

NICANEWS

Irish Nicaragua Support Group
c/o 10 Upper Camden Street, Dublin 2.

The FSLN Congress
Challenging the IMF and World Bank

... and much more

Nicaraguan Women Tour Ireland

In previous editions of Nicanews we reported on the plans of a group of Irish women to organise a visit to Ireland by Nicaraguan women, as a follow-on to the Dymrna Meaney Brigade to Nicaragua in 1992. By this stage, the five Nicaraguan women have been and gone, and everyone is recovering from what turned out to be a hectic, but memorable tour. Everyone involved, both in Nicaragua and in Ireland, are agreed that it was all a great success, and the bonds of solidarity have been strengthened and deepened. Here, one of the members of the organising committee reports on the tour.

It all started in the summer of 1992, when the brigade members, all women, and a number of other women members of the INSG who were in Nicaragua at the time, reflected on a curious aspect of the three Irish brigades since the 1990 elections. Each have been mainly made up of women. And yet, their contacts with the campesinos while on the work period on cooperative farms was almost exclusively with the male leaders of these co-ops. There was a real difficulty in reaching out to the campesina women on co-ops where they were not organised collectively, with the result that the perspective gained on the campesinos' lives and struggles tended to be disproportionately through men's eyes.

From there came the idea of organising a women's brigade in 1993 which would stay and work on a farm where the women were active in the

structures of the co-op and were organised collectively. The programme in Nicaragua was to focus on meeting with women leaders working at grassroots level in their organisations. And this would be followed by an exchange tour, where Nicaraguan women involved in the development of their community, would visit Ireland, to continue the exchange of ways of working, organising, skills development etc., in an Irish setting.

From the very outset the exchange element was at the very heart of the project. Over the past year, a network of brigade members in Dublin, Bray, Derry, Belfast, Leitrim and Navan worked continuously at planning and fundraising for the return visit of the Nicaraguan women. Between getting sponsorship from other organisations, fundraising events, and inevitably calling on family, friends and colleagues to dig deep into their pockets, enough money was raised to bring over five women - all leaders at grassroots level in organisations with which the Irish women had made particularly strong links in 1993 - health issues, community development, trade unions, reconciliation work etc.

From the minute they landed at Shannon in October, their schedule in Ireland was hectic. They were keen to meet as many groups as

possible around the country, North and South. During their stay they visited women's groups, travellers' groups, community groups, trade unions, development agencies, human rights groups and schools, as well as meeting with the media and members of the Oireachtas. Everyone who met them was deeply impressed by their courage, determination and commitment. But it wasn't all work. Despite the heavy schedule, the odd party, céilí and visit to the mountains was fitted in!

Back in Nicaragua now, the five women have since met with Molly O'Duffy of the INSG, who is living in Managua. They are still talking about their wonderful trip to Ireland, and looking forward to meeting with more groups who, hopefully, will continue to visit Nicaragua, in solidarity.

On a final note, the success of the visit was only made possible because of all the help and support we received, from organisations and from individuals. It is impossible to name everybody, but we particularly want to acknowledge and thank Trócaire, Christain Aid, The Little Sisters of the Assumption and APSO for their sponsorship. And of course, everyone else who helped and supported us over the past year. - Thanks to you all.

IRISH NICARAGUA SUPPORT GROUP ANNUAL REPORT 1993-1994

For the second year running, the INSG's priorities were: - support for the popular movements in Nicaragua; - building awareness and campaigns in Ireland on the impact of the debt crisis and structural adjustment on people in Nicaragua; and - follow-up to 1993 Women's exchange tour, looking at ways to broaden our solidarity work to deal with issues common to the whole of Latin America.

The women's exchange tour, which brought 25 Irish women to Nicaragua in 1993 was followed up by a year of intensive work. On the return visit, 5 Nicaraguan women toured Ireland in October of 1994 to exchange experiences with Irish women's and community groups. This involved a massive organisational as well as fund-raising effort.

Debt and structural adjustment have provided another related focus for the group. The impact of IMF plans on people's lives although often clouded in obscure language, are seen as the key to understanding the changes in Nicaragua in favour of the wealthy. Activities in the area have included:

- A major educational project, co-funded by Comhlámh and the EU Commission, and supported by the Debt and Development Coalition, to look at how the Nicaraguan popular

movements have resisted the IMF plans. This project was co-ordinated by Ann Darcy, involved workshops in Dublin, Galway and Cork, the publication of a booklet on the theme and participation in Cental America Week activities around the debt issue all over the county.

- Being one of the founding sponsors of the Debt and Development Coalition, which brings together over 60 groups working on the issues of debt and structural adjustment; the INSG Chairperson took part on behalf of the Coalition, in the 'alternative forum' in opposition to the IMF/World Bank 50th Anniversary celebrations in Madrid in September, 1994.

- Spearheading a lobbying campaign around the hearings at the Paris Club (the lenders' club) on Nicaragua's case.

A Special General Meeting to look at the question of broadening our work to take in issues common to the whole of Latin America had a useful but inconclusive discussion among 50-60 people present. It was agreed that a special group would look at ideas for the AGM to consider.

Speakers from Nicaragua during the year included two representatives of the Communal Movement and Sandinista former Foreign Affairs Minister Alejandro Bendaña. Emma Curtis and Philip Crowley, INSG members recently returned from working with the popular movement, provided very useful inputs to INSG and related work during the year as did Duncan Green of the Latin America Bureau.

1994 AGM

The well-attended AGM was held in October 1994. A lively debate took place on all the above issues. While the achievements of the organisation were recognised, the whole question of broadening out our focus remains top of the agenda. A motion calling on the co-ordinating committee to promote the setting-up of a Latin American Solidarity Centre was passed. Already progress has been made on this initiative. Members will be kept informed of how this develops.

A new co-ordinating committee was elected for 1994/1995.

Chairperson	Bláthnaid Ní Rathaille
Secretary	Ann Darcy
Treasurer	Con Maxwell
Committee	Anne Daneshmandi
	Tom O'Connor
	Nadette Foley
	Ronan Stenson

59% DON'T IDENTIFY WITH ANY POLITICAL PARTY

According to a recent poll carried out on the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua, 59% did not identify with any political party. 19% said they were Sandinistas, 11% Liberals, 7% Other Parties and only 4% identified with the government. Those surveyed were also asked about their voting intentions should a presidential election be held with candidates Sergio Ramirez, Daniel Ortega, Antonio Lacayo and Arnaldo Aleman. According to the results, Sergio Ramirez would emerge the winner with Arnaldo Aleman second.

Programme for Central America Week 1995

For further information contact Hilda Carroll, Central America Week Office at 01 - 475 1998
All events free of charge unless otherwise stated

THURSDAY 23 MARCH

DUBLIN: EL SALVADOR AWARENESS EVENING: Speakers, slides, artefacts, refreshments. Secular Franciscan Room, Sr Clare's Convent, 101 Harold's Cross Road, 3.00 - 9.00pm (Contact Hugh McGinley 01-497 8039/837 4870)

FRIDAY 24 MARCH

DUBLIN: ART EXHIBITION: Images from Havana by Dieter Blodau, at MSF Hall, Merrion Square, 6.00 - 9.00pm. Will run by lunchtime appointment all week (Contact Cuba Support Group 01 - 676 1213)

PORTLAOISE: PUBLIC MEETING: Doris Garcia, leader of women's section of Nicaraguan banana producers, Regency Hotel, 8.00pm (Contact Tony Dolan 0502-61185)

DUBLIN: OSCAR ROMERO HUMAN RIGHTS SEMINAR: Theme - Impunity. Fr Peter O'Neill, opened by Minister Joan Burton, Milltown Institute, 8.00pm (Irish El Salvador Support Committee)

SATURDAY 25 MARCH

DUBLIN: STREET THEATRE, to launch Central America Week, Grafton Street, 12.00pm

TRALEE: STREET THEATRE. 12.00pm and 3.00pm (Contact KADE 066 - 28155)

BELFAST: FAIR TRADE SALE, clothes, books, music, food etc. Queens University Student's Union 10.00am - 4.00pm

DUBLIN: CONFERENCE: Island Under Siege - Fair Trade for Cuba, at 15 Merrion Square, 11.30am 3.30pm. Followed by launch of booklet *US Blockade of Cuba - Everything you need to know*. (Contact Cuba Support Group 01- 676 1213)

DUBLIN: ESPINAL DAY -TURNING THE TABLES: Rich World/Poor World Dinner. Belvedere College, Denmark Street, 1.00 - 4.00pm, £3.00. Concludes with brief ceremony at Garden of Remembrance, Parnell Square. (Contact Jesuit Volunteer Communities 01-874 5254)

DUBLIN: 15TH ANNIVERSARY OSCAR ROMERO MASS, Merchant's Quay, 8.00pm

MONDAY 27 MARCH

GALWAY: SLIDE SHOW: *Returned Refugees in Guatemala*. Atlanta Hotel, 8.00pm

SLIGO: PUBLIC MEETING: Island Under Siege - Fair Trade for Cuban. R.T.C. Sligo, 1.00pm (Contact Cuba Support Group, 38 Holborn Street, Sligo)

BELFAST: VIDEO SCREENING and talk on Guatemala and Honduras by Marie Gribbon from War and Want. One World Centre, 4 Lower Crescent, 8.00pm

CORK: TABLE QUIZ. Nemo Rangers H&F Club, South Douglas Road, 8.00pm

DUBLIN: PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA: Former volunteer with Peace Brigades International in Guatemala. Irish School of Ecumenics, Milltown Park, Rathgar, 7.30pm

TUESDAY 28 MARCH

BELFAST: "MACUMBA". A brilliant vibrant blend of samba and highland pipes. Speakeasy Bar, Queen's University Student's Union, 8.00pm - 1.30am. Adm. £3.00

TULLAMORE: PROTECTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN CENTRAL AMERICA: Former volunteer with Peace Brigades International in Guatemala. Bridge House, 8.00pm (Contact Tony Dolan: 0502-61185)

WATERFORD: CUBA NIGHT: Social evening including talk by Orestes Aldana from Cuba, Brewery Room, Metropole Lounge, 8.00pm. Adm. £2.00 (Contact Cuba Support Group - Waterford 051 - 54695)

WEDNESDAY 29 MARCH

DUBLIN: CUBAN FILM SHOW, Connolly Hall, 7.30pm. Adm. £3.50 inc. light refreshments (Contact Cuba Solidarity Campaign 01 - 677 2612)

CORK: PUBLIC MEETING: Island Under Siege - Fair Trade for Cuba. Imperial Hotel, 8.00pm. Followed by Latin American Social (Venue to be confirmed - contact Comhlamh Cork 021-275881)

THURSDAY 30 MARCH

DUBLIN: COMHLAMH DEVELOPMENT FORUM: Fair Trade for Central America, 10 Upr Camden St, 8.00pm

BELFAST: PUBLIC MEETING ON TRADE: Duncan Green, Conway Mill Education Centre, Conway Street (Contact Nigel McKinley 08 0232 241 879)

DUBLIN: CÉILI, Ormond Hotel, Ormond Quay, 9.00pm - 1.00am Tickets £4/£2 concession (Contact Comhlamh 01- 478 3490)

GALWAY: DISCO: "Club Sandino", The Warwick Hotel, 10.30pm. Adm. £4/£3 advance

FRIDAY 31 MARCH

DUBLIN: CAFÉDIRECT LAUNCH, by Lord Mayor John Gormley, Oak Room, Mansion House, 5.00pm (Contact Mark Doris 0502 - 61185)

DUBLIN: JUSTICE EVERYWHERE - HOW ABOUT IRELAND? A talk by Rev. Noel Irwin sponsored by the Latin America Committee and AFrl, All Hallows College, Drumcondra, 8.00pm

SATURDAY 1 APRIL

GALWAY: STREET THEATRE with Clockwork Theatre Company, outside Matt O'Flaherty's Pharmacy, Eyre Square Shopping Centre, after 2.00pm

DUBLIN: WORLD TRADE AGREEMENTS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR CENTRAL AMERICA: opened by Minister Joan Burton. Teacher's Club, Parnell Square, 10.00am - 5.00pm (Jointly sponsored by Central America Week Committee & Comhlamh, Cork) Adm. £5/£3 concession.

CORK: ROMERO MASS, St Francis Church (Contact Comhlamh 021 - 275 881)

DUBLIN: CULTURAL EVENING with Latin American music, Teacher's Club, 8.00pm. Adm. £4/£2 concession.

NEWS FROM NICARAGUA

IMPORTANT POPULAR VICTORY ON PROPERTY RIGHTS

A special housing and property rights conference last year has brought what Community Movement leaders describe as 'an important popular victory', on the property rights issue.

This issue which has been dragging on unresolved since the change of government in 1990, flared up into open conflict in February and March of 1994. A National Assembly law banning evictions for a two-year period from 1992 ran out in the spring, and this triggered off a wave of repossession orders through the courts in favour of former owners.

Across the country 1,600 families were evicted, or threatened with eviction, in March alone. And the potential threat was far wider. Out of 121,000 claims to the OOT (the government office set up to decide individual claims under laws 85 & 86) 63,000 were still to be recognised. Any family who didn't actually hold an individual title was at risk. Enrigue Picado, the Community Movement National Co-ordinator, described it as a 'social time-bomb waiting to go off.'

The Community Movement are fighting back (in the words of Maxima Bermudez, National Housing Co-ordinator of the movement) 'by might, and by right'. They are defending people directly by setting up local brigades to block evictions using non-violent direct action. And they are using the law by helping to push a new law

through the National Assembly which extends the ban on evictions for a further 6 months.

This relieved some of the pressure. But now the Community Movement is determined to press ahead for final resolution of the problem. In July they launched a concerted campaign to lobby the President, The National Assembly and other bodies, including the United Nations. In one month they collected 122,816 signatures on a petition demanding government action to resolve the issue once and for all. On 24th July they held a special housing conference, attended by 530 community representatives from all over the country.

The momentum and popular strength of this campaign had a result. The Minister of Finance, Dr. Emilio Pereira, who was representing the Government at the conference, gave a commitment to set up an office for issuing legal titles initially as a pilot project in Outbarnios in Managua with the intention of extending it later to the whole country. This had been one of the Community Movement's principal demands for the last four years. The Community Movement are now 'redoubling their struggle' to keep the Government to these new promises.

MANOEUVRING FOR 1996

Political manoeuvring is already taking place in advance of the 1996 elections, with political parties negotiating to form alliances. The Social Democrat Party and the Democratic Nicaraguan

Movement have emerged to provide what some political commentators believe could provide the electoral platform for Antonio Lacayo. If proposed constitutional changes are approved by the National Assembly, Antonio Lacayo would not be eligible to stand for President because he is Violeta Chamorro's son-in-law. However, Lacayo announced that there was a possibility that he and Christina Chamorro would get a divorce in order to break the family relations. The Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC) of Arnoldo Aleman and the independent party (PLI) of vice-president Virgilio Godoy are also in reconciliation talks.

15TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS

50,000 - 60,000 people filled Managua's Plaza of the Revolution to celebrate the 15th anniversary of the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution on July 19th. Ortega spoke of the gains of the Revolution and also of errors committed. He said: 'The FSLN will continue to be the party of the poor and dispossessed to whom we pledge not to commit the same mistakes to the past, ...the lack of communication with the base, the confiscation's and the expropriations.' Ortega also promised that the FSLN would never again impose military service, but that at the time it was correct because of U.S. military aggression. Ortega called for party unity. 'We must struggle to win the elections, but in order to win we must strengthen the unity of the Sandinistas and with our people in general, but especially with our youth, to involve them in the struggle against hunger and unemployment.'

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT ON THE GROUND

MOLLY O'DUFFY - INSG MEMBER is working as a community and primary teacher trainer in the Barrio Jonathan Gonzales, in Managua. In this article, she describes her project and some of the issues it raises for Community Development in Nicaragua.

The Barrio Jonathan Gonzalez with its 950 houses and a population of 8,000 bang in the middle of Managua behind Plaza Espana is unknown to most visitors and has been almost completely neglected by all governments since its foundation 50 years ago.

It is coloured bright red on all the police maps of Managua because of its high crime rate. It has been known as Vietnam and the Barrio of Death due to its violent history. During the years of Sandinista government, the levels of violence went down but have risen again dramatically since 1990, due to the high levels of unemployment, poverty, machismo, post-war trauma and social decomposition due to the effects of structural adjustment policies.

In many ways the barrio is a mirror image of Nicaraguan society in general. The unemployment rate is 60% (the national average), 4 out of every 100 children of zero to five years die of malnutrition, gastro enteritis and diarrhoea. Half of the children work for their keep. 90% of pregnancies presenting at the health clinics are in the 'high risk' category. Women do the vast bulk of the work and their health is poor. The unemployed men drink and hang around street corners and at home mete out violence to their families. Political

polarisation and envy make it very difficult for any section of the community to organise without another group trying to sabotage their efforts. There are no phones, the streets are unpaved and the houses don't have flush toilets or drainage pipes, so the streets are full of dirty water. Rubbish is piled up everywhere.

In this very difficult context, the Nicaraguan Environment Movement (MAN) runs an integrated pilot project called the Urban Ecology Project in which environmental and income generating aspects are combined. The reason for including the two elements is that since poverty and unemployment are the underlying problems in the barrio, they must be addressed by a project wishing to be accepted by the community. The project is based on the concept of sustainable development, which means that all aspects of the community - social, economical, cultural and environmental, must be taken into account, and that the project must be one in which the community itself will have the capacity and economic resources to manage once MAN moves on to other barrios.

The different parts of the project, therefore, have both an economic and environmental focus. They are:

- A rotating fund for small business people, chiefly women. A rotating fund means that loans are given out to a particular group of people, and when repaid, the money is used to benefit another group. The idea is that a small amount can benefit a large amount of people.
- A rotating fund for those who wish to connect their houses to the sewage and drainage

system.

- A building materials co-operative (so that the work of putting in the sewage will stay in the barrio).
- A local bulletin.
- A primary school.
- Environmental activities like planting trees, cleaning up the barrio, recycling waste and encouraging the growing of organic vegetables.

Food sellers are the main beneficiaries of the loans for small businesses. Most ex-brigadistas will remember seeing the food stalls in Plaza Espana where women in snow-white aprons dispense food from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. All of these women are from the Barrio Jonathan Gonzalez. Their working day begins at 3 a.m. when they start cooking the food for the day; at 6.30 they push their carts laden with tables, chairs, buckets of water and fruit drinks, plates, cutlery, cooked food, and a charcoal grill for re-heating it, down to the Plaza. There they work, on their feet till 4 p.m. when they push their carts back to the barrio. Then they have to go to the Oriental Market to buy provisions for the next day's trading. With the loan from MAN, they can buy in bulk, or purchase furniture that they previously had on loan, replace their jam jars with real glasses, etc. A condition of the loan is that the women save a small quota, so as to have a nest-egg to cover emergencies to prevent them having to decapitalise their businesses or fall into the hands of money lenders in the case of a medical or other emergency.

The loans have been very successful, with a high return rate, making the money available for other beneficiaries.

The loans are accompanied by training in basic accountancy, which the women need if they are to be considered credit-worthy with other lending institutions and for them in the long-run to take over the management of the rotating fund themselves.

The second highly successful component of the project is the Communal Environmental School. This was founded due to lack of places at the state school. There are 485 children and 60 adults attending the school. It has the status of 'Communal School', a new category invented by the Ministry of Education, to evade its responsibilities and force the community to accept responsibility for primary and adult education. All that is offered by the Ministry of Education is supervision of the teachers and recognition of their school reports; the gap is filled by MAN, who provide teachers' salaries and basic equipment, and the community, who offer rooms in their houses for classes to take place. There is a special programme to accommodate working children, and another one to cater for children who live on the streets. MAN has also inserted a major new area in the curriculum: the environment, which the children study through class work, field trips and experimental vegetable gardens.

The school is MAN's main tool in trying to foster an environmental consciousness in the community. However, major propaganda and clean-up campaigns, and family organic vegetable plots also serve to put the environmental message across. Because the environment is so degraded in the barrio, green issues are far from airy-fairy notions for the inhabitants. Eliminating the piles of rubbish and the pools of

fetid water would dramatically improve the health of the population. Tree planting would provide shade and possible fruit, and, by helping the rain to permeate the topsoil, would prevent the dust storms that cause so many allergies and respiratory diseases. Organic vegetables improve the diet of the population, that otherwise only eat rice and beans.

The real problem is not one of persuasion, but one of organisation. There are many groups functioning independently in the barrio - the Communal Movement, the Base Committee of the FSLN, the Soya Kitchen, and the JCOP (a version of the Communal Movement allied to the mayor of Managua, Arnoldo Aleman), and MAN has sponsored the setting-up of others - the building materials co-operative, the local bulletin and association of small businesswomen, etc. MAN has also encouraged the setting-up of a co-ordinating committee of all these groups so that there is a unified structure for community action.

The organisational task had been extremely difficult and so far had not proved successful. The groups are small, badly organised and riven with internal conflicts. The co-ordination committee has not functioned well because of the groups' failure to unite around common interest. Such is the problem that the new slogan of the project team is 'reconciliation' - the same methods are to be used, as have proved successful in the reconciliation process between Sandinistas and ex-members of the Resistance. This is a crucial area of work for MAN since the community will never be able to take over the running of the project unless and until it has a form of organisation which

allows differences to be dealt with in a structured and non-destructive way.

This project is a perfect example of the type of development projects being set-up in the 1990's in Nicaragua, Latin America and indeed in the world. The merits it claims are that it is based on credit, not handouts; on self-help, not paternalism; on facilitating, training and organising, not imposition; on a bottom-up rather than top-down approach; on sustainable development rather than short term benefits.

This type of project arose from the failure of many top-down development projects, and from funding cutbacks, which mean less money has to go further. But this approach is still in its infancy and some of its central features have yet to prove themselves. Several major question marks hang over it, for example, the matter of economic susceptibility. There are many services which cannot be financially sustainable, for example, education and sanitation to a barrio as poor as Jonathan Gonzalez. If sustainability is the chief criterion for deciding where funds should be spent, services such as these would never be supported. And, for example, if aid is only channelled through loans, the poorest sections of the population, unable to guarantee repayment, are left out in the cold.

The failures, as well as the successes of a pilot project like this one in the Barrio Jonathan Gonzalez need to be taken into account for drawing up the best model of community development in the future.

CHALLENGING THE IMF AND WORLD BANK

1994, the 50th Anniversary of the IMF and World Bank, saw demands for radical reform of these institutions reach a crescendo. Jean Somers of the Irish Debt and Development Coalition here reports on the part that Ireland has played in this process.

ENGAGING WITH THE IMF & WORLD BANK

In May, the World Bank Vice-President responsible for poverty alleviation, Mr. Choksi, was in Dublin to discuss the 'achievements' of their programmes. Hot on his heels, the Managing-Director of the IMF, Mr Michael Camdessus, arrived in June to address a Coalition seminar on the role of the IMF in the debt issue. While neither of these events achieved a meeting of minds and hearts, they provided an opportunity for representatives of Irish Organisations to add to the mounting criticism of IMF/World Bank policies - on the effects of structural adjustment policies on poor people, on the environment; the urgent need for debt relief; the lack of democracy and accountability; the fundamental problems with their overall analysis of the problem and doctrinaire solutions uniformly imposed across the globe.

INVOLVING IRISH POLITICIANS

Following a presentation from the Coalition to the Joint Oireachtas Development Co-operation Sub-Committee, a report on

the Third World debt and the IMF and World Bank was adopted by the full Foreign Affairs Committee in April. It contained recommendations for reforms which Ireland should pursue as members of these institutions - on debt relief, poverty reduction and accountability.

As a result of Coalition lobbying, a Dáil debate on the report was held in June. This was the first public discussion on Ireland's participation in the IMF and World Bank, the first time Irish politicians took responsibility for the policies pursued by Ireland within these institutions. It also means that the government had to make a clear policy statement. The then Minister for Finance, Mr. Ahern's contribution to the debate was disappointing - stating that Ireland remains a firm supporter of the IMF and World Bank.

The Dáil debate marked a significant step forward. The danger is that this could be a one-off event. The Coalitions' aim is to establish a regular, annual report back/scrutiny system at Dáil level on Ireland's role in the IMF and World Bank.

MOBILISING SUPPORT

While lobbying has been a central focus of activity, it was recognised that this needs to be cemented by a popular, grass-root voice calling for reform. Mobilising local support culminated with a 'Solidarity

Parade' in Dublin on September 24th, timed to take place before Bertie Ahern made his speech to the IMF/World Bank AGM in Madrid on the 4-6th October.

CHANGING POLICY

A short-term aim of campaigning during 1994 was to influence Bertie Ahern's speech to the IMF/World Bank. Indeed, his speech made a move away from firm support of these organisations to at least acknowledging the criticisms that have been raised. The next step is to ensure that the acknowledgement leads to positive support for concrete policy changes. Over the coming months, Ireland's financial contributions to specific IMF/World Bank programmes will be under discussion. This will provide another lever to press for change.

The Coalition and the INSG have collaborated closely over the past year and we look forward to continuing joint work - particularly as Nicaragua has become a major focus for international campaigning on their debt issue. If you'd like more information on the campaigns, contact the Coalition at;

Dalgan Park, Navan, Co. Meath.

Tel:[046]21525

CO-OP SECURES IT'S FUTURE

Earlier this year, we reported on the struggles of the 30 campesino families of the Co-op Camilo Ortega Saavedra at Santa Maria de Ostuma in the northern hills of Matagalpa, to keep this co-op together. Here, we bring the story up-to-date, showing how at grass roots level, people are determined to organise and control their lives, and how continuing our solidarity work is very much part of this.

The land for this co-op was what was left to the 30 families after the wife of the former owner, Lucia Cardenal de Salazar, had reclaimed the bulk of the farm. She had bullied, threatened and tried to intimidate the families into leaving the land, but they had successfully organised and campaigned to hold on to some small plots, which formed the basis of their co-op.

Having negotiated this settlement, they thought that at least the problem of where they would live had been solved. Life was very difficult, food was short, there was not enough money to buy seeds to plant crops, education materials for the children, housing materials - but they were determined to make a go of it. They got support from a number of international solidarity groups, including the members of the INSG 1988 coffee brigade, who had worked and lived with these people, and now came together again to organise solidarity and funding for the co-op.

However, as often happens, it was very much the case of the calm before the storm. Despite the agreements reached on allowing the

families to remain on part of the land, Lucia Cardenal was determined to force them off. Her tactics were violence and intimidation, putting cattle to graze on their lands, holding and destroying their crops, and organising her vigilantes to threaten the co-op members. The leaders received death threats, which were taken seriously. The incidences of assassinations of FSLN militants and co-op members has increased dramatically over the past year, so no one ignores these threats when they come.

What was happening on Santa Maria was not an untypical situation for campesinos in Nicaragua. Wherever possible, former owners are running roughshod over the rights of the people, using whatever means they want, including their hired thugs. People are now saying that 'hired thugs' is the only growth industry in Nicaragua. Bit by bit, people are being forced off the land. But the members of the Camilo Ortega Co-op were quite simply determined that this would not happen to them. They had managed to keep together for so long, they were building up their co-op, and they were not going to let it go without a fight and direct action, if necessary.

This summer, they joined with two other co-ops to pressurise the Government to relocate them to land in another area, at no loss to themselves and with compensation for what they were leaving behind. The Bishop of Matagalpa supported them in their demand. They were

determined on militant action - if they were not prepared for this, they knew they would get nowhere. There followed endless weeks of negotiations, meetings with Government representatives, promises made and then broken. The group had enough and took to the streets.

Their demand was simple - that they be relocated. They refused to accept any new land on a 'privatisation' basis, which would have meant buying the land over years and being saddled with an enormous debt. What they insisted on was that they be given twice the extent of land that they had at Santa Maria, and that the nursery, school and value of the houses be provided for. They saw these as rights won with hard work during the sandinista years which they were not prepared to relinquish. And to win these demands, they joined together in action - occupying the offices of the Agrarian Institute in Matagalpa. Their militancy finally paid off, and a new site was identified in San Ramon for the Camilo Ortega co-op and steps were started to arrange the transfer and legal ownership of the new property.

However, even at this stage, there were still problems facing the co-op. To secure the title to their new property, they first needed to clear an earlier debt of \$1,500 and this is where Irish solidarity came in. Molly O'Duffy, an INSG member who lives in Managua had visited the co-op, along with two other friends from the INSG. They were so struck by the commitment and

dedication of this group, and their determination to stay together to protect their co-op, that they set about organising an appeal among their own friends back in Ireland, and among the members of the 1988 brigade, to raise the necessary money. Between them all, enough money was collected to satisfy all the parties being relocated, as promised.

So, this stage in the evolving story of the Camilo Ortega Co-op has been resolved, and the solidarity movement in Ireland has been an important part in that. A special thanks to everyone who helped make it happen, who helped solidarity work at a grassroots level, where it can really make a difference. The story does not end here, however. Being relocated is only the start of the plan to build the new co-op for the 30 families. Their priorities will be to get the season's planting underway and building their houses and a nursery. As a group, they are completely committed to the ideal of keeping this co-op, and believe that 'experience has shown us that unity is essential, not only politically, but also for production, and we can only progress if we adhere to these principles.' They will probably need our support again at some time in the future and the 1988 brigade plan to continue organising fund-raising events as the need arises.

UPDATE ON EL SALVADOR PEACE ACCORDS

The world community welcomed the signing in 1992 at Chapultepec, Mexico, of the UN brokered peace accords between the Salvadoran Insurgency, F.M.L.N. and the Salvadoran government. It was a very comprehensive peace agreement with a definite timetable for the implementation of its various elements; the setting up of a 'truth commission', demilitarisation, reform of the judiciary, land ownership and tenancy, the dismantling of the government aligned 'death squads', electoral reform, and a new police force.

ELECTIONS 1994

Elections were timetabled to take place only when all the essential elements were in place. However, elections for the Legislative Assembly, Local Government and the Central American Parliament went ahead on March 20th in spite of the Salvadoran's Government's non-compliance with key elements to the peace agreement.

The Tribunal mandated to carry out the electoral process has been accused by the University of Central America of preventing a great number of citizens from voting 'despite having two years to prepare for these elections'. The tribunal effectively prevented one million Salvadorans from

exercising their right to vote. The total disenfranchised numbered 1,014,000 out of a total electorate of 2.7 million. There is little doubt that these disenfranchised would have favoured the F.M.L.N. opposition in their electoral choices. For example, new applications met high levels of rejection by the Tribunal in areas where poor people had documents. In ex-conflictive zones, where F.L.M.N. opposition has a strong presence, rejection rates for people seeking voting cards were up to three times the national average. The turnout was higher in elections held in 1982 and 1984 at the height of the war. However, after listing various problems, the U.N. found the election process acceptable despite the irregularities. The result is not an aggregate of chance occurrences, but a pre-planned fraud designed to ensure a victory for the right wing Arena party on election day.

ELECTION RESULTS

The Arena presidential candidate, Calderon Sol, linked to death squads in declassified C.I.A. papers, was elected to the presidency. In the 84 seat national legislative assembly, Arena won 39 seats and its ally, the Army Party (PCN) 4 seats, while the F.M.L.N. gained 21 and the Christian Democrats, 18 seats.

Arena, in the winner takes all municipal elections, gained 212 local councils out a total of 262. The extreme right-wing national republican party (Arena) is now in a position to consolidate its hold on the Salvadoran economy via the presidency, legislative assembly and in 81% of the municipal councils.

THE F.M.L.N. OPPOSITION

The F.M.L.N. had now become the country's second largest political force, surpassing the Christian Democrats. The former insurgent alliance had made major strides in converting itself into a modern political party. However, organisationally, the principal weakness shown by the Left has been a lack of movement towards organic unity either among the F.M.L.N.'s five constituent parties or between the F.M.L.N. and the other Left

Alliance's. The F.M.L.N.'s second largest party (E.R.P.) believes in forging links with modernising entrepreneurs and closer links with the United States, and viewed the winning of the 1994 elections as secondary to its aim of making alliances with moderate Arena politicians and business people.

The largest Party with the F.M.L.N.(F.P.L.), supported by the influential Communist Party, argue for a clear political identity and the development of the Left's popular political base in preparation of winning power later. These developing strains came to a crisis in the new Assembly. Arena with its majority in the Legislative Assembly, which changed the rules for the election of officers to run the assembly. The F.M.L.N. as a body decided to boycott these internal elections but the E.R.P. and its ally R.N., two of the five F.M.L.N. constituent parties, broke the boycott and with Arena

support were rewarded with the prestigious posts of the vice-presidency and secretaryship of the assembly. The national council of the F.M.L.N. has expelled both dissent groups from the Party. At present, all parties of the F.M.L.N. are examining and proposing options as to the role of the F.M.L.N. in the transitional political situation.

This underlining disunity has allowed the governing Arena party to be free of its obligations under the peace accords. Foot dragging over the purchase of lands for the ex-F.M.L.N. combatants with only 25% having received parcels of land two years after the signing of the peace accords has awakened the F.M.L.N. ex-combatant base. The U.N. has been weakening in its resolve to have all the key peace accords realised. The Salvadoran Right is now gaining more than it could ever gain by war.

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