

The background of the entire page is a collage. The main image is a person in silhouette, wearing a rainbow-colored sleeve, holding a red flag with 'FSLN' in white letters. The sky is a warm orange-red gradient. There are smaller, semi-transparent images of flags and a globe in the lower-left and bottom areas.

# INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING PAPER ON NICARAGUA

October 2021



COMMUNIST PARTY OF IRELAND

Nicaragua is one of the few countries in the world where workers and workers' movements, collectives and cooperatives are on the front foot. The governments of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), from 2006 to the present, have transformed Nicaraguan society for the better, and this is the main reason why a well-financed and US-orchestrated misinformation campaign is seeking to conceal the truth and to overthrow the overwhelming popular will of the Nicaraguan people.

The campaign of lies against Nicaragua hides the fact that over the past 15 years the Sandinista government has developed many world-leading social schemes for eliminating poverty and redistributing wealth. In most of the world the gap between the rich and the impoverished has widened sharply; but in Nicaragua, since the arrival of the Sandinistas, the gap has been closing.

Between 2007 and 2016 poverty was reduced from 48 to 25%. Extreme poverty fell by more than half, from 17% in 2007 to 7% in 2016. In part, the government has achieved this after strongly promoting a



popular economy that involves the redistribution and sustainability of resources, the self-management of wealth, solidarity work, and the search for social justice. This has made possible further progress in the diversification of economic sectors and the restoration of basic rights.

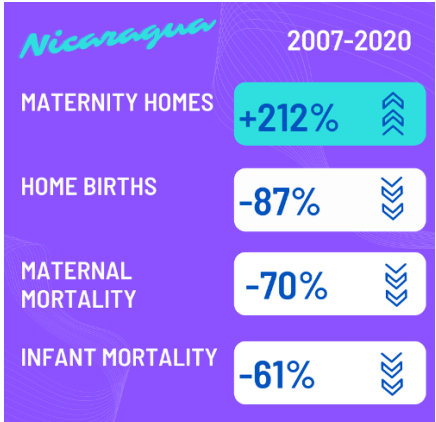
During this period Nicaragua has sustained a 4.5% average rate of economic growth, one of the highest in the region. The country's social economy, driven primarily by the informal sector, was given a gigantic impetus, making Nicaragua 90% self-sufficient in food — a remarkable achievement for any country, made even more commendable given that the United States has laid siege to Nicaragua economically, as it has done to Cuba and Venezuela.

By 2018/19 poverty had been more than halved, 1.2 million children were taken out of food poverty, 27,378 new classrooms had been built, 11,000 more teachers had been employed, 353 new medical units had been created, including 109 maternity and childcare facilities, 229 health centres, and 15 primary hospitals, together with the universal expansion of social housing and social security.

This is accompanied by the mass inclusion of women in society and public life, to the extent that gender equality in Nicaragua — a relatively poor Third World country that was formerly a colony — now ranks fifth in the world in the Global Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report, 2020, bettered only by Scandinavian countries and well ahead of the likes of the United States, Britain, and Ireland.

At the government level, 58% of the highest positions are held by women. Women are a priority in access to health services, which resulted in a 59% reduction in maternal mortality by 2018. This progress earned Nicaragua the United Nations Prize of the Americas in 2011. This reality

is felt by rural women, who for the first time have experienced access to reproductive health, education, and respect for all their human rights.



Between 2007 and 2019, \$1,121.7 million was invested in expanding the electricity network, paving the road system, universalising the provision of the sanitation infrastructure and safe drinking water, and a large modern infrastructure for health and education. It is the country that invests most in public health in Central America, with 21% of its national budget: \$800 per person per year. Despite being the second-poorest country in the hemisphere, it is proud to have a preventive and community-based public health system that guarantees the right to health to all its population.



For the Central American Parliament (PARLACEN) and the Central American Integration System (SICA), Nicaragua is an example in the restitution of Indigenous and Afro-descendant rights. Social investment (56% of the budget) and productive investment has led to the union of the Pacific and the Caribbean coast, which has been a major objective of the country's National Human Development Plan. Over the last 15 years Nicaragua has been a leader in independence from fossil fuels, going from using 25% renewable energy sources in 2007 to 62% in 2018. Since 2020, 97 out of every 100 Nicaraguan homes have electricity.

All these progressive achievements and gains are made all the more extraordinary when it is considered what the Sandi-

nista government and the Nicaraguan people have been up against.

On 19 July 1979 the Sandinista-led uprising finally overthrew the Somoza dictatorship, signifying the beginning of the Sandinista Popular Revolution. From the outset the Revolution had its enemies: for the United States — which had backed the Somoza regime through five administrations, both Republican and Democratic — overthrowing the Sandinistas became a personal mission of President Ronald Reagan in 1980. In the context of the Cold War, Reagan used any means necessary to try to accomplish this, including imposing an illegal economic blockade and training and financing a terrorist army of counter-revolutionaries: the Contras.

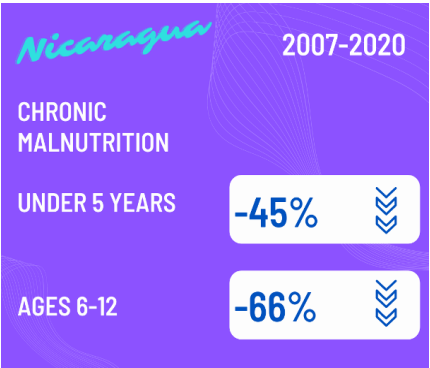


Against all the odds, the Sandinista Revolution was improving the lives of the Nicaraguan people through grassroots schemes, providing a universal health service and free education, eradicating polio through its vaccination campaign, and eradicating illiteracy through its Literacy Crusade. To effectively attack the Revolution the Contras attacked its achievements, the “soft targets” of schools, clinics, and cooperatives, killing teachers, health workers, farmers, and children.

By 1990 almost 50,000 Nicaraguans had been killed in the Contra War, and Nicaragua’s revolutionary project was crippled by the economic embargo and derailed by the war. In the period coming up to the presidential election of February 1990 the United States made Nicaraguan voters’ choice clear to them: unless UNO, the party of the US-backed candidate, Violeta Chamorro, won the election the economic blockade and the Contra war would continue indefinitely. George H. W. Bush’s government poured money into UNO’s campaign to ensure that it would win.

Frightened and tired, when many Nicaraguans went to the

polls they voted to end the war. Chamorro won the election, ushering in a 16-year neoliberal period. The Sandinistas respected the election result — even though it had been obtained under US-led war conditions — did not engage in violent confrontations during the 16 years of neoliberal governments (1990–2006), and participated in all electoral processes during that period, dutifully recognising unfavourable election results in 1990, 1996, and 2001.



Neoliberalism in Nicaragua was socially and economically disastrous. By 2005, 62% of the population were below the poverty line, with high levels of extreme poverty (14% in 2009); 85% had no access to medical services; 64% of the economically active were in the informal sector, with no pension or health insurance;

and the level of illiteracy was 22%, even though it had been eradicated during the 1979 – 1990 period of the Sandinista government.

The US-backed neoliberal regimes of the 1990 – 2006 period privatised education, including, most despicably of all, primary schooling. The neoliberal government worked hard to erase all traces of the Revolution in the early 1990s, not only banning books but burning them. The public school curriculum was completely overhauled, and textbooks were pulped and burned, replaced with books that failed to even mention Sandino. Books by acclaimed Nicaraguan authors were burned; the eternal flame over the tomb of the martyr and founder of the FSLN Carlos Fonseca was extinguished; later the monument itself was bombed, as was a popular piece of public art, the Worker's Statue.

The neoliberal governments sold nearly all public enterprises at concessionary rates while privatising health services and education. They welcomed the World Bank and International Monetary Fund and religiously followed their “structural readjustment”

schemes, refusing to raise wages for teachers, police, or any public worker.

These neoliberal years all but erased workers' cooperatives (formerly a mainstay of the economy and of civic life in Nicaragua, which have thankfully been replenished by the current government), taking away their access to funds. When they could no longer work they began to collapse, and as those in the countryside lost their land they began to move into the cities looking for work.

Gangs took hold in the cities, and crime — which had been all but non-existent in the 1980s — skyrocketed. The poor became poorer and the rich became richer until Nicaragua was one of the most unequal societies in the world.

Not surprisingly, during its years of rebuilding, the FSLN gathered electoral strength, winning the presidency by 38% in 2006 and re-elected in 2011 with 63% and again in 2016 with 72%. These progressive years have overturned the damage wrought by the US-backed neoliberal regimes, and they have guaranteed all the following:

- a free basic health service, education, and infrastructure development;
- 160,000 rural and urban property titles issued, the majority to women, as part of a scheme begun during the Sandinista agrarian reform programme in the 1980s; this has been particularly important for small-scale producers, based on the principle that "land should be controlled by those who take care of the earth";
- the establishment of a Ministry for the Family, Cooperative and Associative Economy (MEFCCA) and technical institutes that provide business management and technical training and promote peasant production linked with marketing networks;
- the approval of a legal framework and policies that have achieved 80% sovereignty in basic foods, the majority of which comes from small and medium producers;
- government institutions that provide support and training for the agro-ecology schemes run by the Association of Rural Workers (ACT), particularly for women and younger

people, the next generation of farmers.

It is precisely because of these achievements, which run directly counter to the interests of US imperialism, transnational capitalism and big corporations, that the United States has been pursuing "regime change" in Nicaragua and financed and instigated a violent right-wing coup in 2018 in which more than two hundred people were killed. Equally contemptibly, the United States then sought to blame the FSLN for the murderous violence of the failed coup; and this baseless falsehood has since been regurgitated verbatim by supposedly progressive, liberal and left-wing sources as well as the human rights industry.

For the record, since 2007 the United States has openly channelled more than \$200 million (the real figure may be much larger, given its history of also covertly financing groups) through Nicaraguan NGOs and dozens of newly created media for regime change efforts and for constructing false narratives. The United States and its mouthpieces presented, time and again, a narrative of supposedly peaceful protests while violent masked people with deadly weapons were seen in front of cameras, destroying

public and private property, setting fires — including burning people to death in the streets — and murdering Sandinistas in full view of everyone.

For the vast majority of Nicaraguans who lived through it all, these events were the recent past repeating itself, when Sandinistas were hunted, terrorised, tortured, and killed. One of the results of all this is that in Nicaragua international human rights organisations have lost credibility and are seen more as an industry working in the service of the world's real powers. The continued mass popularity of the FSLN government (polling about two-thirds of the popular vote) is evidence of the disconnection between what the Nicaraguan people experience and believe and

the lies being told by others elsewhere in the world.

Any person genuinely committed to the truth and indeed to the wellbeing of the people of Nicaragua should ask themselves why there is such a jarring difference between the views of the vast majority of Nicaraguans and the American version of events being peddled around the world, including in Ireland.

Under President Daniel Ortega and Vice-President Rosario Murillo, Nicaragua has successfully defended the country's sovereignty by restoring the social gains of the 1979 – 1990 revolution, by defeating the US-orchestrated violent coup attempt of 2018, and by deepening the progressive socio-economic measures implemented since 2006.





A good gauge of what would have happened had the 2018 coup been victorious is already provided by the actions of the Áñez government in Bolivia, where the United States brought fascists to power through a misinformation campaign and the delegitimising of election results in order to overthrow the sovereign will of the Bolivian people and their social progress. Had the coup succeeded, the structural connection between Nicaragua's socio-economic developments and national sovereignty, on which the former rests, would have been brutally demolished, including the repression and murder of many Sandinistas and social leaders.

The atrocities perpetrated during the coup attempt in 2018 (torture, burning people, setting fire to houses, health centres and radio stations, and generalised violence), are irrefutable proof of this, and they attest not, as the American narrative alleges, to the state violence of some terrible dictatorship, but to a renewed effort — which echoes directly the nature and the targets of the Contra violence of the 1980s, financed and led by the United States — to attack Nicaraguan society itself and its institutions of

social justice and public health and education, as well as ordinary citizens who valiantly defended these.

Again, any sincere person needs to listen to the voices of the majority of Nicaraguans and to ask serious questions about the claim of the United States that its interests in intervening in Nicaragua are for democracy and human rights, as well as asking questions of those who would propagate the imperialist narrative.

Having intervened brutally in Nicaragua in 1909, the United States invaded and pillaged the country from 1912 until 1933 and then exerted direct control during the Somoza dictatorship until 1979, followed by the Contra War (1980 – 1990) and the US-sponsored neoliberal governments (1990 – 2016). Nicaraguans also still remember the US mercenary incursion of William Walker, who declared himself president of Nicaragua in 1856 and seized power by military force and restored slavery.

Any decent person and organisation will listen to the sovereign will of the Nicaraguan people and give them their solidarity to ensure that no



more William Walkers are imposed upon them. Nicaragua is entitled, as is any sovereign state, to determine its own path of development and to choose its own government, and that right is also enshrined in international law.

On the subject of which, on 27 June 1986 the International Court of Justice in the Hague ruled that the United States had violated international law by supporting the Contras and by mining Nicaragua's harbours, all in breach of any state's international obligations "to not use force against another state, not to intervene in its affairs and not to violate its sovereignty." The decision included the need for the United States to pay reparations,

calculated at more than \$17 billion. It has refused to comply. Indeed, having lost this case to Nicaragua the United States walked away from the International Court of Justice, and any pretence that it wishes to project about itself as the upholder of international law and a "rules-based system" disappeared with it.

The world has a responsibility to stand up for international law and for the right of the Nicaraguan people to determine their own sovereign future without external and imperialist interference. And anyone who is genuinely committed to a better world, to democracy and to universal rights needs urgently to give their solidarity to the

Nicaraguan people and to defend the tremendous achievements of the FSLN that have massively advanced social justice and inclusion.

The vast majority of Nicaraguans already know this: they participate daily and collectively in projects and initiatives that are rebuilding and developing their society. In November 2021 they will vote overwhelmingly to continue that progress; only imperialist tyranny will seek to stop them.

Do not side with tyrants, do not allow present-day William Walkers to impose themselves upon the Nicaraguan people: take a stand with democracy on the side of the people and their freely expressed wishes to continue their vibrant, participative and inclusive society.

The current US campaign seeks to make the FSLN and the popular will of the people toxic. It is a narrative based upon outright lies that are intended to unseat a social movement committed to the construction of a better Nicaragua and a better world. Show some backbone, and support them to the hilt.

The US Congress has passed

two laws, the Nicaragua Investment Conditionality Act (2018) and the Reinforcing Nicaragua's Adherence to Conditions for Electoral Reform (RENACER) Act (2021). The latter directly targets more than half the population of Nicaragua with economic sanctions (and will indirectly affect the whole population in any case, even in its initial measures), and it explicitly intends to interfere in Nicaragua's elections, as stated in the bill's title. It commands Nicaraguan voters to choose an opposition candidate if they do not want to suffer serious deprivation and harm over the coming years, just as the United States did previously in 1990.

It is this kind of imperialist overreach that should be treated as toxic and should be condemned and opposed in the strongest possible terms by all decent people in Ireland and around the world. The US aggression is demonstrably the antithesis of democracy: it is coercive and dictatorial imperialism at its worst. Imperialists, and anyone seeking to give ideological cover to imperialism, should be challenged and confronted.





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