

AGRICULTURE



Agriculture has a vital role in the economy of Nicaragua. 50% of the people work on the land. Cash crops such as coffee, cotton and beef form over half the country's exports and therefore the main source of money for development. Nicaragua needs to maintain this production whilst becoming more self sufficient in other foods and improving peoples diet, plus providing more employment

Before the revolution 1.5% of the population owned 41% of the land as big estates geared to cash crop production; whilst 51% of the people owned just 3.5% of the land producing beans, maize and rice for their own consumption on the poorer land. Children of poor families suffered malnutrition.

After the 1979 revolution the new government took the land of Somoza and his cronies into state ownership. Since then much land has been redistributed from the larger landowners (particularly those who weren't farming it properly) to peasants with a strong encouragement to cooperative production and ownership. Food production is particularly under threat from Contra attack as they concentrate on the most isolated rural areas

Juigalpa is in a zone of traditional cattle ranching and is now trying to develop other forms of agriculture to give a better, more varied diet., and to develop more employment.

particular assistance has been requested for
 - A market gardening cooperative - irrigation pumps are particularly needed.
 - A pig farm - money is needed for stock and buildings.

In 1979 the workers and peasants of Nicaragua overthrew the murderous and corrupt dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza, a dictatorship of poverty and oppression which was backed to the full by the USA. Over 50,000 laid down their lives in the making of the revolution. Led by the FSLN (Sandinistas) their struggle and eventual victory became a symbol for millions of workers and peasants throughout Latin America suffering under similar regimes. In the 7 years since, the process of revolutionary social change has brought enormous gains, and transformed an under-developed and impoverished country. Where Somoza declared war on his own people, the Sandinistas declared war on disease, illiteracy and malnutrition. Standards of health care, education and popular democracy are unrivalled in the Central American region. In the 1984 elections contested freely and fairly by 7 political parties, the FSLN took 3/4 of the popular vote on a 75% turnout.

These achievements have taken place despite the policy of economic destabilisation by the Reagan government and the CIA's funding of the remnants of Somoza's genocidal National Guard (The 'Contras') whose military actions cause much damage in both human and economic terms. The recent US Congress decision to make \$100 million available for the Contras war effort will only lead to further death and destruction and brings the prospect of a direct US invasion and another Vietnam one step closer.

The town of Juigalpa lies about 100 miles East of Managua, the capital city and is the main town of the Chontales region. Eastwards lies the thinly populated Atlantic Coast region. Whilst this area did not suffer as heavily as some parts of Nicaragua during the intense civil war that led to Somoza's overthrow it is now close to the front line of the war against the Contras as they are forced by the army to operate in small guerilla bands in the remoter highlands and jungles of the Eastern part of the country. Its population has been swelled to 40,000 by refugees from more remote areas, and its regional hospital is heavily used. If military defence is one arm of the war, the battle for production and the Contra attempts to destroy it are the other. Juigalpa and the Chontales region are determinedly diversifying their economy away from its traditional ranching base - hence many of the projects for which they have requested support are linked in some form to production.

DIRECT LINKS COMMITTEE

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Return to NJDLC, Box 2, 118 Workshop, 118 Mansfield Road, Nottingham

- * I/We enclose a donation of £ _____ to help fund _____ (particular projects can be specified or money can be donated to the Direct Links Committee for it to use as most appropriate)
- * I/We wish to support the Direct Links Committee and enclose £ _____ as membership fee.
 (Rates: Individuals £4 waged, £2 unwaged. Organisations £10 large, £5 small)
 Receipts will be sent together with regular bulletins.
- * We would like a speaker/slide show to come to one of our organisation's meetings

Indicate as appropriate. Cheques made payable to NJDLC

NAME

ORGANISATION

ADDRESS

Tel No.

NOTTINGHAM - JUIGALPA DIRECT LINKS

Sept 86
No. 1

Managua, Nicaragua's capital, at 9am on a blistering hot day - July 19th 1985, the 6th anniversary of the revolution. Nearly half a million people packed into a large open space by the lakeside for the independence day celebrations. Half a million - there's only 3 million in the entire country, and they're fighting a war. All through the night people have been travelling from the country's furthest regions in convoys of buses and lorries.

A chance to celebrate, a chance for the Nicaraguan people to feel their collective strength, but also a chance to demonstrate to the rest of the world, to the ranks of watching foreign dignitaries - that this is a popular revolution, and a determined one. Tens of thousands of people chant slogans - 'Popular Power' and 'They shall not pass' - referring to the Contras, and the American marines if they should ever come.

Cheers as the announcer points out all the different solidarity delegations from around the world with their banners and flags. A special cheer for the delegation from Burlington USA. Nicaragua's quarrel is with the US government, not the US people.

A message to the world, that they want us to act, to create a web of solidarity around the Nicaraguan revolution and its enormous social and political gains. A solidarity that is from person to person, organisation to organisation - that provides material aid in one direction but takes back hope and inspiration in the other; and an understanding - that we all have a responsibility to stop the US governments intervention and state terrorism in Nicaragua.



19 July 1984: In Managua, crowds celebrate the fifth anniversary of the revolution. Photo: Piers Cavendish/Reflex



The Nottingham-Juigalpa Direct Links Committee was formed on April 10th 1986 to coordinate solidarity work, develop ideas and initiatives and to generate as much interest in and solidarity with Nicaragua as possible in our community at a grass roots level.

Links at every level - trade unions, community groups, womens groups, youth groups, co-ops, church bodies, educational and cultural organisations - as well as more formally we hope through the city council - will allow us to develop a greater understanding of the problems being faced daily in Nicaragua. From this we will be able to offer support and practical solidarity.

To facilitate our work we are currently focussing on a number of specific projects drawn up in liason with organisations in Juigalpa, and these are outlined in this bulletin. These projects are not meant to be exclusive and we have information about others eg the drug needs of Juigalpa's hospital; and are always open to groups wishing to support new initiatives particularly relevant to them..



MINING

LA LIBERTAD is the name of a village and a gold mine, about 40 miles East of Juigalpa in a fairly remote highland area subject to sporadic Contra attack. Gold is Nicaragua's only significant mineral resource and whilst its importance to the economy is much less than say coffee or cotton it still provides a much needed source of foreign exchange for the beleaguered economy. Before the 1979 revolution US and Canadian companies owned the mines and got the ore out of the ground as quickly as they could with scant regard to the safety and work conditions of the Nicaraguan miners.

Now the mines are state owned - but as in all of the Nicaraguan state sector the unions and workers are fully involved in decision making at the local and national levels. State ownership has meant significant improvements in working conditions in the mines (including new housing at La Libertad) but like everything else they have suffered as the US backed war and economic blockade has drained away resources.

HOUSING

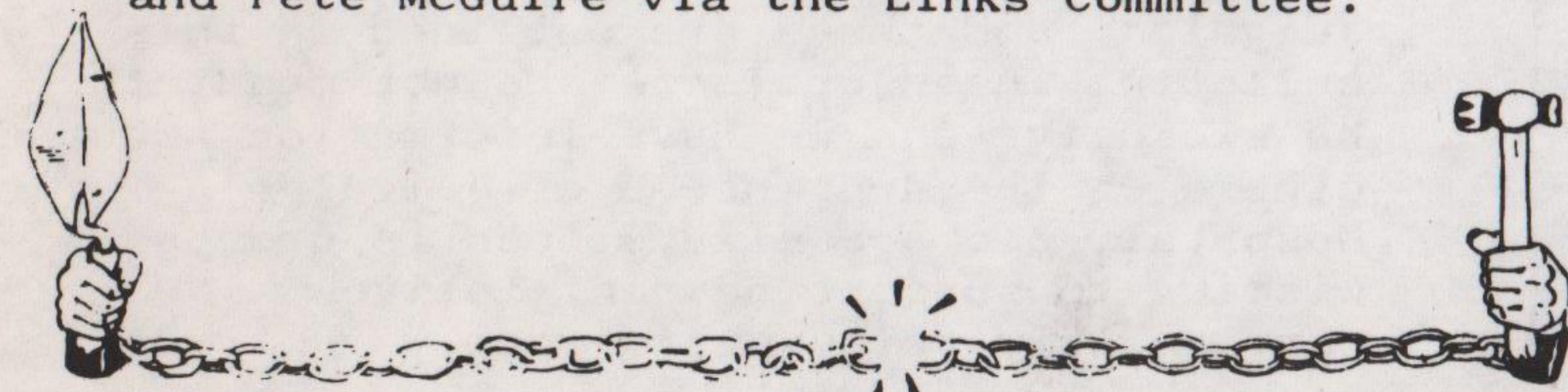
When the Sandinista government came to power in 1979 there was, and still is, a chronic shortage of housing. The ministry of housing estimate that 250,000 units need to be built plus a further 16,500 units to cater for the population growth. The capacity for construction in both the private and government controlled sectors would take 30 years just to meet present needs. This does not take into account the population displaced by Contra action which at the end of 1984 was 78,000 people.

A major obstacle to house construction is the acute shortage of roofing material. It is estimated that 50% of the housing costs are for the roof covering and support structure. It is in this area that we have been approached by the Sandinista Defence Committees (CDS) in Juigalpa to assist.

50 families in the Juigalpa region are engaged in the production of Spanish type ½ round clay roof tiles. Within this group are the skills required for extraction, working and baking of clay, but because of the lack of tools and facilities they can only produce a limited number of tiles, mainly in the dry season. We have been requested to build part of a technical college/workshop for the development of modified manufacturing techniques, in conjunction with the tile makers.

We are sending 8 building workers from Nottingham to construct the technical college (amongst other proposed projects) in January 1987 for 3 months. We shall be taking machinery, hand tools and moulds to help develop new designs for clay tiles and also to introduce the fibre cement tile system, which we were involved in, while working in Managua in 1985.

The Brigade needs £20,000 for tools, materials and travel and significant sums have already been raised. We can offer a slide show and talk to any group and welcome all enquiries and assistance. For further details contact Mary Anderson and Pete McGuire via the Links Committee.



A Nicaraguan 10 Cordoba note celebrating genuine public ownership of the country's mines.

La Libertad is a small mine with limited reserves. It functions partly for production and partly to train new miners for work elsewhere - and it is short of everything.

A particular request to solidarity groups is for safety equipment and medicines for a dispensary. Nearly £500 has already been sent from Nottingham to buy equipment and quantities of miners boots, gloves and helmets are currently being collected.

(A detailed list of requirements is available from the Direct Links Committee)

EDUCATION

The Sandinista government has recognised the importance of education to extend democracy and to involve all Nicaraguans in the building of a new order. They want to reverse the neglect of years when the average citizen had been considered an object to be exploited. In 1980 thousands of volunteers worked in the literacy crusade. The level of illiteracy fell from 50% to 13% in 5 months. This success has created a demand for education which is very difficult to satisfy.

The Leopoldina Castrillo school in Juigalpa is a typical school. Isabel Norcross, representing the Links Committee saw it in June 1986. She saw the classroom which had been built by parents using £600 sent from Nottingham for materials. Room is still so short though that the school works in shifts. During the day it caters for 503 pupils between 7 and 12 years of age. The shifts are from 7am to noon, and 1pm to 5.45. THEN from 6pm to 10pm the school is used for adult basic education - to allow parents to keep up with their children!

There is a painful shortage of desks, text books, exercise books and pens and pencils. We are therefore collecting cash to buy desks, as well as paper and writing materials to send.



Letter from IVAN MARIN, a 10 year old pupil at Leopoldina Castrillo School, to the children of Nottingham 19 June 86 (one of 20 letters spontaneously written by pupils and given to Isabel Norcross)

Dear little friends,

A fraternal greeting from me and from my school Leopoldina Castrillo. It is for me a great day that I am writing this letter that might reach you.

I want to tell you that my country is small but I feel that it is great. Some day they will stop attacking us and we too will be able to help somebody as you are helping my country and my school in particular which is short of desks. We sit on the floor but we are proud of it as it teaches us things in the corridors, but we are happy and some day a free country will shine out of my Nicaragua.

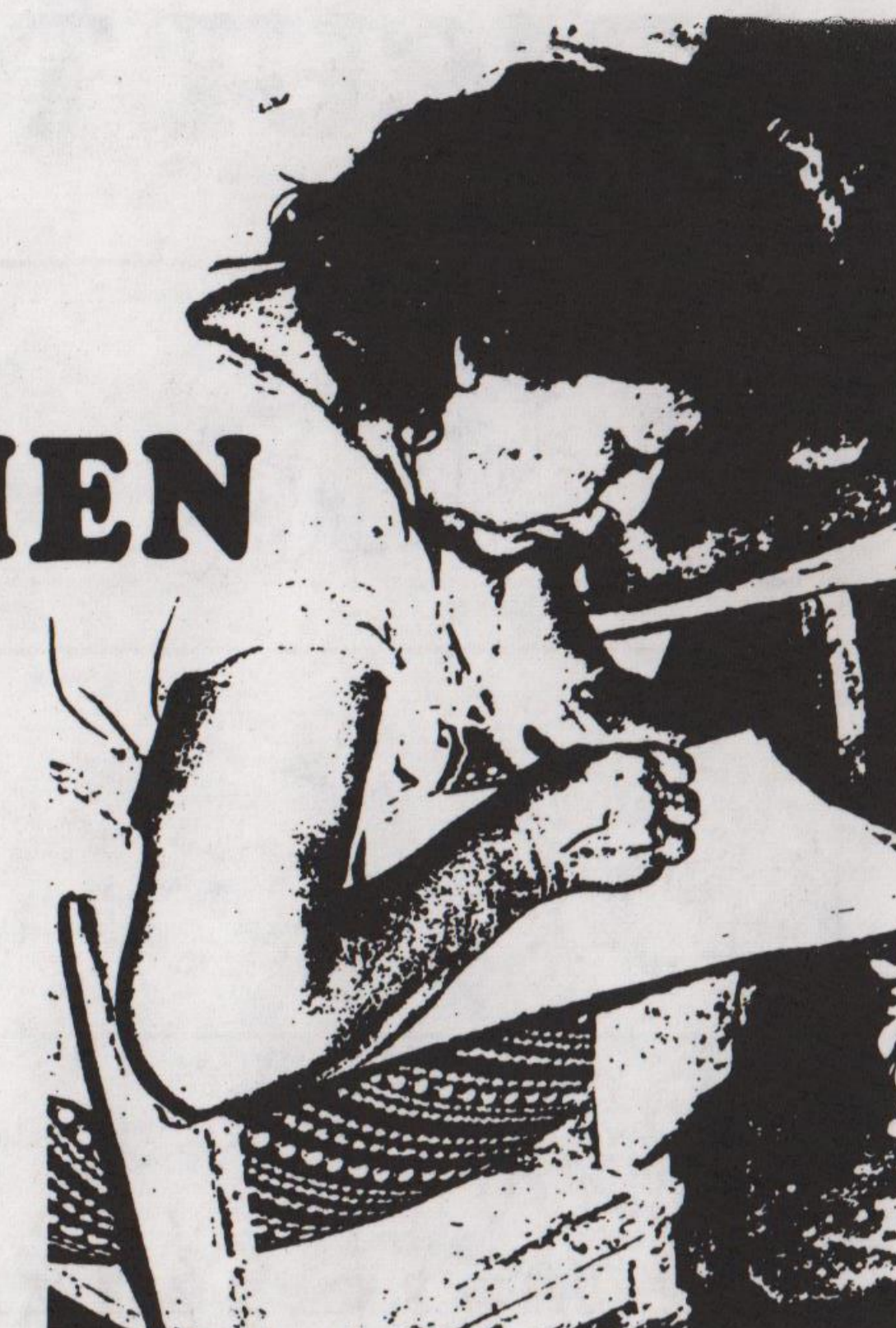
Today I feel proud writing to you, but I hope you will consider everything I say in this humble letter, which doesn't come with an envelope, but comes with my love, A Nicaraguan who is learning in this school says goodbye, a school which with your help will be built, will have pencils, exercise books. I won't use them but my children will. That is my hope. Cheers - a friend

Ivan Marin

Education and training are also essential for developing a new, more diverse economy especially in less developed areas. In Juigalpa a new Technical and Economic school is at the heart of this plan. It aims to create skills in construction, agriculture and administration. The school has just three teaching areas, dormitory accommodation and a dining hall at the moment. The Direct Links Committee seeks to help this technical school by sending materials which have been requested.

They need tools for a workshop, drawing instruments, paper and text books in Spanish

WOMEN



"SOME DAY WOMEN WILL GAIN THEIR LEGITIMATE RIGHT TO EQUALITY. THAT DAY MEN WILL BE FREER TOO. THAT DAY SOCIETY WILL HAVE WON ITS FINEST BATTLE, AND THAT DAY MUST BE ACHIEVED NOT JUST FOR WOMEN BUT FOR THE WHOLE COUNTRY."

Tomas Borge 1982

Under the Somoza dynasty women were a disadvantaged group in an oppressed society - typically mothers and housewives. Little importance was given to their legal rights, rights to education and to work. In spite of this Nicaraguan women played a vital role as soldiers and citizens in the overthrow of Somoza; but an enormous struggle remains to shrug off the burden of 'machismo', to create the awareness and the institutions to make the equality of women a reality. The principal grassroots womens organisation is called the Luisa Amanda Espinosa Nicaraguan Womens Association (AMNLAE) after a woman who died for the Sandinista fight against Somoza.

In Juigalpa today AMNLAE is working in many ways to help women develop their potential. They support the Collective for Popular Education, a mobile unit which visits the more remote areas of Chontales specialising in the basic education of women, training in elementary farming techniques, and information on their civil rights. They also want to expand training opportunities to enable women to work outside the home if they so wish. A small building and 3 sewing machines represent the beginning of a school to train 50 students at a time in sewing. They have begun to build a poultry rearing unit to be run by women, and are planning a workshop to teach carpentry skills to women

In pre-revolutionary society women were legally second class citizens and AMNLAE seeks to change laws and reform attitudes to achieve true equality of the sexes. There is a particular problem concerning the legal situation of single parent mothers (who form ¾ of all mothers). A Womens Legal Office was founded in Managua in 1983 and dealt, in 1984, with 4090 cases:- maintenance (32.5%), divorce (28.5%), child custody (9.7%), battering (8.3%), housing (7.6%). One office cannot meet the national demand but there are plans to set up a Womens Legal Office in Juigalpa to serve the Chontales region. The Direct Links Committee is raising cash and office equipment to support this initiative.