

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) Annual Report January to December 2013

Introduction

Highlights of 2013 included the launch of our new publication *Nicaragua Now*; the organisation of a UK-Nicaragua solidarity day bringing together activists past and present; and a speaker tour by Carlos Fonseca, FSLN international department, to coincide with the Latin America Conference in December. The breadth and depth of solidarity and commitment to Nicaragua in Wales and England was well illustrated in the wide variety of activities – speaker tours, selling Nicaraguan coffee, fundraising, delegations to Nicaragua, cultural events, Copa Sandino to name but a few – organised through Wales NSC and towns with twinning links and projects in Nicaragua.



Our Nicaraguan giant women made a big impact at public events in London.

On the downside, we had to move to another premises from March-August due to an arson attack on the building where our office is based. This caused considerable disruption to our work. We are very grateful for the moral and financial support of our members who sent us messages and donated so generously to our appeal for funds. Our thanks also to those who supported our fundraising in other ways whether by pulling pints in muddy fields, learning Spanish, doing sponsored runs and cycle rides or buying goods and raffle tickets.

UK-Nicaragua Solidarity: past, present and future

Over 50 people gathered in London in mid-July to celebrate 35 years of UK-Nicaragua Solidarity. Participants ranged from 1980s activists who campaigned in support of the Sandinista Revolution in the cold-war days of Thatcher and Reagan to Raleigh International and Progressio volunteers recently returned from ten-week community development programmes in rural Nicaragua. What they shared was a passion and commitment to Nicaragua solidarity, in some cases going back more than 30 years. Speakers, films and an exhibition looked at the political context of the different eras, what motivated and inspired people to go to Nicaragua, what they feel they contributed, what they gained from the experience, and the impact the experience has had on their lives subsequently. The aim was to engage or re-engage participants in solidarity with Nicaragua through their trade unions, NGOs, twin towns or other UK organisations supporting projects in Nicaragua.

'I would like to thank you for giving me the chance to participate in the Nicaragua solidarity day. It was a very nice opportunity to get a lot of historical information, know a bit more about the work of NSC and meet a lot of nice people. I've been on a "want to go back" mood since the event!'

'... an interesting mix of speakers, enjoyed chatting with people who were involved in the past; there's a lot of fascinating history in the organisation's past which was what I took most from the day.'

Our thanks to the Nicaraguan Embassy and Progressio for their financial support for this event.

Visit of Carlos Fonseca, International department FSLN, 3-13 December 2013

The purpose of Carlos' visit was to raise awareness of the political and economic model that the FSLN government has promoted since returning to power in 2007, in particular its achievements and challenges in the context of strengthened Latin American integration and the rising global significance of the region. The key themes that Carlos highlighted were: government social programmes that have played a major role in reducing poverty; the setting up of mechanisms for direct democracy through the Councils for Citizens Power; promoting gender equality (according to the World Economic Forum Nicaragua ranks 10th in the world in a global equality index compared with the UK at 18th); the significance of ALBA and Petrocaribe as expressions of Latin American integration and unity; the importance of the planned interoceanic canal; and how economic stability is being achieved through an alliance between the government, workers and the private sector.

Over 600 people heard Carlos speak at the Latin America conference in London, and at public events in Cardiff, Bristol, Sheffield and Leeds. In addition Carlos spoke at a fiesta organised by Cuba Solidarity where he recalled the memory of his father Carlos Fonseca Amador, one of the founder members of the FSLN who was killed in combat in 1976. Interviews were published on the NSC, Wales NSC, Latin America conference and Latin America Bureau websites as well as Facebook and Twitter. Carlos' visit also opened opportunities for re-establishing contact with MPs including Kerry McCarthy, MP and Labour Party spokesperson on foreign affairs; Jeremy Corbyn, MP; and Dave Anderson, MP. Carlos also met Helen Holland, leader of Labour group on Bristol City Council; Karen Smyth, prospective LP candidate for Bristol South, members of the Welsh Assembly and Mayor of Sheffield Councillor Vickie Priestley. Meetings with Keith Birch, UNISON/Labour Party link and Byron Taylor, TUC/Labour Party link provided opportunities to exchange ideas and information on trade union/party links in the UK and Nicaragua.

Latin America conference December 2013

The 10th Latin America conference, coordinated by the Venezuela and Cuba Solidarity Campaigns, was attended by over 600 people, making it the biggest and best represented yet. Over 50 speakers, including leading parliamentarians and trade union leaders from the UK and Latin America, introduced plenary sessions and workshops. For NSC this was a key opportunity to raise awareness of the progressive changes happening in Nicaragua and highlight why regional integration, in particular ALBA, is so critical from a Nicaraguan perspective.

As well as being a keynote speaker at the conference, Carlos Fonseca (see above) also participated in well-attended workshops on food sovereignty and regional integration. Together with the Environmental Network for Central America and Peace Brigades International, we also organised a successful workshop on volunteering in Central America, highlighting the issues related to volunteering and presenting various examples of the volunteering opportunities available.

Communications

One of the key recommendations of a 2012 review of our work related to improving our communications to reach out to a wider, younger audience. This was implemented in 2013 through the launch of the publication *Nicaragua Now*, redesigning and restructuring our website and improving our use of social media.

● *Nicaragua Now* replaces *Central America Report*

From 1987 to 1996 the Central America Human Rights Committee (CAHRC) published ***Central America Report (CAR)***. After CAHRC closed down in 1992, a group of UK region wide or country specific organisations working on Central America continued to publish CAR. However, all these organisations now have their own websites, social media and print publications which means that there is less need for a Central America wide-print publication. For this reason, in September 2013 the NSC Executive decided to launch a new publication, *Nicaragua Now*. The content includes features and interviews on issues affecting Nicaragua and the region, in particular focusing on Nicaraguan organisations that have links to the UK. The many and varied forms of UK-Nicaragua Solidarity are carried out through NSC, NSCAG, Wales NSC, twin towns, trade unions and other UK-based organisations with projects and volunteering programmes in Nicaragua. We have worked to expand the readership

of *Nicaragua Now* through a wider distribution network and promoting articles on social media. Initial feedback has been very positive.

- We redesigned, restructured and relaunched the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign website
- We collated and distributed *Nicaragua Solidarity News*, a digital round-up of solidarity activities and events around the country.
- We made more extensive use of Facebook and Twitter to highlight news from Nicaragua and UK-Nicaragua solidarity activities.

Development of Strategic Plan 2014-2016

A review of the work of NSC and NSCAG was carried out by an external consultant in 2012. In 2013, following a hard look at the finances of both organisations, the EC approved the implementation of the following operational recommendations: closure of our office in Managua and employing one (rather than two) part-time representative in Nicaragua working from home, primarily on communications; increasing our support in the UK and Nicaragua for Wales NSC and twin towns; publishing a quarterly e-newsletter of UK solidarity events and actions; reducing office costs by leasing a desk to another organisation; and increasing income through a special funding appeal. After consultation with affiliated organisations, the EC also agreed on a values and mission statement and strategic plan 2014-2016.

Collaboration with other organisations

We worked closely with other organisations that promote solidarity and/or have projects and undertake advocacy in relation to countries in Latin America. This included Cuba and Venezuela Solidarity Campaigns, the Environmental Network for Central America (ENCA) and the Central America Women's Network.

Support for Wales NSC, twin towns and other groups

We supported Wales NSC, twin towns and local groups in Edinburgh, Bristol, Islington, Leeds, Leicester, Norwich, Oxford, Reading, Tavistock, Sheffield and Swindon, and Nicaragua Education, Sustainability and Technology (NEST) and the Nicaragua Education, Cultural and Arts Trust (NECAT) by facilitating fund transfers, providing information, publishing articles in *CAR* and *Nicaragua Now* about twin towns and providing practical support in Nicaragua for groups without representatives. In November we organised a well-attended twin towns meeting that provided a forum for an exchange of ideas and experiences, and identified areas of work where NSC could play a coordinating role in the UK and Nicaragua that would benefit all twin towns and NSC.

Fundraising and Sales



Harry Noyes ran the London marathon for NSC and projects in Nicaragua

2013 was a mixed year, but the final result was very satisfying. The total raised through fundraising and sales was £33,380, an increase on 2012 (£32,072) which was one of the highest results for many years. A further £7,809 was made through Gift Aid and £1,200 from leasing a desk in our office.

- Disappointments were the paper and email auction (bids were low) and the fact that for the first time since 2000 sales made less than £5,000 despite an increase in orders. The *Gift for Nicaragua* worked well however; £600 raised on the 2012 sales catalogue was donated to the union of co-operatives, SOPPEXCCA, for gender awareness workshops. A total of 92 women participated in two sessions held in Jinotega and Sebaco entitled 'Women Living and Sharing together'. The objective was "to contribute to the strengthening of knowledge and change in attitudes for the application of gender equality and fairness in all affairs of the cooperative and within the family".
- We had a fantastic festival season, making almost £8,000 through the provision of bar workers to the Workers Beer Company. Our Loteria and Spanish classes, taught by Claudio Chipana, continued to do very well. Once again income from several sponsored events was very good (£7,124), although nothing like the previous year which was exceptional (£13,051). Harry Noyes (pictured) ran the London marathon for us. The response to our appeal following the arson attack on our building was wonderful – £8,327. Many thanks to all individuals and trade unions who supported us over the year, whether by pulling pints in muddy fields, learning Spanish, running and cycling, buying goods, donating money or sending us encouraging messages.

Membership

All members received regular mailings including the final issue of *Central America Report* and the first issue of *Nicaragua Now*. We also email our Solidarity News to all members and the Nicanet News to those who request this service.

- Income from affiliations and related donations was £21,091, considerably less than the £29,005 of 2012 in which there were some extraordinary donations from individuals and when several members raised their standing orders.
- We are continuing efforts to ensure greater income stability through standing orders, and at the end of 2013 77% of individual members were paying by standing order, which is excellent.
- On the downside, there only 11 new members compared with 6 in 2012, 14 in 2011 and 25 in 2010. The diminishing number of people attending delegations and study tours continues to have a negative effect, but this is also due to the fact that there is so much information available online that fewer people want to pay to join an organisation.

| Membership | Dec 10 | Dec 11 | Dec 12 | Dec 13 |
|---|------------|------------|------------|---|
| Individuals | 505 | 470 | 465 | 451 |
| Wales NSC, twin towns and other local groups | 14 | 14 | 14 | 15 incl. 2 (see below) An additional 4 groups receive mailings but are not paid-up members |
| Project-based groups | 3 | 2 | 2 | Included in the above |
| Trade Unions: national, branches and regions, Trades Councils | 92 | 76 | 82 | 79 |
| Overseas subscriptions (libraries) | | 4 | 4 | 4 |
| All groups | 109 | 96 | 102 | 98 |
| TOTAL | 614 | 566 | 567 | 549 |

All trade union work is carried out through the separately constituted Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign Action Group (NSCAG). Further details on trade union affiliations are provided in the NSCAG annual report.

Board of Trustees: NSC is governed by a Board of Directors/Trustees, which develops NSC's overall strategic plans and monitors activities and outcomes.

2013 Board members: Carmen Barreda, Rita Drobner, Pauline Fraser, Gill Holmes, Bob Hardie, Christine Oddy, James Poke

NSC Staff: *London Office:* Stella Embliss, Mathews Chanza, Helen Yuill

NSC representative in Nicaragua: Liz Light as of April 2013, previously administrator

NSCAG staff: Stephanie Henthorne until March 2013, Louise Richards from October 2013

Note that all staff are employed on a part-time basis.

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC), 86 Durham Rd, London N7 7DT

Email: nsc@nicaraguasc.org.uk

Tel: 020 7561 4836

www.nicaraguasc.org.uk

Facebook: Nicaragua-Solidarity

Twitter: NSCAG_UK

A company limited by guarantee with charitable status No 1106881