

Update from the Nicaraguan Insurrection

Horizontal Organizing vs. Left Neoliberalism and the Pitfalls of Nationalism

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Two weeks ago, we published a report from the uprising in Nicaragua that began in April. Since then, the situation has only intensified. Here is an update from our comrades in Nicaragua, describing the most recent developments and the stakes of the struggle. In Nicaragua, we see an uprising against the neoliberal policies of a “left” government in which a movement is attempting to resist right-wing cooptation in the absence of an established anarchist or autonomous movement. We are concerned about the prevalence of nationalist and rhetoric and imagery, but we believe that it is important to support revolts against authoritarian governments in order to generate dialogue that could open up a revolutionary horizon. Just as it will not benefit leftists to support unpopular and oppressive “left” governments, it does not benefit anarchists to refuse to engage with insurgents whose goals are still evolving.

For the past month, Nicaragua has seen daily protests against the government of Daniel Ortega. This is being called *La Insurreccion de Abril* (“the April Insurrection”). Over the last two weeks, these protests have escalated to countrywide blockades and urban barricades. Organized students are occupying three public universities (UNA, UPOLI, UNAN). Nicaraguans in every major city have taken to the streets to demand complete systemic change, including the resignation of Daniel Ortega. Riot police and Sandinista Youth continue to carry out pro-government repression. Although things have quieted down across the country, the most affected cities of Masaya, Matagalpa, and Jinotega are still recovering from the aftermath of the riots.

“It’s been amazing to protest in the streets of Managua without government or Young Sandinista repression. We’ve been able to do this for ten days now. It’s the first time since Ortegas came to power that we’ve been able to take the streets in this way. I truly feel as if the city is ours. We’re witnessing amazing street art, art projects, and interventions. We don’t know what’s going to come out of the dialogue. Government reform, police reform, new elections, autonomous regions?

I feel good, but it has been exhausting. We have good days and bad days. I feel emotionally drained, just working and working and working. Not really taking time to think. It’s been exhausting to live on a day by day space and time. So many doors have been opened!

Classes began at UNAN, the largest public university in the country, on Monday, May 7. Students organized a protest inside the university campus, staging a sit-in and then spending the night. This continued until the university shut down. UNAN is now occupied with an estimated 500 students inside. The students are organized as a commune with rotating personnel guarding the barricades, receiving aid, maintaining communications, re-painting old murals, and staffing a medical center. All the major roads towards the UNAN are barricaded and defended by students, causing major traffic congestion. Nevertheless, drivers cheer the students on as they pass the barricades.

The demands of the UNAN student groups are comparable to those announced by other student organizations: justice, peace, the completely restructuring of student unions, an immediate end to the repression carried out by police and Sandinista Youth, and university autonomy. Other universities, like UNA (the agrarian university), have already created their own student governments outside the state’s framework of legitimacy.

The student representatives of the Coalition of Students have announced that the students of each university should organize as best fits their local conditions, whether that means through the UNEN [the government-sponsored student union] or outside of it—whatever path will lead towards educational autonomy.

During the second week of May, police and Sandinista Youth carried out periodic attacks on UNAN each night, but people protected the entrances to the universities with cultural activities like music and singing; people spent the night at the gates of the university to secure the safety of the students inside. It's now been about two weeks since the last major confrontations at UNAN involving police and Sandinista Youth.

In discussions with comrades who work and operate inside of UNAN, they report that they've never experienced this kind of togetherness and collectivity. They describe a union that transcends class, gender, and race, people united around the cause of justice and autonomy.

“Several contacts inside of UNAN advised me not to enter to conduct interviews, since it is likely that there are infiltrators from the Sandinista Youth inside the campus who would recognize me and might harass me outside.”

Managua experiences about four marches every day, organized in different parts of the city. Each march has a different theme and a corresponding location. Marches have been connecting new historic places, like *Camino de Oriente* (where the revolt started) and *Rotonda Jean Paul Genie* (the new roundabout, which is now a memorial site) to places like UCA and *Rotonda Ruben Dario* that are in the center of the city.

We have witnessed marches organized by diverse sectors of the population: various colleges and high schools, alumni marches, marches of teachers and professors, marches organized by the private sector. Mothers and family members of the victims murdered by the police have also led their own marches.

At the same time, taxi drivers have created their own protests, mobilizing around the spike in the price of gasoline. You can see the phrase *No + Alza* (“stop the rise”) painted on windows of taxis, buses, and cars.

Nicaragua pays the most for gasoline despite having the strongest relationship to Venezuela. There is no transparency in this transaction. A general boycott of PETRONIC, the State-owned petroleum company, is also taking place.

The confrontations are now predominantly occurring outside Managua in smaller cities like Masaya, Sebaco, Matagalpa, Estelí, and Granada. These confrontations have led to looting and chaos in the streets as families try to protect their homes and businesses. Since the police and state officials are doing the absolute minimum, in some places there has been a push towards self-government and local assemblies. We have seen several small business sectors organize themselves to prevent looting and crime; at the same time, we have seen groups making deals with the local police to protect neighborhoods.

Most of these confrontations occur when the police disrupt protests, creating a state of emergency in a given locale. This gives looters an incentive to attack gas stations and supermarkets. Pro-government news sources then report the looting, blaming the protestors for everything. It is well-documented that the police have used live ammunition on protesters.

We can see the response to these confrontations on the walls of the city streets. *Sin Justicia no hay Paz!* “There is no peace without justice!” *No eran delincuentes, eran estudiantes.* “They were not thugs, they were students.” *Se busca asesino* with an image of Daniel Ortega: “Wanted Murderer!”

Fue el Estado (“it was the state”) is one of the most popular slogans we see spray-painted in every corner of the city. This slogan conveys the popular idea that the Ortegaista government has corrupted the state, and the state is responsible for all the violence, destruction, and death. In this narrative, the solutions that are implied are oriented toward restructuring the state so that it will cease to be affiliated with a political party and more “neutral,” catering to the needs of the whole population, not just the Ortegaistas. Obviously, this is not an anarchist analysis.

Solutions outside of the state are slowly emerging, but the process is not complete. Neighborhood assemblies, community patrols, student unions, trash collection schedules, and pirate transportation have emerged as necessities in practice: short-term solutions. As anarchists, it’s our task now to demonstrate that these can offer long-term possibilities for autonomous community-run participatory structures.

On Monday, May 14, it was announced that the “dialogue” between the state and the student movement plus the private sector and “civil society” [various NGOs and other groups] would occur on Wednesday, May 16. The student movements originally stated that they were willing to engage in dialogue, but that the ongoing police repression made it impossible. Nevertheless, a day later, a part of the student movement agreed that they would be at the dialogue table.

So far, three sessions of this dialogue have taken place. Everyone expected the first session to turn out to be a trap set for the students, but in fact it was a trap for the state. The church (the mediators of the dialogue), “civil society,” the private sector, and the *campesino* movement all supported the students in their demands that the government put a stop to the repression and recall all police personnel. For the first time in Nicaraguan history, a student interrupted the dialogue, stood up to face Daniel Ortega, and attacked him on account of his authoritarian and violent government. Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo never give interviews to the press, so it was amazing to see them so vulnerable.

Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo did not attend the second session of the dialogue; their representatives did, but arrived two hours late. The second session of the dialogue concluded with an agreement that the government would have their police and paramilitary forces stop attacking protestors in return for the students calling for the road blockades to be lifted. The road blockades have completely paralyzed the economy. Despite this agreement, the Agrarian University was attacked on the night of Saturday, May 19 and four students were injured. Consequently, the deal was called off and the blockades went back up.

The third session of the dialogue ended with no consensus. The barricades remain in place as of the night of Monday, May 21.

A key player in all of this is the CIDH (*Comisión Interamericana de Derechos Humanos*, “Inter-American Commission for Human Rights”). They have just announced that they have documented at least 76 people killed and 868 injured during the uprising. This report could trigger international repercussions against the Ortegas. The CIDH, of course, is essentially a neoliberal organization answering to the Organization of American States.

The immediate demands presented to the government include justice for all the people who have been murdered in the course of the repression. This would involve a trial of the government and police officials responsible for their deaths. Through such a trial, there would also be a push towards separating the police from the Orteguista party, as originally stipulated by the constitution. A more far-reaching reform of the police could also happen. Through this reform, people will also push for a complete change in the system of government, including educational autonomy and separation between the Orteguista Party and public institutions.

The *Autoconvocados* (“Self-Assembled”) movement controls the streets with the power to mobilize hundreds of thousands in Managua, enjoying the freedom to protest for the first time in over ten years. Any negative response or suspicious activity of the government will be received with public demonstrations.

No justice, no peace.

On Horizontal Organizing

The *Autoconvocados* movement is an umbrella term that can be used by everyone, but only some events are approved and legitimized by the *Autoconvocado* committee, a group of about 10 organizers that run the official *Autoconvocados* Twitter account, among other things, to which they post official events. This group operates through consensus and has no leaders.

The Student Coalition is the group representing the students in the dialogue with the rest of the State. This coalition includes representatives of major universities all over the country. It is a coalition of five different student groups, operating horizontally and through consensus. According to the media, two leaders have emerged; this is how the media attempts to create leadership. In fact, the organizing is very much horizontal. This student coalition has the capacity to rally hundreds of thousands of people, setting the tone for the discussion and reaction. One part of the coalition is the *Coordinadora Universitaria Por la Justicia y la Paz*; out of those with delegates in the dialogue, they have been the closest to a feminist perspective.

All the other public affinity groups that have emerged, like the *Artistas Autoconvocados* and *Arquitectos Autoconvocados* (artists and architects), are basically different sectors that are organizing themselves non-hierarchically to set up actions and promote events. There are no public leaders in these movements, only delegates and representatives.

Overall, the most obvious aesthetic of the opposition is nationalism. It is under this banner that all the solidarity and direct action has happened.

All the same, there is a lot that is horizontal about this movement. Small affinity groups organize through social media to deliver medical supplies, food, and resources to communities that have suffered from rioting and looting. Basically, these horizontal organizations are promoting a culture of participation and consensus. A culture of listening and suggesting. A culture of face-to-face politics. A culture of solidarity and inclusivity. A culture of direct action. All things we would have never learn through “party system” politics.

In terms of the future, it is this practice that is creating the theory for the short-term goals. Practices come first. First, we need people in the streets to react to the immediate actions of the government. But in this situation practice cannot create long-term goals. For that, we will need theory.

Text Messages from the Uprising

“Today was the happiest day of my life.”

“I’m at the safehouse making bulletproof shields out of garbage cans.”

“They are killing us with snipers, send help send help”

“I’m on my way to Costa Rica. There were people outside my house telling me that they were going to burn down the house and kill me.”

“A tree of life fell on top of E—!”

“There are barricades surrounding your neighborhood, you can’t get in.”

“I have a group of 70 gang members ready to fight, just let us know where to go.”

“We need to occupy the Central American University.”

“Your meme made the national newspaper!”

“Friends, just got out of a meeting, our TV show has been canceled, it was too radical.”

“They’ve burned two trucks in front of my house. And the house behind mine is on fire. I need to get out of here.”

“I’m outing pro-government supporters on Tinder.”

“Don’t worry, V— sent a drone to check out the situation.”

“Friends, I made this new group because I think there were infiltrators in the other group.”

“VICE wants an interview, what should we tell them?”

“To go fuck themselves.”

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