

NICARAGUA NOW

**Nicaragua
Solidarity
Campaign**

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Inter-oceanic canal: benefits & risks

Property claims & reparations: who owes what to whom?

Sharing skills through volunteering

Trade union for the self-employed

UK–Nicaragua solidarity



Contents

- 3 What has happened with property claims and reparations related to the Sandinista Revolution and the US-backed contra war?** What lessons for Cuba? Helen Yuill speculates
- 4 Nicaragua Now outlines progress on the controversial inter-oceanic canal**
- 6 The global problem of child trafficking is growing in Nicaragua** Liz Light talks to NGO Casa Alianza about how Nicaragua is addressing the problem
- 7 What role for international volunteers in supporting young people in Nicaragua to set up businesses?** Shahnaz Biggs explains
- 8 Sociolinguist Jane Freeland describes her 35 years of solidarity research on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast**
- 9 Sue Balcomb, Leeds Central America Solidarity, visited their twin town La Concha to help reactivate community development.** What difference did her visit make?
- 10 UK – Nicaragua solidarity** News from London, Leicester, Sheffield, Swindon, and Bristol
- 12 NSCAG trade union co-ordinator, Louise Richards, describes the UK speaker tour of Flor de María Avellán** from the Confederation of Self-Employed Workers (CTCP)

NICARAGUA NOW

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Cover photos: Street seller and deputy general secretary of the Confederation of Self-Employed Workers (CTCP) Flor de María Avellán. Fatima Ismael, Union of Co-operatives SOPPEXCCA, with the 240 delegates from 20 countries at the Global Fairtrade Cities conference in Bristol. Credit: Jon Craig @JonCraig_photos

Design: Tom Lynton

The articles in this magazine should be taken as having been written in a personal capacity unless otherwise stated.

There is another way

Scrap the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) was the demand of a petition signed by over three million people presented to the European Commission on 7 October.

This represents just one manifestation of a growing global struggle over the kind of world that we want to live in, a struggle that rejects neoliberalism and the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a small elite within and between countries.

So, is there any precedent for a 'free trade' deal being scrapped? And what is the alternative?

In 1994 and 2005 the US signed two 'free trade' agreements, the first with Mexico and the second with Central America. However, the next stage, a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), disappeared into the sea at the 2005 Summit of the Americas. It was defeated through the strength of social movements, and left and centre left parties and governments led by Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. 'We came here to bury the FTAA. I brought my shovel to join in the burial', he stated.

Out of this burial came the Bolivarian Alliance for the People's of Our America (ALBA), a political, economic, and social alliance of 11 Latin America and Caribbean countries. With ALBA relations between states are based on solidarity, complementary trade, and respect for

sovereignty. Trade is a tool to reduce inequalities within and between countries.

Using Nicaragua as an example, how does this work in practice? Venezuelan provides oil to Nicaragua where it is sold at market prices. Half of the cost is paid within 90 days in cash and in kind (beef, cooking oil, coffee, sugar, milk, and beans). The other half is converted into a 25-year loan. Nicaragua invests these funds into production and social programmes and energy and road infrastructure.

This has formed part of a government strategy of promoting macroeconomic stability and guaranteeing free health care, education, and social programmes that reduce poverty.

In what the World Bank describes as a 'remarkable turnaround', GDP has increased by four to five per cent annually, exports have doubled, and Foreign Direct Investment has quadrupled. The UN Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) has praised Nicaragua's programmes that address food security and malnutrition.

In October 2015, a survey by the National Institute for Development Information (INDE) with World Bank support, showed that poverty has decreased from 42.5% in 2009 to 29.6% in 2014 and extreme poverty from 14.6% to 8.5%.

This was not achieved by austerity programmes and scapegoating those on benefits but by prioritising the needs of the impoverished and marginalised.

The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) and NSCAG work with Nicaraguan organisations and social movements fighting for social and economic justice by promoting and seeking support for their activities. We carry this out through *speaker tours of the UK by representatives of our partner organisations

*facilitating mutual solidarity between UK and Nicaraguan trade unions *organising events to raise funds and awareness about Nicaragua and our partners' work *publishing news, briefings, articles and online updates *providing support for Wales NSC and 12 towns and communities in the UK with twinning links in Nicaragua

Get in touch, get involved

NSC www.nicaraguasc.org.uk

[f](#) Nicaragua-Solidarity

Wales NSC www.walesnicaragua.wordpress.com

Twin towns and other groups with projects in Nicaragua www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/solidarity/twin-towns

Briefings on the Nicaraguan interoceanic canal: www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/resources

Weekly bulletins of news from Nicaragua: www.nicanet.org

Reparations then and now: Nicaragua, Cuba and the US

Helen Yuill looks at what has happened to property claims and reparations during and after the Sandinista government of the 1980s... and parallels and possible lessons for Cuba.

On 17 December 2014, Presidents Barack Obama and Raúl Castro simultaneously announced the beginning of an opening in relations between the US and Cuba. One of the many issues to be addressed is Cuba's claim for US\$833bn in damages caused by the 55-year blockade, and another is compensation claims by US citizens and US companies for property expropriated after 1959. Cuba also has its own property claim, for the US naval base in Cuba's Guantánamo Bay.

After the Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza dictatorship in 1979, the Somoza family and their close associates had their property confiscated. In addition, banks foreclosed on owners who had mortgaged their property and fled the country with no intention of repaying; people who abandoned their property had it confiscated; other underused property was expropriated. According to former Agriculture Minister Jaime Wheelock, nearly four million acres of farmland were redistributed to 80,000 families under the Sandinista agrarian reform programme.

In 1990, after 30,000 deaths and faced with a collapsing economy, Nicaraguans made a pragmatic choice and voted for a US-backed, 15-party coalition. This 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 confiscating property that had formerly belonged to US citizens. Since then, US aid to Nicaragua and support from multilateral institutions has been dependent on Nicaragua making 'satisfactory progress' on resolving these property claims. 28,000 claims have been processed, resulting in property being returned or exchanged, or compensation being paid in government bonds.

According to Conservative Party president Alfredo César, successive governments have compensated former owners to the tune US\$1.3bn: "We Nicaraguan citizens are the ones who have paid through our taxes." This will continue for another fourteen years, through payments on government bonds.

NSC supporters outside the US Embassy, 1986, calling on the US to respect the World Court verdict



Julio Elchert

On being found guilty by the World Court, the US ignored the verdict and walked out

In contrast, the US has paid nothing for destruction they caused during the 1980s contra war. In 1986, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) found the US guilty of military and paramilitary aggression against Nicaragua, in violation of international law and in breach of the 1956 treaty of friendship between the two countries. The indictment included mining ports, bombing attacks, and encouraging what amounted to

acts of terrorism.

The ICJ rejected US arguments of collective self-defence and ordered the US to cease acts of aggression and pay reparations. Claiming the ICJ has no right of jurisdiction over the case, the US refused to participate further, and later blocked enforcement of the judgment by the UN Security Council – thereby preventing Nicaragua from pursuing US\$17bn in reparations. In 1987, the UN General Assembly called for "full and immediate compliance" with the ICJ decision. Only

Israel joined the US in opposing adherence to the ruling. In 1992, Nicaragua's case against the US was withdrawn by the then US-backed Nicaraguan government.

While there are some parallels, Cuba's context is very different. In 1992 Nicaragua's economy was broken; the country was governed by a weak 15-party coalition glued together and financed by the US; it was a deeply-polarised country in a deeply-polarised continent.

In contrast, Cuba today is in a strong position to demand negotiations conducted with mutual respect. President Obama has admitted that the US policy on Cuba has been a failure, and US business wants to engage with Cuba. In addition, a much stronger, more integrated Latin America, has much greater political clout and China is a significant player in the region.

www.cuba-solidarity.org.uk/cubasi

Inter-oceanic canal: balancing benefits and risks

Nicaragua Now reports on developments in the proposal to build a 173 mile inter-oceanic canal across Nicaragua at a cost of US\$50bn. What are the potential benefits and risks? What are the prospects of it actually being built?

In June 2013, the Nicaraguan National Assembly granted the canal concession to Hong Kong Nicaragua Development Company (HKND), to construct a canal that would be the largest ever civil earthmoving project in history. It would not only transform global trade but also make Nicaragua a major global transport centre. The Nicaraguan government argues that this is the only way to lift the country out of centuries of under-development and poverty, and that the Canal will potentially help to protect the environment nationally and globally. Critics argue that the social, economic and environmental risks are too high a price to pay.

But why Nicaragua and why now? According to Paul Oquist, Minister-Secretary for National Policies of the Nicaraguan Presidency, there are three key factors: the country's geographical position; its abundance of underused

water resources, the global need for a canal that would accommodate a new generation of container ships; and the government's proven capacity to implement human development plans.

Although there have been significant improvements since the Sandinista government returned to power, Nicaragua remains the second most impoverished country in the Americas after Haiti. Oquist argues that an annual growth rate of 8-10% is necessary in order to eradicate extreme poverty: 'we need a way out of poverty; the canal will provide this.' According to HKND, 50,000 jobs would be created in the construction of the canal, half of them Nicaraguan and the other half Chinese and other nationalities.

The trade unions affiliated to the National Workers Front (FNT) also see the project as a way to reduce unemployment and eliminate poverty, and argue that

without the canal Nicaragua will be consigned to decades of further poverty. Adrian Martinez, general secretary of the Confederation of Self Employed Workers (CTCP), says "The Canal Project is a great opportunity for self-employed workers to develop skills, expand their economic activities and further contribute to social and economic stability. In the CTCP we've started encouraging our members to diversify their economic activities, to think about future services that can be offered to the commercial and tourist sectors which could expand with the Canal."

Opinion polls have consistently indicated that the majority of Nicaraguans support the project: according to a poll conducted by M&R consultores from 1 to 15 October 2015, 77% of Nicaraguans back the Canal project. However, this level of support falls to 40% among the estimated 30,000 people who live along the proposed Canal route.

Inevitably with such a gigantic project, enormous questions remain: will the social and environmental benefits outweigh the risks, will the project be economically viable?

Opponents of the canal include human rights, environmental and indigenous organisations and communities living on the canal route who face expropriation of their properties. They argue that the canal concession grants excessive power to HKND and violates articles of the constitution related to sovereignty, the environment and indigenous rights. Communities along the route have held more than 50 protests over the past year; environmental groups highlight potential irreversible damage to fragile eco systems; others point out the dangers of creating an enclave economy of limited benefit to local people.

Dr Jaime Incer Barquero, regarded as the founder and leading figure of conservation efforts in Nicaragua, is an advisor on the environment to the Presidency. As a former Environment Minister, he supported the canal but after analysing the adverse effects he believes it will have on the country's biodiversity, he has changed his position stating "We are putting the Nicaraguan people's most valuable resources under threat."

After the granting of the concession,





Triple E ship under construction in South Korea. These 400 metre-long ships with a capacity for 18,000 containers, are unable to pass through the Panama Canal. A Nicaraguan canal would cut 5,000-7,000 miles off journeys from Asia to the US eastern seaboard, the Caribbean and Latin America. Fewer ships, shorter journeys and greater fuel efficiency would mean a 35% reductions in CO₂ emissions, proponents claim

The Project offers potential benefits to the environment and people of Nicaragua, but only if its business case is robust, the financing secure, and the Project is constructed to international standards. ESIA report

HKND contracted international companies to do feasibility and impact studies on the social, environment, financial, technical, and legal aspects of the project. The British firm Environmental Resources Management (ERM) undertook the Environmental and Social Impact Study (ESIA). After delays of more than a year, they released an executive summary of their 11,000 page report in October, 2015.

The document addresses how to mitigate risks in the following areas: adverse effects on Lake Nicaragua and biodiversity; soil erosion and sedimentation; land expropriation and resettlement; social and economic impact on Indigenous Peoples; natural disasters; loss of cultural heritage and public safety. The ESIA goes on to strongly recommend that further studies must be carried out and adequate time allowed for a public review by Nicaraguan and international experts before a final decision is taken.

In relation to the environment, the Nicaraguan government argues that the country suffers a net loss of 55,000 hectares of forest annually, and that revenues from the Canal will help to mitigate a further dramatic loss. The ESIA backs up the potential for this to be realised: ‘with full successful implementation of mitigation measures and considering the status quo of rampant deforestation, the Project has the opportunity to create lasting benefits for biodiversity.’

The overall conclusion of the ESIA is that ‘the Project does offer potential benefits to the environment and people of Nicaragua, but only if its business case is robust, the financing to complete construction is secure, and the Project is constructed’ and operated to international standards including implementing all recommended mitigation measures.

In response to the ESIA, HKND’s Vice President, Kwok Wai Pang stated that “The Canal will unavoidably have some negative impacts, but if ERM’s recommendations are followed, we expect a net positive social and economic impact.” He added that “changes have been made to the original canal design to avoid and mitigate some of its negative impacts.”

Paul Oquist confirmed, at a meeting in Washington on 22 September, that “We [the Canal commission] and the president [Daniel Ortega] have made the decision that all the recommended studies must be carried out. No stone should remain unturned when it comes to the environment.”

Canal commission spokesperson, Telémaco Talavera, reiterated the government’s determination to realise what has been a dream for Nicaraguans for generations: “The world is interested in this Canal, convinced of its mutual benefit but especially for Nicaragua, so we can continue to reduce poverty, improve health, housing and productivity and become actors in world markets.”

Child trafficking: a growing problem in Nicaragua

Child trafficking is on the increase globally and Nicaragua is no exception. **Liz Light** interviews **Merardo Solis**, the legal support coordinator of Casa Alianza Nicaragua (CAN)*, about what is being done by the government, the police and NGOs.

*Casa Alianza is an international NGO that supports street children in Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Nicaragua by providing street outreach, legal aid and care for over 12,000 children annually.

📄 www.casa-alianza.org.uk

Casa Alianza report on sexual exploitation of children in Nicaragua, Oct, 2015

📄 www.ecpat.net/resources

Human trafficking is one of the most profitable businesses in existence today. International Labour Organisation (ILO) figures show that more than 20 million people globally are victims, and numbers are on the increase. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime 2014 Global Report, one in three victims are children and two thirds of those are girls. Most cases are organised through large international networks.

In Nicaragua the majority of victims are trafficked for sexual exploitation, forced labour in agriculture, mining, and domestic service. Merardo Solis points out that victims are trafficked within and between Central America, Mexico and the US. Increased tourism in Nicaragua means more sex tourists, mainly from the US, Canada, and Western Europe.

Merardo explains that CAN has been working on “the prevention of child trafficking since 1998, monitoring and registering victims, and providing psychological and legal support. In 2004 the government began paying attention in response to US State Department concerns about regional trafficking. As a result the National Coalition Against Human Trafficking was set up in 2005 involving civil society organisations, the National Police and the Ministry of Public Affairs.”



Campaign poster text reads:
‘Some games are shameful.
Say no to people trafficking’

Training workshops and awareness raising events organised by Coalition, have reached over 45,000 people. One key role that CAN has played is to work with the justice system to train specialist judges and advise them on how to avoid re-victimising people during the legal process.

Nicaragua has been praised internationally for its efforts in combating human trafficking. It received a first class rating from the US State Department three years in a row up to 2013. In 2014 this dropped to level 2 with recommendations that more should be done on protection and provision of specialised residential centres.

To facilitate these recommendations, Nicaragua approved the Special Integral Law Against Human Trafficking in 2015. The law includes penalties for trafficking, and measures for the prevention, protection and care of victims. CAN research demonstrates that the problem is growing and points to the critical importance of regional coordination so that criminals can be prosecuted using similar legislation in each country.

Merardo concluded, “The business of child trafficking is driven by demand. Factors include poverty, unemployment and a lack of opportunities, but without the demand there would be no market and no profit to be made.”

Mercedes’ story

Fifteen year old Mercedes (not her real name) was in a hospital waiting room with her grandmother when she struck up a conversation and exchanged contact details with a young woman. Later the woman phoned Mercedes and invited her on a shopping trip to Panama. Excited at the idea of the journey Mercedes agreed to join her. However, the woman delivered her to a brothel in Guatemala where she was forced to dance in her underwear, take drugs and have sexual relations. After enduring three months forced imprisonment and prostitution, she managed to jump out a window and hand herself into the authorities. She was repatriated to Nicaragua where she spent three years receiving psychological attention, drug rehabilitation and treatment for STD. Years later she has a family who have no idea of the torment she endured. The woman who recruited Mercedes was also a victim of the traffickers: she was imprisoned for seven years for her involvement in recruiting Mercedes.

Sharing knowledge through volunteering

Shahnaz Biggs, a Raleigh International ICS* volunteer and member of the NSC events group, describes her experience of volunteering in northern Nicaragua alongside local volunteers.

*The UK government funded International Citizen Service (ICS) provides volunteering opportunities for 18 to 25 year olds to fight poverty at home and abroad.

www.volunteercs.org

Raleigh International is a sustainable development charity that runs a range of programmes including the ICS.

www.raleighinternational.org

Why Nicaragua? When I decided to go travelling, I knew I wanted to help make a difference in the world.

Having previously studied Spanish, I joined NSC Spanish classes which opened up a whole new world for my understanding of Nicaraguan and Latin American culture.

I started to read more and began to question why the largest Central American nation was the second poorest country in the Americas. Having an interest in young people through volunteering with youth groups here, I started to look at how poverty affects young people in Nicaragua.

Though I knew youth unemployment was on the rise globally, I was shocked to find that of the 20% of the poorest people in Nicaragua, 78.5% are young people. I was inspired to apply for the Raleigh ICS Entrepreneur programme as I felt that the way Raleigh works makes a real impact and promotes sharing knowledge between UK and Nicaraguan volunteers.

So how did we contribute? My team of six UK and six Nicaraguan volunteers worked with three rural communities in the Madriz municipality. These communities have high unemployment and



socioeconomic issues, worsened by lack of fresh water, climate change and deforestation: only 38% of residents have completed primary education.

Key to the success of our work was volunteering alongside Nicaraguan volunteers who explained cultural norms, helped to translate and build relationships with the communities. Together we designed and ran skills based workshops for 45 local entrepreneurs. They had a wide range of business ideas including bakeries, community shops, a barber and a pharmacy. It was inspiring to see young people wanting to make changes in their local community and taking action to change their economic situation.

One of the unique things about the Raleigh programme is our collaboration with local NGOs, in our case the Institute for Human Promotion (INPHRU) and Young Entrepreneurs of Nicaragua (EJN). They play a key role in follow-up support for the entrepreneurs and the sustainability of their businesses.

Raleigh and the local NGOs provided SEED funding for a select number of businesses. Our role was to support the entrepreneurs in developing their ideas and building their self-belief. In preparation for pitching their businesses to a panel

of judges, we conducted skills workshops that included engaging with an audience and creating PowerPoint presentations. We encouraged them to understand their businesses thoroughly and demonstrate their passion.

We saw a dramatic change in their confidence: twenty-one entrepreneurs involved in 11 businesses qualified for funding. We also had the pleasure of going with them to buy products for their businesses; some of them got their first clients before we left!

For me it was an invaluable life-changing experience. I now realise with gratitude the opportunities that are available here in the UK. I learned a lot about who I am and gained more interest in development issues, knowing first hand some of the problems affecting the world from a different perspective – because I lived it. I vowed to myself that I would take more action, be more involved in my community and engage with people. You never know who you can inspire through building relationships with people.

On return, I have accepted a place on a Master's degree in Enterprise and Business, where my course will build on the knowledge I gained from Nicaragua.

Leeds support for La Concha's Community Movement

Sue Balcomb has been involved in the Leeds Central American Solidarity (LCAS) for over 30 years. LCAS offers solidarity and funding to the Nicaraguan Community Movement (MCN) in La Concha, a small town near Managua. Sue reports on her return to La Concha with her daughter to provide support for the MCN in re-establishing the group and setting priorities.



MCN La Concha women taking decisions on priorities

We started by getting to know about the communities, their resources, previous projects, difficulties and successes. The group we worked with does not have a culture of the written word, due to many members being pre-literate – as well as a lack of access to ways of storing and sharing written documents. To overcome this difficulty, we created a visual diagram to share.

The MCN grew out of the Sandinista Defence Committees of the 1980s, as a genuine expression of the community, in the community and for the community. MCN groups exist in most Nicaraguan departments, focusing on economic development, education, gender equality, health and housing.

After returning to power in 2007, the FSLN set up government-aligned community structures as part of a national development plan. In some places this has led to an uneasy duplication of activities, competition between the two organisations, allegations of favouritism for party members and, in some cases, hostility. The purpose of our visit was to help the La Concha group decide if and how they wanted to revive their work, and to consider the extent to which challenging the local or national government to fulfil their promises is wise or possible.

Women-only meetings helped develop greater participation. Despite our apprehension that we might be imposing culturally unfamiliar activities, the sessions involved a lot of laughter and the beginning of con-

nections as the women grew in confidence, found out more about their likes and dislikes, and what they had in common. They discussed what changes they would like to make in their households and communities, and what makes for good meetings – including not turning up two hours late!

The women created a priority list of their own ideas and ideas we had gathered from our visits to other MCN and twin town groups. They reported back regularly to the MCN general assembly so that men didn't feel left out. Top priorities included building or repairing latrines, eco-cookers, and roof repairs.

Three groups formed to plan the work, including home visits to assess needs and decide on beneficiaries. Problems included people asking for materials for a house that wasn't theirs, or struggling to understand the limitations of UK donations. Word spread and more people requested help, which meant the committee had to decide if families could receive both an eco-cooker and roofing. The cooker project developed into a partnership with La Mariposa, a local Spanish language school which provides cookers and training, as well as donations of saplings to encourage reforestation.

Three months is a very short time, and we only managed a brief evaluation which noted disquiet from the MCN leader about giving up some control to a wider committee. However, the group expressed pride in developing funding bids and in learning about project development and management. Each group has an evaluation plan to help reflection and address problems.

With donations from the Leeds group, the MCN has distributed the first twenty eco-cookers through La Mariposa, and has started the latrine project. The group has begun to think beyond externally-funded projects and towards more sustainable development – by developing their own skills and knowledge, encouraging links with Nicaraguan organisations who can offer support, money or training, and by strengthening ties with the national MCN movement.

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🌐 leedscasg.wordpress.com

📌 Leeds Central America Solidarity Group

Language rights and solidarity research on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast

In 1988, **Jane Freeland** wrote NSC's *A Special Place in History: The Atlantic Coast in the Nicaraguan Revolution* about her involvement as a sociolinguist in Nicaragua's efforts to recognise the Coast's five minority languages. It traced the region's struggle from early resistance to Revolution, to the ground-breaking development of autonomy.

May 1980, with the Sandinista government literacy crusade in full swing, I was seeking a permit to witness classes and training sessions when my interviewer mentioned preparations for a parallel campaign in English for Caribbean Coast Creoles. Shockingly ignorant of the Coast, I was surprised to discover that Nicaragua had English speakers. As a linguist and literacy teacher, I wondered about the challenge of adapting the literacy crusade's Spanish-dependent method to English. Scarily, I was perceived as a potential 'expert', invited to help rather than spectate. Thus began the steep, 35-year learning curve I'm still following.

I accompanied the Creole technical team developing textbooks. This was both linguistically and politically challenging. Struggling to create new, familiar words from syllables of our first keyword – 'Re-vo-lu-tion'; tackling Creole resistance to political discussion around such words; hearing deeply puzzling complaints from team members about Sandinista lack of respect for their culture – wasn't the Revolution creating special literacy materials for them?

At a London workshop for literacy teachers, I spoke of the Coast campaign and wrote a background paper, which helped me explain to myself how this complicated situation came about. This paper was published in the World University Service Newsletter, the only such article in English.

As anti-Sandinista protests broke out in Bluefields (October 1980) and Miskitu conflict blew up (1981), general lack of knowledge made my paper look 'expert'. Clearly, more was needed. I'd just won an academic's dream – academically 'legit', fascinating, and potentially useful research. By 1984, discussions on autonomy had begun and by 1986 a full-blown public consultation was underway.

Access to the Caribbean Coast was

The history of Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast is different from that of the rest of the country. It was a British protectorate (1638–1787, 1844–1860) and then dominated by US companies. Incorporated into the Nicaraguan state in 1894, it was virtually untouched by the Sandinista uprising against the Somoza dictatorship. The Anglo-affiliations of Coast people made them initially resistant to the Revolution, which they saw as interference from their old 'Spanish' enemy. Mutual suspicion escalated into the US-backed Miskitu-led armed rebellion, and by 1981 the Coast was a major theatre of the *contra* war. However, from 1983, a remarkable process of reconciliation, consultation and recognition of diversity – the real *Costeño* revolution – led to the Multi-Ethnic State and an Autonomy Law guaranteeing social, economic, political and cultural rights. Implementation has been a complex, path-breaking process.

difficult, so I depended for information on Coast contacts in Managua, and *costeños* visiting the UK. Invited to the 1987 Multi-Ethnic Assembly on Autonomy in Puerto Cabezas, I witnessed discussion of the Coast autonomy law.

1994: CIIR (now Progreso) sent me to help define the role of a Language Department in the projected Autonomous University of the Coast (now URACCAN). I worked with Guillermo McLean, 1980 leader of the literacy team. Travelling the Coast in little planes and dugout canoes, we talked to communities about how the Coast's multilingualism affected access to university. Our recommendations became the foundation of URACCAN's Institute for Linguistic and Cultural Research (IPLC).

I retired in 2000 for a new career: teaching sociolinguistics once a year on URACCAN's bilingual teacher training courses to Creoles, Miskitu and Mayangna, who taught me more than I taught them.

My latest project was a Diploma for Mayangna indigenous community leaders (2010 to 2012). The Mayangna want to maintain their endangered language, but orthodox approaches clash with traditional language practices. Together, we worked on more appropriate strategies. Sadly, the agreed follow-up stalled, but I've just been asked to review an application to URACCAN to restart it.

One thing's certain: solidarity research is complicated. It may not bring academic promotion, but it sure enriches your life!

Crossing the Rio Bambana



Jenny Matthews

UK-Nicaragua Solidarity

Fairtrade, climate change, and empowering women

From 26 June to 6 July, Fatima Ismael, general manager of the Union of Co-operatives SOPPEXCCA visited England and Wales. Fatima spoke at meetings in London and Sheffield; visited Fairtrade activists, a school, a Fairtrade shop, and the Welsh co-operative centre in Cardiff; and met funders and coffee buyers in London. NSC, Wales NSC and Bristol Link with Nicaragua have had a relationship with SOPPEXCCA going back to 2002, so it was a great privilege to be working with Fatima again.

During her presentation at the NSC AGM, Fatima said: "We have to continue on this path, with fair trade activists and fair trade farmers working hand in hand ... Many thanks for all your work over so many years for Nicaragua. Co-operatives of small-scale farmers exist today thanks to the solidarity you have shown us and to Fairtrade."

The highlight of Fatima's stay was her visit to Bristol as a guest of Bristol Link with Nicaragua (BLINC) and Bristol Fairtrade Network (BFTN). Fatima was a keynote speaker at the Global Fairtrade Cities conference, where the 240 delegates from 20 countries gave her a standing ovation. Fittingly, as Bristol is European Green Capital 2015, Fatima highlighted the dramatic effects of climate change on SOPPEXCCA co-operatives, drastically reducing coffee growing at lower levels due to the increase in temperature. She highlighted the importance of investing the Fairtrade premium



Fatima Ismael – speaking at the Global Fairtrade Cities conference – with Alix Hughes, Bristol International Twinning Officer

Jon Craig @JonCraig_photos

in fighting soil erosion caused by torrential rainfall, rather than spending it on education and clinics.

Colombian and Argentinian delegates were very keen to discuss linking Fairtrade producers with urban consumers in their own countries. Fatima talked about the market possibilities for Nicaraguan producers within BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa), especially India where the

Fairtrade cities movement is developing.

It was an opportunity for Fatima to learn about the experiences of UK farmers. She was particularly shocked to hear about the high suicide rate amongst UK dairy farmers, and compared it to a similar problem in Nicaragua with small-scale producers.

nicaraguasc.org.uk/news/article/146/fair-trade.climate-change.-gender-equality

Swindon ducks raise more than £1,000

Over 100 people took part in the annual Swindon Ocotal Link (SOL) fundraiser on the upper reaches of the River Thames. It featured BBQ chefs, race officials, canoeists ... not to mention the all-important sponsored ducks. Mayor of Swindon, Andrew Bennett, dropped in to offer his support. Money raised from this very successful event will be used in Ocotal for school educational grants, health projects, and the old people's home.

solswindon.co.uk

BOOK REVIEW

Miskito by Michael Molinski
320 pages, AuthorHouse,
November 2014

Reviewed by Jane Freeland (see page 8)

This novel is as curious as Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast! A fast, exciting read, topically set against 19th-century speculation over the interoceanic canal (see pages 4–5), with interesting insights into US–UK rivalries as Britain's influence wanes. That said, in his role as manager of the pre-canal transoceanic route (by sea,

river and stagecoach), the main character manages to participate directly in all the key events of the time. His feisty wife provides the Moravians' perspective on the Miskito and Creole as real people rather than "just labour", and pushes her husband to institute a fairly minimal labour rights code. She also attempts to change his tendency to view women as little more than a set of physical attributes. A book well worth buying.

www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/shop/other.htm

Projects in Masaya inspire educational work in Leicester

ADIC – Leicester Masaya Link Group’s (LMLG) local partner – has completed a successful solar-powered irrigation scheme with a British Embassy grant. Agro-Solar involved a dozen families in El Timal, a very poor and isolated community where a solar-powered pump has been installed in a pre-existing well. This operates during the day, feeding a tank to provide constant water. In addition to the improved water supply, many of the families are able to water their crops through drip-feed irrigation. Families have planted fruit trees and other crops, so the expectation is that the well will provide huge benefits during the dry season.

Projects like this feature in a new LMLG resource for UK secondary schools entitled Global Challenges – Sustainable Solutions. The activities look at six issues – water, energy, deforestation, food, biodiversity and natural disasters – and encourage young people to develop critical thinking skills, by investigating what impact these issues would have on rural communities in Nicaragua. Case studies of Masaya projects stimulate discussion about how the challenges might be addressed, and explore the benefits the solutions might bring. The aim is for participants to reflect on how their

Outgoing UK ambassador Chris Campbell with El Timal families



lives in the UK are also affected by these issues, and whether or not local actions are contributing to and/or can help to mitigate global problems – ultimately asking what we can learn from partners in the South.

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Motivating new involvement in Sheffield–Estelí twinning

Since 2012 Maria Jesus Centeno has been working with young people and adolescents on a community theatre project in the barrio of Rosario, Estelí. The main source of employment in the area is from the nearby cigar factories. Using a methodology known as “the theatre of the oppressed”, Maria’s group works through a process of building understanding and trust in the community, bringing children and their families together through theatre. The aim is to build a secure

environment where children can relax and express themselves. Maria visited Sheffield in October, 2015 to share experiences with similar organisations, to motivate and stimulate the involvement of new people in the twinning link, and to share information about her work. Another SES (Sheffield–Estelí Society) initiative involves collecting stories and linking elderly people in both cities through an Elder Twins Project.

🌐 www.sheffielddestelisociety.org.uk
 🐦 @SheffieldEsteli



Sheffield children with Latin American parents send a message to their friends in Estelí

Bristolian toilets get twinned

Since 2005 Friends of Morazan (FoM) – a charity set up by Bristol Link with Nicaragua (BLINC) – has been supporting pre-schools in their twin town of Puerto Morazan, north-west Nicaragua. For ten years, the group has supported a Montessori school through providing training and materials, as well as salary support. Seven pre-schools have been built, including latrines and water systems, with £30,000 raised in Bristol. Additionally, thirty locally made water filters have been fitted in pre-school and primary classrooms.

Another initiative involves people and organisations in Bristol donating £400 to twin their toilets with ones to be installed at Puerto Morazan pre-schools. Toilets at Bristol’s Environment Centre (CREATE) and in the clubhouse of the Peelers women’s hockey team have been twinned. Each person and organisation participating gets a certificate with an image and the coordinates of their twin toilet.

🌐 www.bristolnicaragua.wordpress.com/projects/

📘 www.facebook.com/bristolnicaragua

🐦 @Blincistas



Steve Roser twinned his toilet with that at the San Francisco pre-school in memory of his mother

Performers without Borders

Performers without Borders (PWB) will be returning to Nicaragua in January with their seven-person international team of circus and theatre practitioners. Their trip will feature: teaching circus and theatre skills to children in partner projects in León, San Marcos, Granada and Managua; and performing their show. 2015 has seen PWB expand their work by employing artists from Estelí to do year-round workshops with project partners.

🌐 pwb.ngo/the-fab-500

Nicaraguan trade union leader ‘an inspiration’

NSCAG trade union co-ordinator, **Louise Richards**, explains how **Flor de María Avellán** inspired UK trade unionists during her September speaker tour. Flor is the Deputy General Secretary of the Self-Employed Workers Union (CTCP) having previously co-ordinated the union’s Women’s Committee.

C TCP’s members represent a large percentage of the Nicaraguan workforce, comprising some 70% of the economically active population. Around 90,000 of them work in the streets, often for up to 14 hours a day in all weathers and without any personal protection or access to social security. Flor sells towels and car accessories at the traffic lights in Managua. Other CTCP members are self-employed as plumbers, mechanics electricians, carpenters, labourers, taxi drivers and in a variety of other jobs.

The visit by Flor was part of a TUC-funded project which aims to improve women’s participation in union work and encourage them to stand for leadership positions. Funding and support was also provided by UNISON’s North West and Northern Regions and Wales NSC.

As well as attending the TUC Congress in Brighton, Flor met with UNISON’s Ymlaen Branch in Wales and spoke at public meetings in London and Mold. She also visited Manchester and spoke at a meeting of UNISON’s North West Region, followed by attendance at a joint regional international seminar organised by UNISON in Newcastle.

Flor was born into a farming family. At the age of 11, she went to Managua, where she worked until the age of 19 in domestic service, all the while studying at night. In 2002, her life changed when she joined the CTCP, which enabled her to learn new skills and develop the ability to support her co-workers selling in public places. In 2008, Flor benefitted from a government ALBA-funded poverty reduction programme for women called ‘Zero Usury’. Through this programme, she received a loan which enabled her to invest, tripling the original amount. She runs the business with her husband and two daughters, at the same time as studying for a degree in political economics.

Flor explained the union’s decision to carve out a space as ‘self-employed workers’ rather than using the term ‘informal sector’,

Flor with Stephen Russell, Policy Officer, TUC International Department at the TUC Congress in Brighton. The TUC, through the TUC aid programme, is funding a CTCP training project for women



since they believe that all workers share the same rights and responsibilities. She described the CTCP as a new type of organisation, with a socio-political model. With a membership that now stands at 65,000, 48% of whom are women, the CTCP has obtained a number of successes, one of the most important being a Presidential Decree that no self-employed workers should be evicted from their public places of work. At the same time, agreements have been put in place with local authorities and the police to ensure the safety of CTCP members working in the streets.

The CTCP has proposed a new law to protect the political, economic, social and labour rights of self-employed workers, including the right to be covered by social

security. The union has also established a programme to address the issue of child labour.

Flor spoke about the importance of international solidarity, in particular for a vulnerable sector such as hers. She was proud of the achievements of her union to date, but said that international support means that so much more can be achieved. She was impressed by the level of debate in the UK, and also expressed her solidarity to workers in the UK suffering under the same right wing policies which faced Nicaragua during the 1990s.

Further information:
www.nscag.org