

Nicaragua: “There are no longer any trade union organizations, no longer any autonomous social movement. We need solidarity”

Saturday 23 March 2024, by [BALTODANO Mónica](#), [SANCHEZ Mariana](#) (Date first published: 1 March 2024).

Mónica Baltodano was a guerrilla commander during the Sandinista revolution and leader of the Managua insurrection. She held positions of responsibility in the revolutionary government, notably in charge of the territories and municipal work. In 2007, Daniel Ortega returned to power as president by reaching agreements with the right and capitalist sectors on a project that had nothing to do with the Sandinista revolution. [1] Mónica Baltodano, along with many other former militants and fighters from the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front), found herself in opposition. Together, they created dissident movements of the Sandinista Front. In 2018, following the repressive response to the peasants’ and students’ movement, which resulted in almost 400 deaths, Mónica Baltodano found herself in exile in Costa Rica, stripped of her nationality and having all her property and income confiscated. She is in Europe, invited by the 4th International, and agreed to answer our questions. Interview by Mariana Sanchez.

Mariana Sanchez - What was the purpose of your trip?

Mónica Baltodano - We are in Europe to denounce the dictatorial and absolutist regime of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo, who have controlled the government and all its institutions for 17 years. Their objective is not to build a transformation project or to get out of the poverty in which the majority of Nicaraguans live, but to increase their personal wealth, because they have become capitalists. Since their return to government in 2007, they have introduced a neoliberal regime with the most brutal features of extractivism, particularly in gold and silver mining. This has led to deep inequalities in the country. More than 700,000 Nicaraguans have had to leave. In a way, they are the mainstay of Nicaragua’s economy, because the dollars they send home to their families are more important than the country’s exports as a whole.

We would point out that repression in Nicaragua is increasing. There is no freedom of the press or of information. No one is allowed to think differently from the regime, because people risk imprisonment or exile, and the confiscation of all their property.

More than 4,000 organisations have been banned. Associations that worked for women’s rights, for the rights of nature, for the rights of indigenous people...

There are no longer any trade union organisations, no longer any autonomous social movement. That’s why we need solidarity. Not just condemnation, not just communiqués from the international community, but solidarity.

We came to talk to people who had worked in solidarity in the 1980s. Some of them had even been there and taken part in the fight against Somoza, sharing our dream of a fairer society and political, economic and social democracy. Nicaragua has the potential to return to this direction. To do that, we need to get out of the dictatorship. So we are seeking to weaken it on the international stage.

We are in Europe to propose peasant projects, training projects and organisational projects. We needed to get organised, and I'm particularly committed to organising the left-wing sectors that came out of Sandinism. We need to do justice to those who were murdered or indicted, to all those affected by the Ortega-Murillo dictatorship. These are the issues we discussed during our visit.

Some on the left in Europe, even if they know what is happening in Nicaragua, still think that Ortega is a Sandinista, that he is the revolutionary of the 1980s...

We have seen a major advance on the left in terms of understanding and information about what is really happening in Nicaragua. From our discussions, we can conclude that the majority are aware that Nicaragua is not a left-wing regime, that it is a criminal regime that has committed clear human rights violations.

But there is still a sector on the left that insists that it was the continuation of this fine revolution that had excited it. This is a Left that turns a blind eye to reality. Some say it's because Ortega is anti-imperialist. I want to tell them that Ortega is not anti-imperialist. He uses this rhetoric in order to keep a certain sector of his social base. But in order to deceive this part of the left, he is trying to adopt a new West-East logic. That's why it supports Russia or aligns itself with Iran or North Korea.

In reality, the majority of the left has made progress, not only in Europe but also in Latin America. There are strong voices like that of Gabriel Boric in Chile, President Gustavo Petro in Colombia and Andres López Obrador in Mexico, who have condemned the loss of nationality of more than 300 Nicaraguans. Very important voices are being heard, such as those of Pepe Mujica in Uruguay and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in Mexico. We've made progress, but it's very important that the lefts of the world speak out forcefully against Ortega.

This also helps us in our work with young people. Ortega says in his speeches that what he is doing is socialism. Even though we have had the most neo-liberal society since 1990, the young people of Nicaragua believe that Ortega is a socialist.

What remains of the social and trade union movement after the government's repression?

The entire autonomous social movement has been crushed and repressed through arrests and exile, with more than 350 people murdered in the 2018 crackdown.

We are committed to rebuilding these networks. From exile but also internally, with silent working methods, throughout the country. We advocate a peaceful, civic struggle. We have suffered too many wars in Nicaragua. We are trying to take the democratic, civic and peaceful route.

But that doesn't mean we shouldn't organize clandestinely, because the repression is brutal. In Nicaragua, you cannot publish any opposing opinion in the press or in the online media. Journalists are in prison, simply for posting on their profile a demonstration or religious procession that has been banned. Faced with this reality, we need to rebuild the whole social fabric that the regime has destroyed. But we're sure we'll get there, and there have already been advances in that direction.

We are optimistic; we believe that sooner or later this regime will fall. Thousands of Sandinistas, state workers, soldiers and policemen are no longer with the regime, even if they remain in their jobs because they can't make a living from anything else. Thousands of people in all the institutions

no longer support this regime, which is why we are convinced that its end is near, closer than the people in the street think.

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