

NICARAGUA NOW

SPECIAL ISSUE



Issue 10 Summer 2019



40 years UK–Nicaragua solidarity



THANKS

Our acknowledgement and thanks to all the tens of thousands of people who have been involved in our work over the past 40 years ● members and supporters past and present ● NSC and NSCAG staff members in our London and Managua offices ● all those who have taken part in delegations, study tours, brigades to Nicaragua ● those who have served on the NSC Board of Trustees and NSCAG Executive Committees ● volunteers who have run marathons, done stalls, sold raffles tickets, served drinks at festivals, bought our sales items, helped out at events and in our office ● all affiliated UK national, regional and branch trade unions

Above all, our thanks to all the Nicaraguan organisations that we have worked with for their generosity of spirit and deep bonds of friendship and solidarity.

‘The essence of solidarity was the political and moral support and mutual learning ...and above all, the feeling of not being alone’

CARMEN BARREDA

Nicaraguan 1980s student activist and former member of the NSC Board



NICARAGUA NOW

PUBLISHED BY
Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign
86 Durham Rd, London N7 7DT

www.nicaraguasc.org.uk
020 7561 4836

EDITORIAL
Julie Lamin, Stephanie Linkogle, John Perry,
James Pope, Louise Richards, Helen Yuill

COVER PHOTOS Mural in Managua painted by a Scottish, Welsh, and English coffee brigade reads ‘Solidarity is the tenderness of peoples,’ (Che Guevara)

Solidarity between UNISON and the Nicaraguan public service union UNE goes back more than 30 years: Ruby Cox UNISON and Domingo Perez UNE

DESIGN Tom Lynton

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

The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group (NSCAG) was registered as a company limited by guarantee in October 2002. Work with trade unions and political work has been carried out through NSCAG since the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign became a charity in 2004.

40 years of UK–Nicaragua solidarity

This publication marks the celebration of 40 years of UK – Nicaragua solidarity and is a tribute to the tens of thousands of people, particularly in the labour movement, who have contributed to sustaining our work through four decades of profound political change in Nicaragua, UK and globally.

2019 also marks the 40th anniversary of the overthrow of the 43-year US-backed Somoza dictatorship by the broad coalition of forces that made up the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN).

We dedicate this publication to the Nicaraguan people and the organisations we have worked in solidarity with, and their commitment to building a society based on social and economic justice, free from outside interference.

At the same time we honour the memory of the 80,000 Nicaraguans who lost their lives in the 1970s insurrection against the Somoza dictatorship and the US-backed contra war of the 1980s.

As in the 1980s, Nicaragua is once again caught in the cross currents of a polarised world. At a time when a belligerent, unstable US president and administration is threatening war on countries across the world, when the social and economic gains of progressive movements in Latin America are threatened by a resurgent neoliberalism, our solidarity with Nicaraguan trade unions, co-operatives and organisations that make up the social economy remains critical.

‘Where is Nicaragua and what has it got to do with us anyway?’

Carlos Fonseca, one of the founders of the FSLN in 1961, always had an internationalist vision of the Sandinista Revolution, anticipating how critical international solidarity would be in countering the inevitable backlash if the Revolution succeeded in taking power in the ‘backyard’ of the US.

In the UK, the first Nicaragua solidarity initiative took place in London in September 1978 during the final period of the insurrection when a diverse group met in London to organise a speaker tour by an exiled FSLN representative.

There was initial scepticism about the potential for UK – Nicaragua solidarity. The reasons cited were the inward looking tendencies of a demoralised left, communication problems in those pre-internet times, and overcoming the ‘where is Nicaragua and what has it got to do with us anyway’ difficulty.

However, despite the scepticism, interest grew extremely rapidly in the months that followed the speaker tour, particularly within the labour movement. For example, in December 1978, the National Executive Committee of the Labour Party approved a resolution denouncing the ‘genocide committed by the Somoza dictatorship’ and calling for support for the FSLN.

From small beginnings in a difficult political climate, the speed at which these solidarity activists mobilised was exemplary.

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

NSCAG www.nscag.org

f [nicaraguasc](https://www.facebook.com/nicaraguasc)

Twitter [NSCAG_UK](https://twitter.com/NSCAG_UK)

Wales NSC www.walesnicaragua.wordpress.com

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

What has NSC achieved?

Through 40 years of profound political change in Nicaragua, UK and globally we have successfully reoriented our work and sustained our solidarity with Nicaragua.

NSC helped to put Nicaragua on the map in the UK and build a broad consensus that condemned US military and economic aggression against Nicaragua, and supported the achievements of the Revolution and Nicaragua's right to self-determination.

- In collaboration with other solidarity organisations, particularly in the US, we played a key role in counteracting the intense international propaganda campaign that, in the Thatcher-Reagan cold war era, depicted Nicaragua as a communist totalitarian dungeon with troops poised to storm the Texan border.

- During the 1980s, the extraordinary energy and optimism of the Sandinista Revolution was echoed in the spirit of internationalism promoted by NSC and others, and the infectious speed at which it grew. Tens of thousands of people in the UK supported and were inspired by the Revolution during the political gloom of the Thatcher government.

- Brigades, study tours and delegations have raised awareness, providing political, moral and practical solidarity and a two way exchange of skills, knowledge and experience. Since 1982, many people who heard about Nicaragua through NSC's work have visited or



worked there, including over 1,500 people on NSC solidarity trips.

- We have organised well over 150 UK speaker tours by Sandinistas, National Assembly deputies, trade unionists, Fair Trade farmers, teachers, health workers, street sellers, and women's rights, community, debt activists.

- NSC has facilitated strong, lasting bonds of friendship and mutual solidarity between UK and Nicaraguan organisations. The outstanding examples have seen UK trade unions play a critical role providing political, moral and practical solidarity with their Nicaraguan

counterparts, and Fair Trade links between Nicaragua coffee farmers and UK activists.

- NSC provided hundreds of thousands of pounds of medical and educational supplies in the 1980s Nicaragua Must Survive Campaign and subsequently raised funds for the Nicaragua Community Movement, Radio Zinica, women's organisations, co-operatives and training projects funded by UK trade unions. After Hurricane Mitch in 1998, NSC and twin towns raised £400,000 (equivalent to £700,000 in 2019).

- NSC women's, health and environmental networks have been a catalyst for setting up broader Central America Networks.

- NSC and NSCAG have collaborated with Wales NSC and supported 17 (12 still active) local groups with twinning links with towns and communities in Nicaragua.

- Through our publications we have promoted the reality of our Nicaraguan partners whose views are often invisible in the mainstream media.

- We have collaborated with many

**‘The Revolution's first line of defence was the hearts and actions of international solidarity’
A former FSLN National Assembly deputy**

other Central America solidarity and human rights organisations, the Cuba and Venezuela solidarity campaigns and Fair Trade and climate change networks, amongst others.

- We have sustained our work by developing a very diverse funding base including sell out shows of top musicians and the annual bike ride for Nicaragua in the 1980s and 1990s. Throughout the 40 years affiliations and donations, merchandising, Spanish lessons, raffles and sponsored events such as marathons and the Workers Beer Company have sustained us.

Solidarity with the Sandinistas

July 19th, 1979 was a defining historical moment not only for Latin America and the Caribbean but also globally. Inspired by the Cuban Revolution 20 years earlier, the victory eroded the US's political stranglehold over the region and realised the dream of Nicaraguan hero, Augusto César Sandino, a symbol of resistance to US domination, assassinated by the first Somoza in 1934.

'The popular insurrection that ended the military dictatorship brought such happiness. We lived the great dream of a liberated country, with social justice, equal rights for all.' Fatima Ismael, Co-operative Union, SOPPEXCCA

However, as Fidel Castro warned: '...find your own Nicaraguan way. The only thing you should learn from us is to avoid our mistakes.' The Sandinista government set about transforming Nicaragua through an internationally acclaimed literacy crusade, rural and urban land reform, and

free health care and education for the first time in Nicaragua's history.

In 1981, Ronald Reagan became US president. Evoking threats of a Soviet takeover in Central America, the US set about destroying the Sandinista Revolution, unleashing a war on all fronts short of direct invasion: military, political, diplomatic, ideological, economic and psychological. However murky, illegal and morally reprehensible, the means justified the ends.

On 1 May 1985, Reagan declared that Nicaragua constituted 'an unusual and extraordinary threat to the security and foreign policy of the United States,' imposing an economic embargo. Its real threat was to provide an example that neighbouring countries might have followed.

By the end of the 1980s, Reagan's brutal war, ruled illegal by the World Court in 1986, had resulted in the loss of 30,000 lives, the destruction of the economy, and

the severe undermining of the gains of the Revolution.

They were defended not only in Nicaragua but on the global stage, involving hundreds of thousands of people inspired by the achievements of the Sandinista government and appalled by US attempts to destroy them.

NSC was set up in 1978 with two main aims: to build a UK movement of political, moral and material solidarity with the Sandinista Revolution and to defend Nicaragua's right to self-determination free from foreign interference.

Although building a base of political support within the UK labour movement was a priority, from the outset NSC very rapidly developed as a broad coalition that stretched across all sectors. This is the story of the tens of thousands of people in the UK in the 1980s who joined a global effort to support the Revolution.

Managua, 20 July, 1979, tens of thousands gather in the Plaza de la Revolución in celebration of the overthrow of the Somoza dictatorship by Sandinista forces.



Brigades, delegations and study tours



Send-off for NSC's first coffee brigade in 1986 with Islington South MP Chris Smith

In the 1980s, over 1,000 people visited Nicaragua on NSC organised work brigades, delegations and study tours; many others visited as individuals and those with specific skills lived and worked in Nicaragua.

The coffee brigade story: As the US sponsored contra war became more intense particularly in coffee growing areas of northern Nicaragua, an estimated one fifth of the population was mobilised into the military. During the coffee harvest this left chronic labour shortages. Brigades spent two to four

weeks picking coffee followed by a week visiting organisations and projects around the country. Though their contribution to the coffee harvest was minimal, they demonstrated solidarity to Nicaraguans and made a huge contribution on their return as first hand witnesses to what was actually happening and the consequences of the war.

Reafforestation and building brigades: NSC organised its first building brigade in 1984 to work with the local community on constructing a school. Subsequent brigades worked on building

adaptations for those who were disabled as a result of war injuries. In addition, six reafforestation brigades lived and worked alongside rural communities.

Delegations and study tours: As well as brigades, NSC also organised study tours for those with specific interests in health, education, the arts and trade unions. These groups played an extremely important role in building solidarity with Nicaragua in their own sectors, particularly the trade unions. This led to the setting up of networks including the Environmental Network for Nicaragua, the Arts Fund for Nicaragua, and the Nicaragua Women's Network. This had a multiplier effect in broadening the base of UK solidarity.

For most of those who visited Nicaragua their solidarity was an extension of their political commitments in the UK. On their return, they wrote hundreds of newspaper articles, did radio interviews, organised local talks and fundraising events, set up local groups, motivated people to sign petitions, lobbied MPs, and got involved in NSC networks.

Solidarity was always viewed as mutual: "to go somewhere where people have actually tried to take control of things even though they've got very few resources, and, to see what can be achieved with so few resources is very, very inspirational." 1986 coffee brigadista

Nicaraguan literacy crusade March – August 1980: national and international solidarity

After the triumph of the Sandinista Revolution, the key priority was building 'a new model of society based on equality, well being, solidarity and social justice'. The literacy crusade expressed in an integrated way all aspects of this model: eradicating illiteracy; building understanding between Nicaraguans of different classes and backgrounds; gender equality; raising political awareness; nurturing creativity, co-operation, and critical thinking; and building national cohesion.

Over 60,000 young people and 30,000 adults mostly from urban areas received basic training in teaching literacy before being assigned to rural communities to spend five months living and working with families and teaching them to read and write. Thousands of others provided logistical support, bringing total numbers involved in the campaign to one fifth of the population. Women made up 60% of brigadistas and 50% of literacy learners.

'I am no longer ignorant, I know

how to read. And your son isn't ignorant any more either. Now he knows how we live, what we eat, how we work, and he knows life in the mountains. Your son has learned to read from our book.' Extract from a campesina to the mother of the brigadista who taught her to read.

As a result of the campaign, illiteracy was reduced from 56% to 12%. Nicaragua was awarded the UNESCO Nadezhda K. Krupskaya award in September 1980 in recognition of this success. In 1981 additional literacy campaigns were held in Nicaragua's Caribbean coast in the local languages: Miskito, Sumo and Nicaraguan Creole. These innovative and highly successful literacy initiatives not only dramatically reduced illiteracy in Nicaragua, they also inspired and informed other literacy projects around the world.

NSC contributed by raising awareness and backing for the Literacy Crusade by publishing an 80 page booklet called 'The Loss of Fear,' part of a wider campaign to support education in Nicaragua;

National Literacy Crusade, international solidarity with Nicaragua



building alliances within the National Union of Teachers (now the National Education Union) and raising £5,000 (the equivalent of £21,000 in 2019) to contribute to literacy crusade costs. A 1980 conference on education in Nicaragua attracted 80 people many of whom became long-term NSC members and supporters. NSC was instrumental in gathering the support of 133 MPs, MEPs and members of the House of Lords for the 1981 Nobel Peace Prize nomination of the Literacy Crusade and its director Father Fernando Cardenal.

Nicaragua: political and material solidarity

During a 1985 visit to Europe, then Nicaraguan Vice president Sergio Ramirez, launched the Nicaragua Must Survive Campaign. The crisis in Nicaragua had deepened due to the intensification of the contra war and the US economic blockade, which meant acute shortages of even basic supplies. The Campaign was an appeal for broad, large scale political and material support. Groups and hundreds of individuals around the UK collected funds and educational and health supplies for people in rural areas affected by the war. In 1988 alone NSC collaborated with the Labour Party, NSC Women's Network, the National Union of Students, the Nicaragua Health Fund, trade unions, and Welsh Aid for Nicaragua in sending six containers of supplies worth over £200,000. (equivalent to £700,000 in 2019)

Two years in the life of NSC, 1987-1988

'A sordid tale has been unfolding in Washington, a tale of deceit, lawbreaking as government policy, and the moral bankruptcy of a superpower.... a secret army, navy and air force, a parallel executive circumventing the will of Congress, millions of dollars from various sources including illegal arms sales to Iran being used to pay for the contra war to destroy the Sandinista government' NSC magazine Nicaragua Today Summer 1987 on the findings of the Tower Commission into the Iran – Contra scandal.

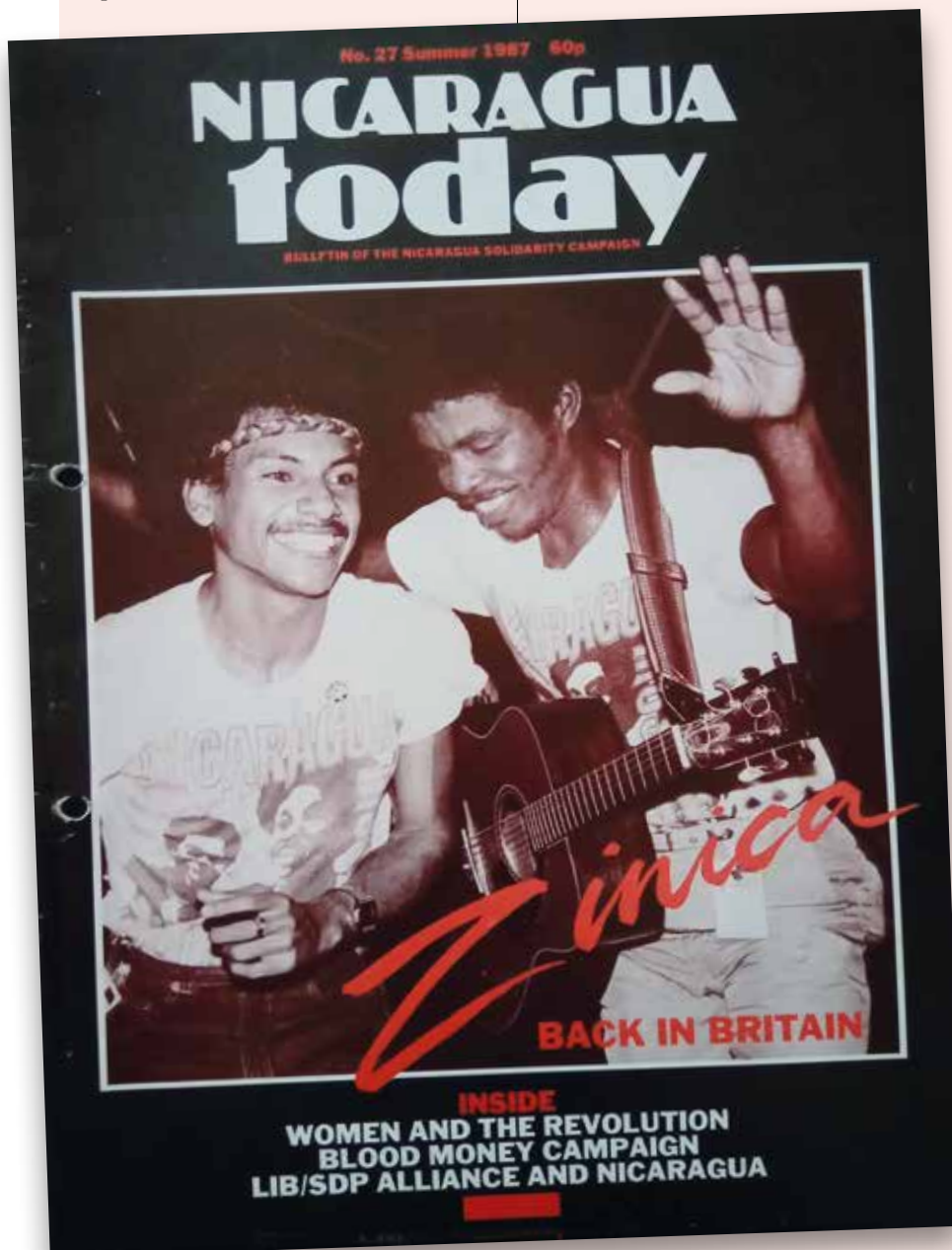
Two key developments in June and August of 1986 determined the focus of NSC's campaigning activities for the following two years. Firstly, the International Court of Justice found the US guilty of arming and training an illegal

paramilitary organisation (the contras), mining Nicaragua's harbours, and imposing a trade embargo. The Court ordered the US to cease all aggression against Nicaragua and pay reparations. The US refused to accept the verdict of the Court or to pay the estimated \$17 billion damages.

Secondly, two months later Congress approved a further US\$105 million funding to continue financing the contra war.

In response NSC launched the Blood Money campaign denouncing all US funding in contempt of the World Court ruling. This included:

- 200,000 leaflets and 5,000 posters, stickers, badges and t-shirts circulated widely through our 65 local groups, 19 national trade union affiliates, 4,500 individuals, and through women's, students', environmental and health networks and Wales NSC.
- 50,000 members and supporters signed a petition – a labour intensive feat in those pre-internet days - that was presented to the US Embassy by playwrights David Hare and Harold Pinter and shadow foreign secretary Gerald Kaufman.
- Eight issues of *Nicaragua Today* published along with briefings, press releases resulting in substantial national and local media coverage.
- Extensive lobbying of MP, MEPs, and trade unions to build awareness and to condemn the Reagan administration and the collusion of the Thatcher government.
- Nine NSC coffee, reforestation and building brigades, a trade union delegation and six study tours to Nicaragua in which nearly 400 people participated.
- Ten UK speaker tours of Nicaraguan government ministers and officials, representatives of trade unions and the Nicaraguan women's movement (AMNLAE) with rallies and public meetings.
- Sell out gigs by prominent musicians attended by 10,000 people in London and 2,000 at the Edinburgh festival.
- With other organisations NSC sent ten containers of emergency supplies after Hurricane Joan.
- Two sponsored London to Oxford bike rides which raised £124,000.



The House for Nicaragua story



1980s property boom in London, vultures poised for a killing, a large squatting community skilled in building renovation, dismal political situation, lots of people looking for a channel for positive action...

London architect and builder, Robert Todd [known as Tod] was deeply affected by 'A Nation's Right to Survive', John Pilger and Alan Lowry's influential 1983 documentary, and decided to 'do something'. Tod's 'something' turned into an eight year commitment starting with buying a derelict building in Lambeth, South London, which at the time had a twinning link with Bluefields on Nicaragua's Caribbean Coast. Over eight years the 'House for Nicaragua' project brought together more than 200 volunteers of all ages and backgrounds, including craftspeople, builders, electricians, mural painters who 'build a beautiful house that expressed the reasons behind doing it.' These reasons included raising awareness of the gains of the Revolution and the threat it faced from US aggression.

1980s London was a frenzy of destruction, building projects and greed. In contrast to this materialistic throwaway consumerism, building materials for the 'House for Nicaragua' project were sourced via creative, inspired scrounging through late night forays into the skips, building sites and dumps. In short the project represented an attack on the values of individualistic capitalism and in this way it mirrored the principles of Sandinista Revolution. As planned the house was sold in 1991 and the funds were distributed to Nicaraguan projects including nursery schools, health and education programmes and a children's mural collective.

Fusing politics and fundraising

From the beginning we have sustained our work through a very diverse funding base including affiliations and donations, appeals, merchandising, raffles, sponsored events, fiestas, Club Sandino, Spanish lessons and providing volunteers at festivals through the Workers Beer Company.

NSC played a pioneering role in fusing the performing arts and politics. In the 1980s this included fundraising events that attracted top musicians, poets, comedians and artists who took part in sell-out shows ranging from the Edinburgh Festival to Glastonbury to the Brixton Academy. Performers included Julie Christie, Alexei Sayle, David Hare, Tom Robinson, Jo Brand, Eddie Izzard, John Hegley, Jimmy Somerville, Mike Westbrook, Gilles Peterson, Sinead O'Connor, David Hare, John Keane, Los Van Van, Hugh Masekela, Billy Bragg, The Pogues and many more. At all these events our innovative sales merchandise flew off the tables and our mail order



operation was hugely successful.

Our annual Bike Ride for Nicaragua from 1987 to 1994 became the second most popular sponsored event of any organisation in the country, with over 2,000 participants per ride raising tens of thousands of pounds.



Actors Roger Lloyd Flack and Alfred Molina promote the 1987 London to Oxford Bike Ride

Solidarity from below: 1990–2007

On 26 February 1990, exhausted by war and economic collapse and faced with more of the same if they re-elected the FSLN, Nicaraguans made a pragmatic choice and voted for the US backed UNO coalition. On one hand the elections were unanimously declared technically free and fair; on the other Nicaraguans voted with a gun to their heads.

After a peaceful transition of power, a series of US backed neoliberal governments brought some level of economic stability but at enormous social cost. Now discredited IMF structural adjustment programmes were imposed: economic liberalisation, minimising the role of the state, privatisation and large-scale cutbacks in public expenditure. This resulted in mass unemployment and the decimation of health care and education.

NSC entered a new, very challenging phase with the disappearance of Nicaragua from the media and the reassertion of US dominance internationally. We re-oriented our work to include:

- Fostering, maintaining and building links between Nicaraguan organisations and their UK counterparts based on common interests. This included trade unions and Fair trade linking.
- UK speaker tours and fundraising in support of the Nicaragua Community

Movement (MCN), and the Association of Rural Workers (ATC) defending the rights of the tens of thousands of beneficiaries of the urban and agrarian reform programmes threatened with property seizures.

- Publicising and fundraising for the innovative work of the Nicaragua National Network of Women Against Violence and facilitating links with UK counterparts.
 - Up until 2000, providing political and financial support for the FSLN as an opposition party. This included facilitating links with the Labour Party, speaker tours by FSLN representatives, securing funding for the FSLN through the Westminster Foundation for Democracy and organising MP and MEP delegations to Nicaragua.
 - Campaigning to defend the gains of the Revolution and denouncing US interference particularly in elections.
 - Promoting people to people links through brigades, re-afforestation projects, trade union delegations, community theatre exchanges and study tours.
- NSC also took up broader campaigns using the example of Nicaragua to highlight wider social justice issues. NSC participated in Jubilee 2000 through organising speaker tours of Nicaragua



Cabaret at the Conway, 1991

debt campaigners, delegations to Nicaragua and publications highlighting that 60% of Nicaragua's aid was actually being using for debt repayments. In addition we organised a petition signed by more than 6,000 people asking the UK government to cancel Nicaragua's UK debt and to use its influence internationally to support debt cancellation.

In 1992, NSC participated in the global campaign 500 Years of Indigenous, Black and Popular Resistance by working with Caribbean Coast organisations promoting and defending the autonomy process. In addition to speaker tours and publications, we participated in a rally in Liverpool attended by more than 1,000 people where Francisco Campbell from the Caribbean Coast was a keynote speaker.

In 1998 when Hurricane Mitch killed 3,000 people and destroyed thousands of homes, disaster relief became NSC's focus. Within days, NSC launched an appeal for the reconstruction work being carried out by the MCN. We raised over £80,000 (the equivalent of £138,300 in 2018) from individual members, trade unions and the general public. Branch trade unions gave almost a third of the money and national affiliated unions donated £2,250. Two very successful cabaret events raised over £9,000. The MCN used the funds to train health promoters and to rebuild latrines and homes.

Throughout the period NSC continued to publish Central America Report (with other Central America Organisations) and provide support for and collaborate with Wales NSC, UK-Nicaragua twin towns, the Central America Women's Network and the Environmental Network for Central America.



Co-operatives, Fair trade and Solidarity: 1990–2007

The strength of the Nicaraguan co-operative movement has its origins in the vision of Nicaragua's national liberation hero Augusto César Sandino. A key part of the Sandinista agrarian reform programme, rural co-operatives bore the brunt of brutal attacks by US-backed contras in the 1980s. After 1990, a new wave of co-operatives emerged as campesinos defended their land against neo-liberal government policies and, through their involvement in Fair trade, gained access to markets and finance.

Since 2002 NSC has been facilitating links between a well-developed co-operative movement in Nicaragua and UK networks of activists campaigning and promoting Fair trade co-ordinated through the Fairtrade Foundation. In the spirit of social and economic justice these direct links have aimed to build mutual solidarity and understanding between those at different 'ends' of the coffee supply chain. They have introduced a Nicaraguan perspective into wider Fair trade campaigns.

☞ **... Fair trade means conserving and improving our land, looking after the environment, education for our children and access to health care for our families... it also means better opportunities above all for women, opportunities to organise and take decisions. Fair trade means producers and consumers working together for a better life, it's much more than just a question of money.** ☞

BLANCA ROSA MOLINA
Co-operative Union
CECOCAFEN

What we achieved:

- Raised the profile of Nicaragua and Fair trade through our participation in the Fair trade Foundation at national level
- Secured funding from the Department for International Development (DfID) to strengthen links among and visibility of Nicaraguan women coffee producers. These funds were used to organise the first ever forum of 65 producers that agreed an action plan to increase women's participation and decision-making in

co-ops. This movement called Flores de Café has made a significant contribution to strengthening the participation and visibility of women farmers.

- Organised five speaker tours during Fair trade Fortnight by representatives of Nicaraguan coffee co-operatives, CECOCAFEN, SOPPEXCCA, and MIRAFLORES. These involved extensive programmes of visits and talks in England, Scotland and Wales.

'Very often in Miraflores we feel alone in trying to create a better world but the opportunity to meet other people with the same dreams and who act on those dreams means we feel accompanied and strengthened.' Porfirio Zepeda, Co-operative Union (UCA) Miraflores during a speaker tour in 2002

- Fifty people visited Nicaragua on Fair trade study tours involving living and working with Fair trade coffee farming families. This had a multiplier effect with participants returning with first-hand knowledge to share through trade unions, twin towns, and Fair trade networks.

'In Nicaragua I was able to experience what life was like at the other end of the chain, and witness how important it is that we pay a fair price for the products we consume. I believe it is a real opportunity to challenge the vast inequalities that exist between rich and impoverished countries.'

- Co-ordinated a Fair trade Forum

involving Nicaragua producers and members of an NSC study tour to exchange perspectives on issues relating to fair trade at international level, particularly the dilemma of how to expand the Fair trade market without the social justice aspect becoming diluted by transnational companies.



- Published and disseminated briefings and articles about Fairtrade and produced a DVD called 'Coffee: take it fairly' based on the experience of Nicaraguan farmers.



Fair trade coffee producer Norma Gadea, one of five coffee farmers NSC invited to the UK to take part in Fairtrade Fortnight events

Defending the gains of the Revolution: Trade Union solidarity

Neo-liberal policies decimated the Nicaraguan workforce: over 100,000 state sector workers lost their jobs – 66% of the workforce – including 2,500 union leaders while unemployment and underemployment soared to 70%.

Nicaragua's trade unions saw their rights stripped away; those who were in work received low wages and strikes to defend workers' rights and secure improved working conditions were commonplace.

Due to the privatisation of public services and attacks on unions, trade union membership plummeted. For example the membership of public service union UNE fell from 40,000 to 6,500.

Following on from the political solidarity links of the 1980s, NSC continued facilitating support between UK and Nicaraguan trade unions, sharing knowledge and experience, enhancing mutual understanding and promoting social and economic justice.

NSC focused on harnessing the support of the UK trade union and labour movement through highlighting and campaigning against injustices and providing much needed funding. Moral, as well as political and financial support was important in letting Nicaraguan workers know that, during the darkest of days, they were not alone in their resistance to neoliberalism and right wing attempts – supported by the US - to destroy Sandinismo.

NSC was one of the first organisations to offer us solidarity. Thankyou friends for helping us to improve the working conditions and wellbeing of our sector that had been so marginalised, persecuted and humiliated by neoliberal governments. Confederation of Self Employed Workers (CTCP)

Nicaraguan trade unions

ATC Rural Workers Association

CGTEN-ANDEN The General Confederation of Education Workers of Nicaragua

CTCP The Confederation of Self Employed Workers

FESITUN The Federation of University Workers of Nicaragua

FETSALUD Federation of Health Workers, the health sector workers' union

FNT National Workers Front, umbrella trade union organisation the equivalent of the TUC

UNE The National Union of Employees, public sector workers

Provision of information: With the disappearance of Nicaragua from the news, a constant flow of information was vital to maintaining the momentum of our solidarity.

Affiliations of national, regional and branch trade unions remained constant and linking trade unions in the UK with their counterparts in Nicaragua continued to be a priority area of work. Earlier relationships were consolidated and new ones formed and the UK trade union movement continued to be a vital source of solidarity. For example, in 1995, 16 UK unions representing over three million workers were affiliated to the NSC.

Delegations and speaker tours:

NSC organised more than 15 speaker tours by representatives of ANDEN, UNE, FETSALUD and the FNT to ensure a constant exchange of ideas and information and solidarity. In addition 30 UK trade unionists visited Nicaragua on delegations.

Trade Union Urgent Action network:

Because of the frequent infringements of trade union rights, NSC set up this network as a mechanism for providing immediate support to Nicaraguan trade unions. For example in 1995 the Network was activated in support of 52 workers at a match factory locked out by the owner, and in support of a UNE legal action to prevent their training centre

being seized by a returning Somoza dictatorship supporter.

Financial support for operational

and training costs and strikes: With high unemployment and low wages, those in work were unable to pay union dues, leaving the trade unions in very precarious financial circumstances. UK unions contributed funds to enable Nicaraguan unions to pay salaries and communicate with their members; and for training for women and young workers with a focus on gender, collective bargaining and health and safety. BECTU raised funds for a community radio under siege appeal.

Today, more than ever, there is a need to develop and increase solidarity. Neoliberal governments, driven by the economic interests of the North, have been destroying our trade unions, violating human rights and, as a result, dominating our people... We thank you for all your support... 🙏

DOMINGO PEREZ
General Secretary, UNE
June 2005



Workers and peasants against hunger and war. We demand employment and legalisation of land. ATC demonstration, 1995

2007 – 2019

Co-operatives, Fair trade and Climate Justice

The 2006 election of the Sandinista Government marked a new era with an incoming government committed to implementing a national plan to eradicate Nicaragua's main historical problem: high levels of entrenched poverty. Poverty has been reduced from 48.3% to 24.9%, and extreme poverty from 17.2% to 6.9% as a result of an integrated programme of free basic health care and education, social and economic programmes targeting women, and major investment in infrastructure such as roads, electricity and renewable energy.

These changes have had a profound impact on co-operatives and other organisations of the social economy: economic stability, a free basic health and education service for the first time, roads and electricity even in the remotest areas,

and a government ministry dedicated to supporting this sector.

Co-ops, Fair Trade and Climate Justice: We campaigned on Nicaragua as an example of the impact of climate change on small scale Fair trade coffee producers; mitigation, adaptation programmes including renewable energy; and why the threats posed by climate change mean that Fair Trade and solidarity is crucial. In addition, we highlighted Nicaragua's perspective on climate change, far in advance of its time in denouncing the lack of political will and sense of urgency on the part of the largest polluters.

We participated in the Climate Coalition (an umbrella network of over 100 UK organisations) and Fairtrade Foundation by disseminating information illustrating Nicaragua's example; continued mutual

☞ Solidarity is about mutuality of values, common understandings, friendships, and uniting to redress imbalances of power ☞
UK–Nicaragua solidarity event, 2013

solidarity linking of Nicaraguan Fair trade producers and UK campaigners through study tours to Nicaragua and UK speaker tours of Nicaraguan Fair trade producers; organised meetings and public events with Dr Paul Oquist, Nicaragua's representative to international climate change fora, on broader issues relating to climate change internationally.

Other activities

- * organised film showings, International Women's Day celebrations, and UK – Nicaragua solidarity events
- * co-ordinated a UK speaker tour and a delegation to Nicaragua in solidarity with the 2007 literacy campaign
- * published briefings, and organised events on the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA)
- * collaborated with Wales NSC and supported the network of 12 towns and communities and project based local groups
- * 'Nicaragua Now' launched in 2013 covering developments in Nicaragua and solidarity news
- * co-ordinated Nicaragua speakers in the annual Latin America Conference in London.

CASE STUDY

Mutual solidarity linking

During Fairtrade Fortnight 2017, Santiago Dolmus from CECOCAFEN, an umbrella co-operative with 2,100 coffee farmer members, visited the UK. His key messages were the threats posed by climate change and the transnational agro industry, and the importance globally of supporting alternative small-scale sustainable models based on co-operatives, agro ecology and Fair trade.

- Santiago gave presentations on the 'The Fair trade coffee story from the plant nursery to the coffee cup' and responded to searching questions from 260 8-15-year olds in five Portsmouth and Lewisham schools

- Over 100 people attended public events in Oxford, Lewisham and Portsmouth

- Met with the mayor, councillors and council officials in Lewisham, Matagalpa's twin town

- Visited shops selling Fairtrade

products in Portsmouth and Lewisham and Cafedirect who sell CECOCAFEN coffee

The visit opened opportunities for exchanges on issues of mutual interest with Fair trade and environmental activists, students, university teachers, allotment holders, baristas, church members, farmers, market sellers and government employees doing policy work on climate change and renewable energy. We followed up the visit by fundraising for a CECOCAFEN capacity building project, and briefings and articles.



Fair trade coffee co-operative representative Santiago Dolmus with Fair trade activists in Portsmouth



Fundraising

Mexican runners who raised £7,500 for NSC and funds for CECOCAFEN in the London marathon, 2019. Our funds continue to come from individual and organisational affiliations, donations, raffles, sponsored events, appeals, Spanish lessons, sales and providing volunteers to serve beer at festivals.

Trade Union solidarity

NSCAG's focus changed in 2007 from supporting Nicaraguan trade unions suffering constant attacks to further developing mutual solidarity links between Nicaraguan and UK trade unions with a particular emphasis on youth organising and training at national and regional levels in Nicaragua.

National, regional and branch trade union affiliations increased from 72 in 2007 to 118 in 2018. In addition to contributing much needed funds to NSCAG and Nicaraguan trade union projects, UK unions have hosted Nicaraguan visitors, sponsored raffles, and provided opportunities for members to take part in delegations to Nicaragua.

Linking Young Trade Unionists: UNISON funded an education and training project for young Nicaraguan trade unionists to build active, practical solidarity links through seminars, speaker tours and delegations. The UK delegation participated in an FNT Congress and Youth seminar and developed plans with the FNT Youth Committee to sustain the links. On return they organised an International Youth Solidarity seminar and set up an NSCAG Youth Action Network. The focus on young trade unionists has continued with UNISON and TUC capacity building projects.

Participation of women: Our focus has widened to supporting projects that enhance the participation of women in Nicaragua's trade union movement.

Solidarity with the Self-employed workers union (CTCP): In 2007, the FSLN government rescinded the law which banned people from working in the streets. CTCP members found that they had the chance to build a better life for themselves, with access to welfare and social security. Sexual harassment and crime, major problems for vulnerable workers, were significantly reduced and the CTCP secured seats in the health and social security ministries, minimum wage commission and national labour council. NSCAG supported the CTCP through a film about workers' rights and trade union issues focussing on CTCP's work; a UK speaker tour by a CTCP representative; and securing TUC Aid funding for a women's empowerment project.

Legal office for trade unionists



In 2011 UNISON's International Department funds enabled UNE to fulfil a long-cherished dream; the opening of a law centre. The office, now funded by UNE, has enabled members to access otherwise unaffordable legal advice and provided training on trade union law and collective bargaining.

Computers for trade unionists: The then National Union of Teachers, the UIA Charitable Fund and Computer Aid International provided computers to the National Workers' Front FNT to enable members to acquire skills to

gain employment, and enhance their effectiveness as trade unionists.

Solidarity in the aftermath of disasters: After an earthquake in 2014 and tropical storm in 2017, UK unions contributed generously to appeals for FETSALUD and UNE members to repair and rebuild their homes.

Education and health related links: Two highlights are the establishment of a teacher exchange between Nicaraguan teachers' union ANDEN and the National Education Union, and UNISON support for a twinning agreement, the first of its kind, between Nicaraguan health union FETSALUD and the George Eliot Hospital in Nuneaton.

NSCAG solidarity has been particularly beneficial for our organisational and political work and has made it possible to exchange experiences... solidarity means taking the same road as our brothers and sisters

JOSE ANTONIO ZEPEDA
General Secretary, ANDEN

Mutual solidarity

Our giant Nicaraguan woman (gigantona) has regularly taken to London's streets with messages of solidarity from Nicaraguan to UK trade unions including at this TUC anti-austerity demonstration in 2016.



Solidarity in the aftermath of the attempted coup



The attempted coup in April, 2018 – backed by the US – had a profound social, financial and psychological impact especially on the security of those already impoverished and living precarious lives on the margins. For the trade unions, co-operatives and those working in the social economy, it was not only an attempted coup against the government but also against their organisations. The destabilisation attempts have continued through an international campaign by the Nicaragua opposition and their international allies to discredit and undermine the Sandinista government.

Throughout this period, we have supported the Nicaraguan trade unions, co-operatives and other organisations of the social economy in their fight to retain their rights and defend Nicaragua's sovereignty through:

- raising awareness of the government policies and programmes that have

addressed the well-being and human rights of the many

- collecting and publishing information including testimonies from Nicaraguan partner organisations on the impact of the attempted coup and the critical role of the social economy, with government support,

☞ The self-employed were hardest hit because they don't have a consistent income or savings and lack the resources to face a long period of economic stagnation.

The economic damage to households was severe, as was the social impact ☞

**ADRIAN MARTINEZ
General Secretary, CTCF
commenting on the 120,000
job losses as a result of the
attempted coup**

in reactivating the economy

- denouncing immoral, illegal US sanctions against Nicaragua in the form of the NICA Act whereby the US will use its clout to block loans to Nicaragua that are vital to the government's drive to end poverty.

To counter the bias, misinformation and fake news of the mainstream media our priority was to keep our individual and trade union members and MPs informed, and to disseminate information as widely as possible through websites, press contacts and the social media. We did this in the form of briefings, articles, letters to the press, and to human rights organisations. In addition we had meetings with the UK government and with MPs from all parties in order to ensure that the perspective of Nicaraguan workers and those living on the margins – totally absent from mainstream media – is heard.

PHOTO STORY

Since 2004 NSC and NSCAG have participated in the annual Latin America conference in London co-ordinated by the Cuba and Venezuela Solidarity Campaigns. This event brings together campaigners, politicians, trade unionists, journalists, academics and those with a general interest in Latin America. In 2018, Nicaragua was represented by trade unionist and National Assembly deputy Dr Florence Levy who received a standing ovation from the 600 attendees. Florence highlighted the achievements of the Sandinista government particularly in health care, the social and economic impact of the attempted coup, and the severe threats the country faces from the US. Dr Levy also undertook an intensive programme of other meetings and visits organised by Wales NSC, UNISON North West and West Midlands, and spoke at an international seminar organised by the National Education Union. She also met the All Party Parliamentary Group on Central America and other MPs.

As in the 1980s, Nicaragua is once again caught in the cross currents of a polarised world. At a time when a



belligerent, unstable US president and administration is threatening war on countries across the world, when the social and economic gains of progressive movements in Latin America are

threatened by a resurgent neoliberalism, our solidarity with Nicaraguan trade unions, co-operatives and organisations that make up the social economy remains as important as it was in 1979.

Solidarity through twinning

Solidarity through twinning towns, communities, hospitals, schools, universities, and streets

A twinning link is a means of encouraging mutual understanding, friendship and solidarity between people, towns, and communities in different countries.

The essence of twinning is summed up in a message the Bradford twinning group received from counterparts in the town of Tisma: 'Although distance separates us, we are united in solidarity, compassion, kindness, humanity and [a spirit of] love of our neighbour.'

UK twinings are more commonly associated with peace building between European cities after the Second World War. However, the Nicaragua twinings were part of a new wave of South – North twinings set up during the Cold War.

From 1985, as larger numbers of 'internacionalistas' returned from Nicaragua, profoundly affected by their experiences, some continued their solidarity by setting up twinning links with communities they had visited. Political solidarity provided the initial motivation for twinning underpinned by admiration for the struggles of Nicaraguan communities.

After the 1990 electoral defeat of the Sandinistas and the urgency of

defending the gains of the revolution, twinning links focused on three main themes: financial support for education, health, environment and sustainable development projects; building links around themes of mutual interest such as cultural exchanges; and inserting a Nicaraguan perspective into UK campaigning on global issues such as Fair trade.

The key to sustaining links, often for more than 30 years, are core groups of committed volunteers with the capacity to engage local people in activities that promote mutual solidarity with Nicaraguan partners.

From near-zero recognition, the wealth of activities and solidarity links through twin towns has played a major role in literally putting Nicaragua on the map!

Raising awareness and funds to support projects

● Since 1990 the **Islington – Managua Friendship Association (IMFA)** through pub quizzes and standing orders has raised £130,000 for the Los Pollitos pre-school in Managua, used to pay teachers and build classrooms.



The Norwich – El Viejo Link raises funds for 200 scholarships annually for educational materials for children from impoverished families to enable them to attend school

NSC, Wales NSC and twin towns

NSC has always collaborated closely with Wales NSC, an autonomous organisation set up in 1986 with a focus on promoting links between Wales and the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua on issues of mutual interest such as autonomy.

Although affiliated to NSC, twin towns and project bases groups have their own structures and partner organisations. NSC provides advice, information and practical support, promotes their work, organises an annual forum to exchange ideas and information, and when appropriate, takes on a co-ordination role.

‘ I am blown away by the generosity of spirit and commitment in your work, and the tangible, positive impacts on the both Nicaraguan and UK communities.’

ROSS DENNY

UK Ambassador to Costa Rica and Nicaragua, February, 2017

● After Hurricane Mitch in 1998, the **Norwich/Norfolk – El Viejo Link** raised funds to build 42 houses for those whose homes had been destroyed: the settlement is named 'Norwich Inglaterra'.

● Lessons under trees or in shrimp storerooms are a thing of the past for pre-school children in Bristol's twin town of Puerto Morazan. **Friends of Morazan and the Bristol Link with Nicaragua (BLINC)** have raised over £40,000 for local people to build nine pre-schools. Funds have come from an annual football tournament called Copa Sandino, sponsored marathons, Rotary Club donations, crowdfunding and from people donating by 'twinning' their toilets with a pre-school latrine.

● Through trade union and school sponsorship, quiz nights and a sponsored bike ride the **Bradford – Tisma Group** has fundraised for a nursery school, the repair of desks and musical



Bristol celebration of Fairtrade and International Women's Day, 2017. Nicaraguan Fairtrade coffee producer Ana Maria Gonzalez, Co-operative Union SOPPEXCCA, is seated in the front row

instruments in a secondary school, and clothes for families in an impoverished neighbourhood.

● Since beginning as a school link in 1988, the **Santa Rosa Fund in Tavistock, Devon** has broadened its work, raising over £10,000 per year for schools, youth centres and a centre for people with severe disabilities.

● Through an annual sponsored swim, performances of the Nicaraguan Misa Campesina and quizzes, the **Oxford León Association and Trust** has supported projects in León since 1986. Some funds are channelled through NECAT – see below. The group also supports a charity providing clean water to rural villages.

● **The Nicaragua Education, Culture and Arts Trust (NECAT)** has raised £455,000 since 2003 for an education centre in a poor area of Leon that runs after-school clubs, health education, cultural activities and a mobile library that visits schools. A recent addition is a much valued Montessori pre-school. "I really love [this project] because it provides additional support to us mothers with limited resources, our children learn from our culture and others... in an enriching manner."

Facilitating exchanges by organising delegations to Nicaragua, co-ordinating visits to the UK by partner organisations, organising student exchanges and volunteer programmes

For all the twin towns, exchange visits have been key to sustaining the spirit of twinning. Examples include Nicaraguan muralists visiting Bristol

and Leicester to paint murals with local communities; a Nicaragua dance group from Ocotal who visited Swindon; musicians from Leon who took part in a performance of the Misa Campesina in Oxford; and an interchange between Bristol and Puerto Morazan focused on the Montessori methodology for pre-schools.

“It was very gratifying to see in another country how much our efforts as small farmers and Fairtrade producers are valued.”

**JUNIETH LEIVA
SOPPEXCCA, 2019**

Food for Thought: the Leicester-Masaya example

The Leicester – Masaya Link Group, set up in 1988, has focused on two complementary areas of work: financial support for sustainable development projects in Masaya and an extensive outreach

programme that has reached tens of thousands of Leicester children.

One example is the 'Food for Thought' programme, funded initially by the Department for International Development. This provides hands-on experience of life in Masaya, starting with a visit to the city's botanic garden to find out about plants that grow in Masaya and how they can be used as food, drink, medicine and crafts. Photos, case studies and artefacts are used to immerse the children in the Nicaragua context. Pupils then take on roles such as planting and harvesting maize, cooking maize 'tortillas', mixing tropical fruit drinks, preparing herbal remedies and making traditional crafts.

Buying and selling their products in a recreated, bustling Masaya market, pupils explore the principles of local trade and gain awareness of how food gets from the farmers' fields to the market place. The day ends with a Nicaraguan fiesta.

Bringing Fairtrade alive in Bristol

Following a Fairtrade tour organised by NSC in 2006, Bristol's BLINC began a programme of annual visits of women farmers during Fairtrade Fortnight. They are members of the co-operative SOPPEXCCA which has 650 small-scale coffee and cocoa farmers organised into 15 co-operatives. BLINC organises intensive programmes of visits and talks to schools, universities, community groups, shops, churches, councillors and others.

These visits have had a powerful impact in Bristol in bringing Fairtrade alive, raising awareness of the realities of life at the other end of the coffee chain, and the benefits of Fairtrade particularly for women. In 13 years, this programme has reached more than 20,000 local children, school staff and parents as well as business people and university students.

Former twinning links

- Camden – San Ramon
- Lambeth – Bluefields
- Liverpool – Corinto
- Manchester – Bilwi
- Nottingham – Juigalpa

Existing groups

- Bradford – Tisma
- Bristol – Puerto Morazan
- Islington – Managua
- Leeds – La Concha
- Leicester – Masaya
- Lewisham – Matagalpa
- Norwich/Norfolk – El Viejo
- Oxford – Leon
- Reading – San Francisco Libre
- Santa Rosa Fund (Tavistock)
- Swindon – Ocotal

www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/solidarity/twin-towns

Solidarity Messages



Happy 40th anniversary to all at
The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign

ALBORADA
LATIN AMERICA UNCOVERED
www.alborada.net

ASLEF
the train drivers' union

Congratulations on 40 years of solidarity!

COMPUTERAID
www.computeraid.org

Revolutionary greetings & congratulations from the CUBA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN

ENCA.org.uk

Congratulations on 40 years of Solidarity
From all at the
Environmental Network
for Central America

CONGRATULATES NSC ON 40 YEARS!

**40 YEARS OF SOLIDARITY
KEEP UP THE GOOD WORK**

GENERAL SECRETARY MATT WRACK | PRESIDENT IAN MURRAY | WWW.FBU.ORG.UK

While GMB congratulates NSC on its 40th birthday, we regret that, in the face of renewed US aggression, solidarity with Nicaragua is as relevant now as it was in 1978.

www.gmb.org.uk/join

The National Education Union – NUT Section stands in solidarity with the people of Nicaragua

realtime
information systems

Congratulations on your 40th Anniversary

Proud partners for over 20 years www.rtis.co.uk

**Thompsons Solicitors:
40 years in solidarity**

www.thompsons.law

The Venezuela Solidarity Campaign sends solidarity greetings to the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign

NO TO TRUMP'S INTERVENTIONS IN LATIN AMERICA!

[@VenSolidarity](https://www.facebook.com/VenSolidarity)
venezuelasolidarity.co.uk

Venezuela Solidarity Campaign

Congratulations NSC!

From the co-operative CECOCAFEN, we send greetings to NSC on your 40th anniversary of sustained solidarity with the people of Nicaragua. Throughout the years, NSC has not only believed in but has also been on the side of truth, social justice, peace and wellbeing that Nicaraguans have always been struggling for.

On behalf of the families of 2,100 small-scale coffee producers, members of CECOCAFEN

Thank you for your support in helping us to move forward in improving the working conditions and wellbeing of our sector that was so marginalised, persecuted and humiliated by neoliberal governments. Thank you friends for your solidarity and love.

Confederation of Self Employed Workers (CTCP)

Embassy of Nicaragua

Happy 40th anniversary to the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign

Thank you for all your hard work, dedication and love for Nicaragua. Your support is of huge value to us, helping us to build bridges in the UK, and to defend and advance our revolution and the happiness, peace and prosperity of Nicaragua.

Hasta la victoria siempre!!!

Soppexcca
UNION DE COOPERATIVAS AGROPECUARIAS

Thank you NSC!

We have to continue on the path of 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 Fairtrade and the solidarity you have shown us.

Fatima Ismael
Union of Co-operative Union SOPPEXCCA

Sisters and Brothers...

We are writing to you on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the NSC, a great organisation which promotes solidarity between our two countries. We benefit directly from these actions of love and warmth. Both twinings and links between UK and Nicaraguan trade unions have contributed to our fight against poverty. We join with you in this celebration and bring you greetings.

Sincerely,
Domingo Perez,
General Secretary, UNE

Unite the Union congratulates NSC on its 40th Anniversary

www.unitetheunion.org
[@unitetheunion](https://twitter.com/unitetheunion)
[Uniteunion1](https://www.facebook.com/Uniteunion1)

Len McCluskey
General Secretary

Tony Woodhouse
Chair – Executive Council