

Nicaragua — National Reality, Neocolonial Delusion

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An academic called Jonah Walters has recently published a couple of attacks on the political and economic model being worked out in Nicaragua under the country’s Sandinista government led by President Daniel Ortega. One attack published by the North American Congress on Latin America [“Ortega’s Developmentalism Is Based on the “Popular Economy”—But What Does that Mean?”](#) alleges that the unquestionable economic democratization of Nicaragua’s economy is in fact a mirage, in reality reinforcing neoliberal patterns of oligarchic and corporate economic power in Nicaragua. Another attack in New Left Review, [“Ortega’s Synthesis”](#) deploys a series of falsehoods to justify Walters’ argument that Nicaragua’s political and economic model is in crisis and unlikely to survive.

Both attacks follow the familiar pathological moebius strip logic Western psychological warfare always follows against target nations from Cuba to Syria or Iran to Venezuela. NATO country governments fund local opposition media and NGOs to generate falsehoods frequently based on deliberate terrorist provocations by opposition political activists. Those false opposition reports get recycled as fact by Western academics, media and NGOs which in turn generate reactions in international institutions. Those reactions are then taken up by the original local sources of the false reports to intensify their NATO country funded psychological warfare campaign both domestically and overseas. The process is endless.

In that context, Walters’ articles are simply one more example of the faithless deceit and self-deceit of the Western pseudo-progressive intellectual managerial classes in academia and non governmental organizations overwhelmingly funded by NATO country governments and multinational corporations. In relation to Nicaragua, this phony-progressive intellectual managerial class have used their media outlets and NGOs for over twenty years to attack the Sandinista Front, categorically siding with the country’s US government sponsored, right wing aligned political forces, most particularly the social democrat Sandinista Renewal Movement originally led by Sergio Ramirez and Dora Maria Tellez, supported by other leading ex-Sandinistas like Monica Baltodano.

When Rodolfo Walsh wrote, “History looks much like a piece of private property whose owners are the the owners of everything else” he prefigured the class role of media outlets

like NACLA and the New Left Review. These and other apparently radical or progressive media report on international affairs essentially publishing neocolonial propaganda with a progressive flavor. As often as not, these outlets instruct the majority world on where they have gone wrong and admonish majority world governments and political movements for alleged human rights failings or for not being sufficiently progressive or revolutionary.

Walter's two articles on Nicaragua follow that neocolonial template. His NACLA article concludes of President Ortega's government that *"having already heightened the rate of exploitation in key capitalist sectors to an unsustainable degree, it also lacked the popular influence to contain disruptive social conflicts any longer. This is the source of the Ortega administration's deep and ongoing political crisis, which will not be easily overcome..."*

Walter's false, obfuscating conclusions betray the fact that he lacks even the first clue of the grass roots development of Nicaragua's political and economic life since 1990. His perspective is dominated by the delusional views of the social democrat ex-Sandinistas who split from the Sandinista Front in 1994. That fact becomes even more self-evident when one reads Walters' misleading and downright inaccurate misrepresentations of the 2018 crisis that he advances in his New Left Review article where he attributes as a cause of the crisis in 2018: "a proposed social security reform that would have increased personal and employer contributions while imposing a 5% reduction in benefits"

To the contrary, there was no proposed across the board 5% cut in workers and pensioners benefits. [The full text](#) of the proposed Social Security reform clearly defends workers and pensioners rights, seeking to extend to pensioners the same comprehensive health care enjoyed by active contributing workers financed by a modest 5% levy on retired people's pensions. Walters derisory summary completely ignores the reality of the proposed measure which put the burden of the Social Security increase on employers, not workers. In fact, the government sought to protect the social security health system and increase social security coverage and benefits as a collective public good, proposing:

- Gradually increasing the employer's contribution by 3.25 percent
- Increasing the employee's contribution by 0.75 percent
- Increasing the government's contribution for public sector workers by 1.25 percent
- Making people on high salaries pay social security contributions proportionate to their income
- Taking 5% from retirees' pensions to offer them the same health care as that of active workers
- Maintaining the number of weekly contributions to qualify for a full pension at 750
- Maintaining the reduced pension and the minimum pension for those eligible
- Maintaining the Christmas bonus
- Maintaining pensions' value against the annual Central Bank sliding devaluation
- Keeping all INSS clinics in the public system

Supporters of Nicaragua's social democrat political opposition, like Jonah Walters, constantly conceal the fact that the employers organization COSEP argued for stripping away most of these rights, doubling the number of weekly contributions and privatizing the INSS clinics. Thus, Walters' account of the Social Security issue in Nicaragua in April 2018 is downright mendacious. Any conscientious editor would have spotted that. Instead, throughout his New Left Review article Walters' gets away with advancing one US funded opposition lie after

another while deliberately omitting accounts contradicting his misrepresentations.

For example, Walters also falsely asserts in the New Left Review that “the Ortega government has unleashed the police on striking workers and underwritten settler violence in Nicaragua’s indigenous regions.” But Nicaragua’s police under the Sandinista governments in office since 2007 have never attacked striking workers and Walters offers no examples of such attacks. If he has in mind the fierce confrontations of 2018, then in fact the police were under constant savage attacks from heavily armed protestors, often under cover of otherwise supposedly peaceful demonstrations as verified by these interviews [here](#) , [here](#) and also [here](#).

Similarly, Walters’ claim of some government role in violence against indigenous peoples is utterly false. Since 2014, when the miskito Yatama party led by ex-CIA agent Brooklyn Rivera lost elections for control of the regional government in Nicaragua’s Northern Caribbean Autonomous Region, foreign progressives have persistently repeated Yatama and other opposition propaganda claiming government inspired violence against indigenous peoples. But the reality of decisive government support for indigenous people’s rights and of opposition lies about that reality can be gauged [here](#), [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). Nicaragua’s government promotes and defends one the most advanced systems of indigenous peoples’ self-government in the world.

Walters continues his mendacious account of events in Nicaragua in 2018 asserting : “On Mother’s Day, hundreds of thousands marched to mourn the university students slain by state forces. Police responded by firing bullets into the crowd.” In fact that day there were two huge marches, one by the opposition, largely organized by the Catholic Church, and one in support of the government. In the incidents Walters refers to in Managua, 20 police officers and several Sandinista supporters suffered serious injury from opposition snipers including several fatal woundings, those events have been covered [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#). That same day, in La Trinidad, near Estelí, opposition gunmen [attacked](#) a Sandinista peace caravan wounding a total of 47 police officers and Sandinista supporters, one of them fatally, while another died later of his wounds. Of around 260 deaths throughout the 2018 crisis around a dozen were either university or secondary school students of whom a number were killed by opposition violence.

These examples of Walters’ mendacity in his New Left Review article lead us back to the false conclusions he draws in his NACLA article. Walters’ key argument attacking Nicaragua’s revolutionary economic democratization is that government policies promoting the popular, cooperative and associative economy in fact foment a kind of “neoliberalism from below”. But applying that formulation in Nicaragua is ridiculous and crass, given that Nicaragua’s Sandinista Front has resolutely defended its [historic 1969 revolutionary program](#) for over fifty years. President Ortega’s government has delivered universal free health care, free education from pre-school to university including free vocational technical training, food security, land reform, accesible housing as well as having among the most advanced policies on gender equality and indigenous peoples rights in all the Americas.

Walters consistently betrays his comprehensive ignorance of Nicaragua’s reality and recent history, arguing for example, that leading Sandinista Orlando Nuñez Soto in the 1990s proposed a strategy for socialist transition, “which emphasized cooperative enterprise over political confrontation with neoliberalism”. But this too is simply untrue. On the contrary, what the Sandinista Front leadership, including Orlando Nuñez, proposed was that peasants

and workers in the countryside and in the cities should organize to defend the properties they had seized after decades of struggle.

Between 1990 and 2006 Nicaragua witnessed fierce battles of the country's popular sectors against neoliberalism, in defence of the revolutionary achievements of the 1980's, against moves to privatize public services like water, and supporting the defence of the country's universities' statutory share of 6% of the nation's budget, among many other examples of vigorous protests and determined civic action. Just as everywhere else in Latin America, Nicaragua during neoliberalism was a theatre of bitter social struggle, with the Sandinista Front both in its midst and at its head. The popular movement in post-1990 Nicaragua made key advances compared with other popular movements in the region.

Nicaragua had a mass radical political party, the largest in the country. It had decades of revolutionary experience with thousands of professionals from the popular sectors that had completed their university studies in the 1980's. Above all, it could face a neoliberal state whose security forces had not been educated and trained to attack workers and peasants. This is why no massacres took place during that period in Nicaragua, despite repeated efforts by the US backed neoliberal administrations to get Nicaragua's national police and army to use their firearms to shoot protestors.

Immediately after the electoral defeat of 1990, Comandante Daniel Ortega said that from then on the FSLN would "rule from below", meaning an open political confrontation with neoliberalism. He also affirmed that the FSLN would return to power by popular vote, not by violence, convinced that Nicaragua's people would inevitably hold the neoliberal US owned administrations accountable for the chaos and suffering caused by their policies. Daniel Ortega was proven right then and now, 30 years later, Nicaragua's people have once more ratified their faith both in his leadership and in the Sandinista Front in the country's first ever elections free of US and allied interference.

The country's popular, family, cooperative and associative economy has pulled Nicaragua politically, economically and socially intact through the crisis of 2018 and the severely damaging effects of the global economic measures taken to address Covid-19. As a result Nicaragua's economic growth in 2021 will be over 9% with conservative projections of between 4% and 5% for 2022. That reality makes nonsense of Walters assertion that the country has been undergoing a political crisis driven by economic contradictions. He pretends against all the facts that Nicaragua has experienced some kind of broad based popular resistance to the government's economic policies.

The very opposite is true. Through 2018 and 2019 Nicaragua's Sandinista government defeated a desperate, concerted attack by the country's financial, business and media oligarchy allied with US funded opposition organizations with practically no popular base. Only the now widely despised and discredited reactionary Catholic Church hierarchy was able to mobilize truly mass support for demonstrations during April and May 2018. In June the general population reacted against the criminal repression they were suffering at the hands of the thugs and delinquents extorting, assaulting and killing people on the orders of the coup organizers. By mid July, the attempted coup was over.

Via the coup attempt they organized, the country's US backed oligarchy - epitomized by the Chamorro family - sought to reverse the revolutionary economic democratization carried out under President Daniel Ortega since January 2007. Devoid of genuine popular support, they had to rely on criminal gangs like those organized by Felix Maradiaga in Managua that

burned down the Managua central office of the country's most important savings and loan cooperative CARUNA. Or the gangs supplied and paid by Dora Maria Tellez in Masaya that burned down a large part of Masaya's popular market area.

This is the political and economic reality of the failed coup attempt in Nicaragua in 2018 which opposition apologists like Jonah Walters try to cover up in everything they write. Meanwhile in North America and Europe, the self same phony progressives and radicals attacking Nicaragua's revolutionary Sandinista government policies have proven incapable of defending even the most basic rights of their peoples. They have twice failed to prevent massive transfers of wealth to the ruling elites in North America and Europe, first during the crisis of 2008-2009 and again in 2020. Instead, most recently, they have colluded in the the most reactionary State and corporate abuse of public health pretexts to reset their economies and remake their societies in an anti-democratic, anti-humanitarian corporate mould.

Nor have they been able to mobilize effectively to protest against their NATO country governments' repeated overseas aggression targeting the majority world's peoples about whom all those neocolonial progressives and radicals claim to care about so much. In Nicaragua's case, the country's people have many challenges ahead to meet and overcome. They are doing so with pride and confidence in their own abilities and justified optimism that their Sandinista government will help them realize their country's sovereign potential. And they will do so together with the peoples of Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela and the rest of the region to defeat continuing attempts from North American and European elites and governments and their class allies to dominate them.

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