

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article4856>



Nicaragua

# **"Daniel Ortega is a political turncoat and the task today is to avoid consolidating his family dictatorship"**

- IV Online magazine - 2017 - IV505 - February 2017 PDF -  
Publication date: Monday 6 February 2017

---

**Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights  
reserved**

---

**Henry Ruíz, Commandant of the Revolution, a member of the historic national leadership of the Sandinista Front (FSLN), is a quasi-legendary figure in Nicaragua. He was one of the leaders of the main rural guerrilla front. He spoke with the magazine *Envio* on the situation in Nicaragua and called for abstention during the presidential election of November 6, 2017. *Envio* transcribed his remarks and published them in full [in issue No. 414, September 2016](#). This is an edited version.**

How did we get where we are today? And I am not saying: how did the Sandinista Front get there? Because the Sandinista Front does not exist. Today, only a political group around the caudillism of Daniel Ortega continues to maintain the acronym FSLN, but there is no longer any mystique, no more norms, programmes, debate: there is nothing left. And who is responsible for that? Those who are responsible for the fact that Daniel Ortega is where he is, are first and foremost those who fought against the dictatorship of Somoza, all the generations who for forty years fought a dictatorship and then allowed this individual to be in power today. For years there were significant contradictions, but we let time pass... Yes, we are guilty, some more than others. Now, we see a budding dynastic dictatorship before our eyes, facing our conscience and defying us.

Dictatorships are very painful political experiences. And if those who are primarily responsible for this dictatorship are the men and women who have allowed Daniel Ortega to get to where he is today, we are the first who must remove him from his position. It is up to us to take the first step. The mission of confronting Ortega is down to us, the men and women who experienced Somozism, who confronted it, who lived through the war of imperialist intervention in the 1980s: we are the ones who saw democracy begin as a system based on law, where pluralism was not a danger and written law seemed to be respected. To take back the banner of social justice which in recent years has deteriorated will today be part of our struggle.

A large majority of young people, however, do not comprehend the consequences of the institutional genocide practised by Ortega during the last ten years, by reforming the Constitution and demolishing the institutions. But I am convinced that, sooner or later, young people will understand that this struggle is not only ours and that they need to become part of it. And they will do so if they see in our struggle and in our commitment correct ethics and political practice, far removed from opportunism, from the corruption that exists alongside these nefarious practices. The task before the whole of Nicaraguan society today is to eliminate this dictator from the government.

Let us recall only a little bit of the most recent history. After Daniel Ortega lost the elections against Alemán [2] and Bolaños [3], there already existed in the front a hidden struggle, a malaise: many Sandinista militants, organized and unorganized, no longer wanted him to continue to be a candidate for the presidency. Why just Daniel, only Daniel...? We saw that this man, who lacked charisma, was not succeeding in regrouping Sandinism. With this conviction, we started a movement in May 2004, putting forward the presidential pre-candidacy of Herty Lewites for the Sandinista Front.

In January 2005, we brought together 10,000 Sandinistas in Jinotepe. The assemblies that we were organising with Herty were massive, and we were meeting Sandinistas again. And we began to feel that we had come together again. It was our idea that a force should emerge within the Front to recover the principles which were then being torn to pieces, a force which would defend national sovereignty, which would rediscover the mystique and which would really fight for the poor. But at the beginning of 2006, Herty was expelled from the Front and once again Daniel Ortega was the self-appointed candidate. And when the campaign for that year's elections began, Herty died suddenly.

## **"Daniel Ortega is a political turncoat and the task today is to avoid consolidating his family dictatorship"**

In 2006, Daniel Ortega won the elections and returned to the government. Did he win them...? At ten o'clock in the evening Eduardo Montealegre [4] hastened to recognize Ortega's victory, without waiting for the count to finish. And 8 per cent of the votes were not counted. If they had been counted, even with an electoral council that was already totally rigged at the time, it would have resulted in a second round between Ortega and Montealegre. I think Montealegre would have won a second round because he would have been able to rely on an electoral and political alliance. And I do not say that because I wanted Montealegre's to win, but to make the point that it is positive for a left-wing force to be able to confront the right and to win or lose in open, transparent and democratic elections. To say that the left must be ready to risk losing power and that alternation in government is a reality that we must accept, both in the framework of representative democracy and in that of direct democracy. But for Daniel Ortega none of that counts for anything. This election he won in 2006 was not a clean victory. And this lingering doubt weighs on the political history of Ortega and his party.

When Ortega began to govern in 2007, those who had launched the project of Herty Lewites said, "Well, let's give him a chance, maybe this guy has changed." And we said that because, having seen the government's programme, we looked at it with economists who had supported Herty and we said, "It's not bad, it shows some signs of wanting to get out of neoliberalism to begin building a developed national economy. Give him a year to see how he does." But this programme was one thing and the political turn of this guy was another. He went quickly to the Central American Institute of Business Administration (INCAE) to meet with the most important entrepreneurs in the country, and there, with them, he decided what would be the economic policy of his government; the same one that governs us to this day and which is based on what he told them that day: "Take care of the economy and I will take care of politics".

As a result of all this, what country do we have today? The agrarian reform has ended and the concentration of land in the hands of a minority has returned. Latifundism is progressing fully, though still with some tasks to perform. And now, the looting of the Caribbean coast! They cut down the forests to take the wood. And where the presence of gold is suspected, the land is already indicated on the map to give concessions to B2 Gold. Is Daniel Ortega concerned about ecology? That does not worry him, for him the encyclical *Laudatio Si* is a pure fantasy of Pope Francis. What is important to him is to amass wealth between "us". And this "we" is he and his family, his allies and the richest people in the private sector.

Poverty is a political problem and it will not be overcome in Nicaragua with the economic policy that Ortega is implementing. To make a big deal of the numbers, debating whether we are growing by one or two statistical points in the indicators of poverty is a way of deceiving us, taking us away from the common vision we need to have on how to build a prosperous and sovereign nation. At the present time, is wealth being created in Nicaragua? It is clear that it is being created, but the question is: where does it go, who gets it? In 2015, \$1.2 billion in remittances arrived in Nicaragua. And this year, Ortega has granted more than \$1 billion in tax exemptions to big entrepreneurs. So who is contributing to the economy of the country? Our exiled workers or big capital? And the poor who have remained in the country continue to make up the biggest workforce in the informal sector, because this sector accounts for almost 80 per cent of our economy. And what about teachers, low-paid public employees, who have to have three or four jobs to earn enough income to maintain their families and survive? These are the opportunities that the sacrosanct market gives them today!

Moreover, Ortega will leave us a country that is seriously indebted. The oil contract signed in 2007 by Hugo Chávez FrÃ- as with Daniel Ortega Saavedra, which left Ortega with over \$4 billion in those years, could have changed the social profile of Nicaragua. Ortega has been governing for ten years and, with this money, we would have escaped the vicious cycle of macroeconomic growth, compounded by the widening of the social gap. We would have been able to change by giving a good part of these resources to improving education, which is always the most formidable lever for the development of a society and a nation. But that money went to Ortega, to his circle of power, to his family and his allies. And today we have a debt to the Central Bank of Venezuela, which is now our creditor, and I am sure it will claim payment of this debt because that money belongs to the Venezuelan nation's wealth. (...)

## **"Daniel Ortega is a political turncoat and the task today is to avoid consolidating his family dictatorship"**

Who is Daniel Ortega? A Sandinista fighter who has the merit of having spent seven years in prison. Afterwards, he said that he was tortured every day of those seven years, but he invented it. Hugo Chávez called him "a guerrilla fighter", but Daniel Ortega did not participate in any guerrilla warfare. He was co-ordinator of the Governmental Junta of National Reconstruction, President of the Republic in 1984, in 2006, in 2011 and in 2016 he will again be President of the Republic. He was a man who had not even a plot of land to be buried in and now he is a potentate, because he has made politics into a good business, forgetting the ethics and principles that should govern the ethics of a revolutionary fighter, as people believed at one time that he was.

The language in which describes himself as committed to solidarity, as a socialist and a Christian, is no more than a sickening rhetoric designed to deceive the activists of his party and the poorest among the popular layers. Daniel Ortega is a political turncoat. He is a man who has gone over, lock, stock and barrel to the ranks of the right, adopting the most reactionary capitalist economic policies in modern history and practising the arts of corruption.

Has he built a dictatorship in Nicaragua? We have spent a lot of time discussing whether or not it is a dictatorship. We said: it is not a dictatorship, because there are no political prisoners, no political assassinations, no torture, no repression... Now it has already been confirmed that we have all that, as happens in the repressive menu of all dictatorships. And although there has been very little of that, wait, because if he stays in government, there will be enough of it, enough for everyone.

If this government was democratic, why did it need the sovereign security law? This law puts a threatening weapon in Ortega's hands. Why does he want to have direct command of the police and the army, without the normative scrutiny of a civil court? So that there is no intermediary in a crisis where he is losing control. In such a situation, Ortega will give the order to repress "adequately". This law, the doctrine of sovereign security, allows the new State Security, which seemed not to exist, but which does exist, to repress everything that the eyes of the dictator consider to be detrimental to his political system.

How can we not see that it is a dictatorship, and furthermore a family dictatorship. It sounds like Somozism. With a difference: Daniel Ortega has gone further than Somoza. He "broke the circle" by adding to his dictatorship the ingredient of choosing Rosario Murillo [\[5\]](#) as vice-president. (...)

Prior to the appointment of Rosario Murillo, people asked me if I thought she would be chosen as vice-president. I answered negatively because it did not add anything politically to Daniel Ortega. The vice-presidency corresponds to a concept of political alliance and has utilised it on several occasions. So why nominate her? He would do so only if he had a double problem. First of all, if he feels that he no longer has the ability to organize the Danielist Front, still however known as the FSLN, by giving it the command structure to make it function as a machine. Secondly, if he does not feel sure he can complete another five-year term. Moreover, as Daniel Ortega does not like to work, Rosario Murillo is hyperactive and takes care of everything... All this must have decided Daniel Ortega to choose her as a formula for electoral politics and for his succession. (...)

Are there any contradictions at the head of this dictatorial regime? There are many. Rosario has had them with everyone. Some people have lost the battle against her. Others have moved up thanks to her. And some have been thrown out. There is movement in both directions: some people are removed from the leading circle while others become part of it. In the midst of these contradictions, Rosario and her children have assumed ever more responsibilities in the state apparatus. So far, I believe she will win the internal battle. Other contradictions that all these people have between them concern the distribution of profits... The novelty is that the decision to impose her as vice-president is causing Daniel serious internal problems and this undermines the organic support O he has maintained so far. (...)

However, Danielism is strong. Because the main contradictions have not yet unfolded. There are already economic

shocks, because this abusive government is clashing with some chambers of the Nicaraguan Supreme Council of Private Enterprise (COSEP). This is where the contradictions will increase. Once the money "touches someone's head", they always want more money. "The devil's excrement," as someone put it. It is a model based on greed and those who become part of it always want more money. Up to now, big national capital and transnational capital are happy with Daniel, they are very happy. He offers them everything and furthermore he satisfies them. And then, look at the repression he ordered when, a short time ago, the workers of a free zone rose up to demand better wages and more humane working conditions: to obtain it, they asked for the support of "Commandant Daniel and Comrade Rosario." And what a commandant, what a comrade! Repress them! The order was given so that this bad example would not extend to the 110,000 women and men working today in the free zones, the only source creating formal jobs that is impelled by this regime and its neo-liberal associates. The same thing happens in the public sector: the person who shows any reluctance or does not mention "the commandant and the comrade" in public statements about his administrative work is fired. (...)

I am now a member of a small political movement, the Patriotic Movement for the Republic (MPR). It is a movement, not a party, because it has neither programme nor statutes. It is a political project, with political goals, which seeks political solutions to the problems of this country and seeks to change the economic policy that this dictatorship has imposed on us. We are the product of what was in its time another movement, initiated only by Sandinistas, the Movement against Re-election, Fraud and Corruption. With these three objectives, we have grouped several comrades and citizens who are gradually developing political ideas.

In our movement, we consider non-perpetual re-election as a principle and a historical necessity in Nicaragua, in order to break with caudillism. We consider it fundamental to establish non-perpetual re-election in a new political constitution that we must win. The defence and the practice of the secular state are also a principle for us. Another principle that we advocate is popular ratification, eliminated by the Alemán-Ortega pact. We advocate it, convinced that the system of political parties must be transformed, because as it functions today it necessarily leads to unprincipled alliances and political cronyism, which always lead subsequently to all the evils of corruption. This is why we propose candidatures ratified by the population, which allow political movements and civil society to engage in politics and participate in elections, united by common programmes and objectives and without the conventional barriers. The social movement exists today in Nicaragua, but it does not participate in politics, because the laws on parties prevent it...

The Movement for the Republic considers as a political emergency the annulment of Law 840 on the concession of the canal [6], because it is an attack on national sovereignty and territorial integrity. Daniel Ortega must be accused of being a treacherous politician, deserving a political judgment that will serve as a lesson to any politician, party, or assembly: a judgment that shows that national sovereignty is sacred and sacrosanct and that it cannot be played with in the name of whatever reason that is alleged to be important. A political abuse such as that committed by Ortega in the concession of the canal is mortal and deserves the highest penalty at the level of the highest crimes. (...)

What is to be done? The conscience of citizens must not be flouted, which is why we propose abstention. We must not vote. If, on November 6, the streets are deserted, we will know that abstention has won and that Ortega has lost [7]. And the next day, Monday, November 7, we must continue to meet, because the next step is to bring about a massive movement to annul Law 840. (...)

Law 840 has constitutional status. It requires two-thirds of the members of parliament to cancel it. But if the MPs cancel it, the Chinese Wang Jing will come down on us, because under this law he can claim damages from international tribunals for the losses caused. That is what the law says. So that if we do it "step by step", Wang Jing will take us to court. And on that level, we do not know whether the concession of the canal, to the amount of 50 or 70 billion dollars, has already been converted into financial derivatives, which can circulate on the speculative market. Who is going to answer this question, when we obtain the cancellation of the law? If we do it by the votes of the MPs, Wang Jing will start a case against us. But if we call on the people to take to the streets, demanding the

## **"Daniel Ortega is a political turncoat and the task today is to avoid consolidating his family dictatorship"**

---

cancellation of the law, we will have moral support and national and international political weight. This must go through a plebiscite. And a mass movement will not allow the plebiscite to be organized by the Electoral Council. There are enough honest personalities in this country to organize it. The masses in the street will give us the moral authority to annul this law and then to draft a new constitution. (...)

We will not win this in one day. Organizing politically is not like making a "pinã±ata" [8]: we set a date, we invite the people of the neighbourhood, we buy the "pinã±ata", in due course we break it and everyone rejoices. No, organizing politically requires patience. The objectives must be clear. When I am asked what the aim of this massive movement for a plebiscite will be, I reply: "To bring down Ortega." We are not going to drive him from power by an armed movement, but by a powerful social movement, and that way we will save a lot of blood. And we must already start, but we must have patience. Patience and clarity of purpose. That is how the struggle against Somoza was: sustained, sustained, sustained and so it grew and grew and grew...

---

[1] Staying for nine years in the mountains, he was baptized "Modesto" by a peasant fighter because of his personal qualities. After the triumph in July 1979, he was appointed Minister of Planning, then Minister of External Cooperation, in direct contact with the international solidarity movement. After the electoral defeat of the FSLN in February 1990 (Daniel Ortega lost the presidential election to Violetta Chamorro), he assumed the responsibilities of international relations and the treasury of the party until the extraordinary congress of the FSLN in May 1994. Defending the criterion of "internal democracy" within any revolutionary force, he was then candidate for the post of general secretary and was defeated by Daniel Ortega in a proportion of 7 votes against 3. Promoter of the "necessary renovation of Party "during the intensification of the internal crisis of Sandinism (from September 1994 to February 1995), he continued to participate in the leadership of the FSLN. He left the FSLN in 1999

[2] Arnaldo Alemán of the Alianza Liberal party won the presidential election of October 1996 against Daniel Ortega. However, Ortega concluded a power-sharing pact with him, which enabled the two parties, Liberal and Sandinista, although historically and politically opposed, to control the vast majority of state institutions.

[3] In November 2001, the liberal Enrique Bolaños won the presidential election by a clear majority, with 56.3 per cent of the vote, ahead of Daniel Ortega who won 42.3 per cent.

[4] In the presidential election of November 2006 the candidates were Daniel Ortega (FSLN, officially 37.99 per cent of the votes); Eduardo Montealegre (ALN, right, 28.30 per cent), Jose Rizo Castellón (PLC, right, 26.21 per cent), Edmundo Jarquán Calderón (MRS, left, 6.44 per cent) and Edén Pastora (AC, left, 0.27%). Daniel Ortega was declared elected in the first round.

[5] Rosario Murillo is the wife of Daniel Ortega.

[6] interoceanic canal project in Nicaragua which has been privatised and the concession given to a Hong Kong based company

[7] According to the official figures, the turnout in the elections of 6 November 2016 was 68.2 per cent, the level of abstention 31.8 per cent and the FSLN of Daniel Ortega obtained 72.5 per cent of the votes cast. On the contrary, for the political scientist José Antonio Peraza, interviewed by *Envio* (<http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/5272>), "the data of the voluntary observers indicate an abstention that exceeds 70 per cent and could reach 80 per cent". The *Envio* editorial (<http://www.envio.org.ni/articulo/5270>) points out that "the most qualitatively significant group in the plural composition of the 6-N abstentionists is that of the FSLN sympathizers. (...) Historical activists of the FSLN and their families, these people who voted for Daniel Ortega all their lives, who always thought and felt with their red and black heart, also decided not to go to vote. They felt marginalized, disagreed with Murillo's candidacy for the vice presidency, seriously questioned the government and did not find a way to express it. They expressed it by abstaining."

[8] The pinã±ata is a receptacle filled with sweets which is broken with sticks on the first Sunday of Lent during a masked ball. In Nicaragua, this term refers to the transfer of state property to FSLN officials during the transition period following the electoral defeat in February 1990.