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Nicaragua

Nicaragua, as Elections Approach

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IN EARLY OCTOBER the Working Group on the Nicaraguan Crisis held a panel discussion, “The Nicaraguan Crisis: A Left Perspective” featuring Luis Carrión, a former member of the National Directorate of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). He is a leader of the political party UNAMOS (formerly the Sandinista Renovation Movement) and living in exile.

Socialist feminist poet and author Margaret Randall and Leonor Zúñiga, a prominent Nicaraguan sociologist and documentary filmmaker participated along with William I. Robinson, a sociology professor at UC Santa Barbara. Both Randall and Robinson had lived in Nicaragua after the Sandinista revolution of 1979.

The speakers were leftist critics of the Ortega-Murillo government on the eve of the country’s November 7th elections. They emphasized that since the country erupted in demonstrations in 2018, demanding a resignation of the government and new elections, the response has been massive repression. (For background see “[Nicaragua 1979-2019](#)” by Eric Toussaint and Nathan Legrand and “[Sandinismo Is in the Streets](#)” by Dianne Feeley in ATC 201, July-August 2019.)

Early this year national security laws suspended habeas corpus, and recently seven opposition presidential candidates were arrested and are being held without charge. Several dozen other opposition leaders have been arrested, forced to go underground or into exile. A number of historic revolutionary leaders, including legendary guerrilla commanders Dora María Téllez and Hugo Torres have been imprisoned.

ATC is printing the introductory remarks that Margaret Randall prepared for the panel. Randall is the author of many books including *Sandino’s Daughters* (1981), *Sandino’s Daughters Revisited* (1994) and *[Our Stories, Our Lives: Stories of Women from Central American and the Caribbean](#)* (2002). As Randall outlines in her brief remarks, many on the international left overlook the reality of Nicaragua today. However, most of the gains of the 1979 revolution have been lost and Nicaraguans and their supporters need to find a way to live through this dark moment. —The Editors

THE SITUATION IN Nicaragua is complex. Sectors of the U.S. left remain in solidarity with president Daniel Ortega and vice president Rosario Murillo. People from those sectors have countered my declarations, some in a spirit of healthy exchange and others confrontationally. As I understand them, their reasons fall into the following three categories:

- Ortega and Murillo were part of the original Sandinista movement that ousted Somoza in 1979. The Sandinistas are revolutionaries, therefore Ortega and Murillo are revolutionaries. Ortega’s win in a succession of presidential elections shows that the majority of the Nicaraguan people support him.
- Successful programs in education and infrastructure place the country above others in the region.
- The United States is critical of the Nicaraguan government, and when Washington is against a government, we should be for it. Those parts of the U.S. left that defend the dictatorship argue that we must defend any government that the U.S. government opposes.

I argue the following:

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1. Ortega and Murillo were indeed involved in the anti-Somoza struggle of the 1970s and held prominent positions in the Sandinista government that came to power in 1979. However, subsequent years brought rifts and divisions among the Sandinistas, with Ortega and Murillo consistently coming down on the side of authoritarianism and greed. Other Sandinistas — all imprisoned or exiled today — formed more democratic movements.

2. I myself worked with Murillo for almost a year at the Sandinista Cultural Workers Association (ASTC) in the early 1980s. I personally witnessed her harassment and humiliation of coworkers, along with her petty jealousies and voracious attempts to grab power. Once Ortega regained the presidency in 2006 election by aligning himself with the extreme right, he systematically eliminated all opposition, both within and outside his party. Today, all viable presidential candidates are either imprisoned or in exile. The results of the upcoming November 7th electoral farce are a foregone conclusion.

3. Since the people's protests of April 2018, state terrorism under Ortega and Murillo has included more than 300 deaths, 150 political prisoners, the forced exile of tens of thousands, censorship of the media, the shutting down of more than 50 non-governmental organizations, and the elimination of all political opposition.

The most important human rights organizations — Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Inter-American Human Rights Commission, and the UN Human Rights Commission—have all denounced the current regime's flagrant human rights abuses. These are indisputable facts.

4. In a country where Ortega has eliminated every potential opponent, an "overwhelming" vote for him cannot be seen as legitimate.

5. There is one issue that I find particularly repugnant, and that is Daniel Ortega's sexual assault against his stepdaughter over a period of 19 years, beginning at age 11. At the time of Zoilamerica Narváez Murillo's 1998 press conference, I wrote a public letter condemning Ortega.

I do not believe that a rapist should hold public office. I have been appalled that U.S. leftists who call themselves feminists overlook this criminal behavior. Rosario Murillo defended her husband, abandoning her daughter. While this may not constitute a crime, it is not a position I can respect.

6. Nicaragua is a nation whose people endure poverty, repression, and an out-of-control COVID pandemic. I understand that sanctions by other countries and international organizations may hurt the Nicaraguan people. The egregious history of the 60-plus year-old U.S. blockade against Cuba has been unable to defeat the Cuban revolution but has meant ongoing hardship for that country's people. So, it's clear that sanctions can punish ordinary citizens rather than a regime.

However, I don't believe there is an either/or solution to the issue of governmental power in Nicaragua. I believe we should denounce the United States whenever and wherever it interferes in the affairs of a sovereign nation at the same time as we must call out the state terrorism orchestrated by the Ortega/Murillo regime.

These include Ortega's extra-military thugs, the fact that all governmental branches including the judiciary are controlled by him, the murders, torture, kidnappings, imprisonment without trials or access to legal defense, the complete electoral takeover and passage of arbitrary statutes used to justify such atrocities. We need to look to the country's own civic organizations for leadership regarding how we, on the outside, may best help the Nicaraguan people achieve peace and equality.

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Source [November-December 2021, ATC 215](#).

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