Critical Support of a Revolution Within
—The Struggle for Indigenous Rights in Nicaragua—

PART I: History and Current Situation

Today, while a brutal terrorist war is being waged against the Nicaraguan people, an historic opening is breaking through on Nicaragua’s Atlantic Coast. In the past six months the issues and the embattled sides have been redefined in the fighting between Nicaraguan government forces and Indian guerilla fighters. It is of global significance that a national government and an armed Indian movement have agreed to work towards new structures which will recognize Indian rights to land and self-determination. The fighting has stopped, with informal agreements to not engage in offensive military action—"We don’t attack each other. We won’t come looking for them in their military installations and they won’t come looking for us in our villages."

(Indian Law Resource Center, 4/22/85)

Of approximately 20,000 Indian refugees in the region, 3-4,000 have returned to their own villages and land from resettlement camps and agricultural projects. They often return to the charred remains of their houses, covered by the jungle growth of two or more years. Indian rebel Steadman Fagoth, the unpredictable and ruthless leader of MISURA ("Miskito, Sumu & Rama"), has been ousted from the organization and now resides in Miami. The Indian forces of MISURASATA ("Miskito Sumu, Rama and Sandinista Working Together"), headed by Miskito Brooklyn Rivera, and most of MISURA, have openly cut ties with the counterrevolutionary ("Contra") and non-Indian FDN and ARDE. The Nicaraguan government is negotiating with...
MISURASATA as a legitimate and legal organization, recognized as distinct from the Contra forces.

MISURA and MISURASATA-SICC ("Southern Indigenous Creole Community"), and a few independent village representatives united this June to form ASLA (meaning "unity" in Miskito). ASLA includes the large number of Indians in the Honduran-based organizations, thus representing - from outside the country - a significant portion of the Indian population of the Atlantic Coast. A new government-sanctioned, Miskito organization - MISATAN ("Nicaraguan Miskitos Working Together") - was formed within Nicaragua in June 1984. The organization's "plan of struggle" was developed by 14 Miskito community leaders, people actively working with the revolution, and past members of MISURASATA (including Mirna Cunningham, Minerva Wilson, Oscar Hodgson and Hazel Lau). Their objectives: to achieve reunification of Miskito families, recognition of the Miskito language as a national language, resolution of problems of land tenure and use of natural resources, and the development of a national and international campaign to explain the Miskito's problems. These objectives were ratified at an assembly of over 350 delegates from more than 53 traditional and relocated communities.

The Nicaraguan government and Rivera have been engaged in official peace negotiations, and have maintained a fragile peace and open diplomatic channels. Currently bilateral talks have broken down. The government is unilaterally formulating a statute on "Regional Autonomy" to be included in the country's Constitution, despite MISURASATA's objections. What "Regional Autonomy" means is far from being decided - but it is certainly being discussed. Throughout the process leaders and community activists are emerging to represent the diverse coastal population.

These signs of change (the lack of a bilateral autonomy process notwithstanding) are

About the authors:

The authors write this article knowing that the debate addresses basic political, socio-cultural and economic realities in the context of dramatically different world views. This crucial debate is occurring in the midst of armed struggle, tremendous suffering and impending US intervention. Few people can agree on the history of the region called the "Atlantic Coast" of Nicaragua, much less the current situation. We have followed the Nicaragua-Indian conflict for a couple of years. We actively support the Nicaraguan revolution, and one of us visited the country in 1983. We are also working with Indian communities in northeastern North America. Our perspective is thus informed by both US-Indian history and the current attitudes of Indian people in this region and their Black, White and Hispanic neighbors.

We have listened to people who have seen their nations, culture, means of subsistence and basic rights attacked, and to those who have resisted. This is a history of the loss of self-determination due to cultural assimilation - through citizenship, education, religion; due to land alienation - through allotment and titling, fraud, abrogation of treaties, relocation, etc. Some of this was, and is due to the efforts of well-intentioned, educated, sensitive white people and their projects and policies.

We write this article not as experts on indigenous rights or to provide an Indian perspective - that can only come from Indian people. But rather, we write as non-Indians who see an urgent need to critically support actions for progressive change.

We, the authors, see this as our responsibility as Anglos and citizens of the United States: to challenge our assumptions and to move the contradictions towards new and creative action. We hope that our analysis will help all our readers with this task.
welcomed by Indians around the world, by
Nicaraguans, the supporters of revolutionary
struggles, and particularly the residents of the
Atlantic Coast. President Betancourt of Colom-
bia, Willy Brant of the Socialist International,
the Government of France, and US Senator
Ted Kennedy continue to encourage the peace
initiative which was begun in New York City
on October 3, 1984.

There are also those who do not welcome
these changes, have actively discouraged them
and can be expected to continue to disrupt the
peace process - in particular, the US State
Department, National Security Council and
CIA, and the Contra forces ARDE and the
FDN. The FDN and ARDE have formed the
United Nicaraguan Opposition (UNO) as sug-
gested by the US State Department to improve
the public image of the Contras. US Congress
has chosen this new political facade as the con-
duit for the $27 million in "non-lethal" aid. In
Honduras, government security forces continue
to prevent Rivera from meeting with Indian
refugees and to discourage a united Indian
organization.

The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua - People and
History

The "Atlantic Coast" region of Nicaragua,
comprising just over 50% of the national terri-
tory, consists of lowland tropical forests and
meandering rivers extending from the hilly
plains savannahs in the northeastern interior to
the Atlantic/Caribbean Coast. Transportation
is still primarily by boat or airplane, although
since the revolution major infrastructural pro-
jects have begun to provide links with the
western half of the country. An "agricultural
frontier" has been moving eastward from the
more densely populated Pacific region (see
map) into the lands traditionally inhabited pri-
marily by the Miskito, Sumu and Rama Indi-
ans. (CIDCA, 1982)

The Mestizo population has grown
rapidly as a result of agricultural colonization
of the region and expansion of central govern-
ment administration and development projects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Primary location</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rama</td>
<td>650</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>south of Bluefields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumu</td>
<td>4,451</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>upper reaches of the northern rivers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Miskito</td>
<td>67,000</td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>northern inland &amp; coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indians</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creoles (Afro-Caribbean descent)</td>
<td>25,700</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>urban centers, esp. Bluefields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garipone (Black Carib)</td>
<td>1,500</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
<td>along the southern coast</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mestizo (mixed descent)</td>
<td>182,000</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>agricultural interior</td>
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source: CIDCA conservative estimates, 1981

Of the thousands of peasants made landless by
the Somoza government's expanding cotton and
cattle export economy many made their way
to the mines and port towns of the Atlantic
Coast, but the majority of the "immigrants" to
the region settled in the rural interior. Coloniz-
ation continues today.

Land Use - the material base of existence:

Early records are unclear as to the identity
and number of the inhabitants of the region
stretching from Costa Rica into Honduras.
Their culture was more similar to that of the
South American Indians than to the Aztec
civilization to the north. Anthropologist Mary
Helms, who lived in a Miskito community in
1965, suggests that the evolution of the
Miskito peoples' identity was influenced by
contact with Spanish buccaneers and later,
beginning around 1560, with the British. This


Coastal history bears little resemblance to the colonization, removal, or eradication of Indian peoples by European settlers which is typical of North America, Costa Rica and of the Nicaraguan Pacific coast. Perhaps due to the limited amount of fertile land and the tropical lowland climate, the British and US used trade rather than settlement to extract the desired resources.

Through trade, particularly of firearms, the Miskitos gained increasing influence over other Indians in the region, and expanded into the Sumu lands farther up river. The British justified exclusive access to trade in the region by naming a Mosquito King who would act "independently." According to Helms, this new political structure was superficial: "Actual political decisions within Miskito society seem to have been made by village headmen and regional chiefs -- a practice more in keeping with the traditional decentralized nature of the indigenous organization." Decentralized structures continue to exist today, although some Indians now live outside of the traditional setting. Indian villages of 20 or more families are strung along the banks of the rivers, and agriculture generally continues in community owned, but individually cultivated, plots. Even during the phase of US corporate exploitation, Standard Fruit and other foreign companies tended to purchase products from small-scale producers rather than attempting to establish plantations with wage labor.

Helms and others describe the region's economic history as a series of booms and busts, corresponding to British and U.S. economic ventures in fruit, fishing, gold, and lumber. However, the Indian population was known for being an unsteady labor force, working only long enough to purchase desirable goods. Clearly paid less than the value of their labor power when employed, the Indians were exploited by, but not dependent upon, capitalist investment. Extensive hunting and gathering continued to compliment wage employment in the tradition of male mobility. Women in the matriloclal society provided the sustaining agriculture, and the continuity of village life. The almost complete conversion of the Indian population to the German protestant Moravian Church in the mid 19th century added church-based religion, education, western clothing, etc. to the villages.

Helms makes a strong case that the Miskitos never became peasants integrated into the economic and political system of the state, nor dependent on wage labor, although the boom-periods are spoken of as "the golden age." During severe depression "bust" periods, charity shipments of goods from overseas became pretty much expected.

The legal status and delineation of Indian land and peoples of the Atlantic region changed although the Indian peoples repelled all attempts at invasion. Around 1800, the British helped the Miskitos repel the Spanish. In 1843, Great Britain claimed a "Protectorate" over the east coast and its peoples. In 1860, under U.S. pressure, her Britannic Majesty "recognized as belonging to and under the sovereignty of the Republic of Nicaragua [the] country hitherto occupied or claimed by the Mosquito Indians within the frontiers of the Republic, whatever that frontier may be." (Article 1, Treaty of Managua, 1860). There was no mention of Sumu or Rama Indians, and no consultation with any Atlantic Coast Indian peoples. Thus Britain ceded to Nicaragua something which it did not possess: sovereignty over the Miskito nation.
The Miskito district established by the treaty was nominally invaded by President Zelaya in 1894, and "reincorporated" as the Department of Zelaya. The Atlantic Coast was often the battlefield in Augusto Sandino's bloody struggle against Somoza and U.S. marines (1927-33). Helms notes that "the fear and general upset of this period is vividly remembered." U.S. military intervention, beginning in 1910, becked the establishment of the Somolza dictatorship. Luis Somoza opened the door to U.S. corporate exploitation of the Atlantic Coast's resources, often providing tax-free status. According to Mirna Cunningham, a Miskito FSLN representative, "The formula was: the minimum investment to get in, the maximum amount of resources." (Perspectiva Mundial, 12/10/84)

In 1960, a World Court decision designed to settle a border dispute between Nicaragua and Honduras moved the official boundary of Nicaragua southward to the Rio Coco. Many Miskito people were unwillingly relocated to the northern shore of the river, and officially dispossessed of their exceptionally fertile land on the Honduran side of the river. The decision was implemented by outsiders, and bisected and the area which the Miskito traditionally considered their homeland. Helms reports that that there was great bitterness at this relocation, known as the traslado.

After the 1979 victory of the Sandinista Revolution, a tremendous task faced the Nicaraguan people and the new Nicaraguan government as it attempted to redistribute the nation's wealth to the poor. Augusto Sandino, in 1933, described his vision of the Atlantic Coast as he saw it then; not radically different from some perceptions today: "This virgin region makes up over half of Nicaragua's national territory — only by developing it can Nicaragua earn dignity and respect as a country." (Envio, 12/84) Its development could be highly significant economically. Timber was already desperately needed to build housing for the urban poor, particularly in Managua. Gold mines, hydropower potential, and increasing domestic oil palm, cacao and rice produc-

Organizing to Resist:

People organize to change their material conditions and resist threats to their existence. Indians in the Americas have organized to stop inter-tribal fighting (Iroquois Confederacy), to protect their subsistence activities (fishing rights in Washington State), their culture (Kuna in Panama) and reclaim their land base throughout the Americas. These are not isolated activities; they are all mechanisms to survive as peoples.

SUKAWALA, the National Association of Sumu Communities, was founded in 1974. Sumu Indian leader Timoteo Patron notes that the Sumu's historical oppression is not limited to labor exploitation and to the usurpation of their land: "More than that, we haven't even been recognized as a people. Our very existence has been denied." (Barricada Internacional, 7/11/83) After World War II, U.S. timber interests had pushed the Sumu from their land and deforested large areas of northeast Nicaragua. In April the largest Sumu community, Musawas, was devastated by the war. SUKAWALA's revitalization in April was explained by Patron: "We are generally a quiet and reserved people, but the time has come to demand our rights."

ALPROMISU (Alliance of Miskito and Sumu Peoples), the forerunner of MISURASATA, was formed in the same period as SUKAWALA. To revive the timber industry following the withdrawal of U.S. timber
interests in 1966. "Somoza initiated a massive reforestation project, directed by the Instituto de Fomento Nacional and the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization. Large tracts of land utilized by the Miskitos were "nationalized" and the Miskito were prohibited from extracting lumber. For the first time, the state and market economies were seen as a threat to the Miskitos' claim to land and natural resources. Shortly thereafter, in 1967, local Indian organizations developed along the Coco River.

Four years later, Nicaragua's first national Indian organization, ALPROMISU, was formed to protect rights to land and natural resources." (Macdonald, 1981) The organization was frequently accused of "separatism and association with foreign enemies", according to Macdonald, and Somoza's national guard eventually succeeded in infiltrating and rendering ALPROMISU ineffective. Soon after the victory in 1979, literacy and health campaigns were initiated and progressed with the benefit of local criticism, participation, and re-design. Also numerous natural resource utilization plans were formulated, unilaterally, by the new Sandinista government. The revolution's literacy and health programs were met with cautious enthusiasm, which was tempered by historical distrust of the "Spanish" on the part of both the Indian and Creole populations.

In an assembly of 700 delegates representing 300 villages, ALPROMISU reorganized to become MISURASATA. The Nicaraguan government encouraged the Managua-educated Steadman Fagoth, Brooklyn Rivera, and Armstrong Wiggins to represent the organization in the Council of State, and provide leadership and staff. Although most antagonisms over the literacy campaign were settled in dialogue with the government, land rights quickly became a central issue of contention. The highly successful land reform in the Pacific region which granted land titles to individual farmers or agricultural collectives, (in conformance with the will of the people), did not fit the extensive nature of Indian land and water use patterns. In 1981 the agricultural reform law was amended, with the intention of adapting it to Atlantic Coast needs.

"The Popular Sandinista Revolution will not only guarantee, but also legalize, the ownership of lands on which the people of the communities of the Atlantic Coast have traditionally lived and worked, organized either communally or as cooperatives. Land titles will be granted to each community." (FSLN/GRN,1981)

Under MISURASATA pressure the Council of State agreed to a moratorium on nationalization until Indian land claims were settled. The government also agreed to MISURASATA commissioning a study of community land rights to serve as the basis for negotiating the boundaries of community land holdings under the statute. "The Miskitos' reaction to proposed nationalization of land and resources along the Atlantic Coast was not prompted by some historical antipathy towards "Spaniards"; it was a response to a perceived threat against their subsistence security and their status as equals in relations with nation states." (Macdonald, 1981) As with most land claims in the hemisphere, both legal and aboriginal rights indicated that large areas did in fact belong to the Indigenous occupants. When the government learned that the claim would include 35% of national territory, including the gold mines, they were alarmed at the potential loss of control over natural resources. They were also concerned, in the face of counterrevolutionary activities in the north, about the security of the eastern portion of the Honduran border. In the United States land claims are frequently quietly suppressed - but with difficulty. But in the new and threatened revolutionary Nicaragua, it was impossible. Twenty-two MISURASATA leaders were arrested in February 1981, charged with a separatist movement sponsored by the CIA. The growing CIA involvement and arms flow in the region suggested foreign alliances with the Indian cause. The question of who had the rights to which resources was quickly lost in charges and counter-charges, and escalating Indian resentment of government military presence on the coast. Once released from Managua prison, Steadman Fagoth denounced the Sandinistas
and crossed over the border to Honduras, founding an Indian-based organization, MISURA. This charismatic leader attracted several thousand Indian followers to his fighting force. Fagoth soon joined forces with the non-Indian, Contra FDN, which expanded its campaign to the Atlantic Coast. Brooklyn Rivera, having visited "refugee camps" in Honduras, publically denounced Fagoth and his use of authoritarian and coercive methods against Indian people. After half a year of continued attempts to press the Indian land claim, Brooklyn Rivera also left Nicaragua, and took up arms in Costa Rica in the name of MISURASATA.

The Relocation - "Tratado" number 3:

Fagoth's group began a rabid anti-communist radio campaign against the Sandinistas, in English and Miskito, and conducted several armed raids along the Coco River, in which some 80 people, including military and civilians were killed. In January and February 1982 the Nicaraguan government announced that they had uncovered a CIA plan called "Operation Red Christmas", in which Indian people were to be incited to rise up in a secessionist movement against the revolution, backed by Fagoth's Indian fighters. The Sandinista government ordered the total evacuation of the civilian population from the Rio Coco to create a free fire zone. The move was unannounced, and enforced by military personnel. Some 8,500 Sumu and Miskito Indians were relocated against their will to a resettlement camp some 120 km inland, named Tseba Prl (meaning "Free Land" in Miskito). Another 10,000 Indians fled across the river into Honduras.(See "The Disappearance of Raif", Akwesasne Notes, 1985). Although the relocation was justified as a necessary preemptive action, relocation has a bitter connotation to virtually all indigenous peoples. The Sumu and Miskito had their own history of relocation: the removal of the Sumu to make way for multinational timber harvesting, and the relocation of Miskito people at the time of the 1960 redenifion of the international boundary between Nicaragua and Honduras. These relocations were vividly remembered and bitterly resented.(Helma)

Relocation was rapid. Communities had not been informed that it was to take place.
At night, Sandinista military entered villages and told people they had to leave. Only children and pregnant women were flown over the 30 miles of rugged terrain to the destination chosen by the Sandinistas. Those who refused to go had no choice but to flee over the river into Honduras. In the chaos, family members were scattered and divided between the relocation camp in Nicaragua and the contra-controlled refugee camps in Honduras. Indian houses, orchards, possessions and crops were destroyed in over 40 villages to prevent the establishment of guerrilla bases. CIDCA (1984) reports that there was a lack of sufficient control over military commanders based in Zelaya [resulting in] reprehensible conduct ranging from cultural disrespect to physical abuse and bodily harm. All the Indians in the 200 km area of the Rio coco lost their houses and possessions, some lost their lives.

They had also lost control over their own circumstances. The government stated that the sole purpose was to defend the civilian population which supported the revolution from contra reprisals, to prevent MISURA and the FDN from establishing a base of support within river communities, and to launch an effective counteroffensive against the contras. Both MISURA and MISURASATA, as guerrilla fighting forces, were allied with US-aided Contra forces — the FDN and Pastora’s ARDE respectively. There was also an arms flow from the well-supplied MISURA to MISURASATA. (Macdonald, 8/85) Rivera describes Indians fighting from Costa Rica, Honduras, and within Nicaragua as groups which are more loyal to the Indian rights cause than to any particular leader, such as Fagot. Fagot’s goals and methods have continued to be indistinguishable from those of the Contras. In contrast, Rivera has always maintained that he is not interested in the overthrow of the Sandinista government or the revolution, but accepts arms and aid from whatever sources are available. He states that he is fighting for “the fulfillment of Indian aspirations within the revolutionary process.” (Syracuse NY, 7/7/85) As Fagot’s terrorist methods alienated Indian leaders within his own organization, MISURA commanders tended to act independently in the field.

Tasba Pri:

Instead of the familiar river environment, the five settlements of Tasba Pri are located on a new road connecting Puerto Cabezas on the Atlantic Coast to Managua. It is hardly the typical "refugee camp"; it is more like a permanent agricultural settlement. In the first six months of 1982, the government invested heavily in housing, schools, medical care, electricity, drinking water, telephones, local radio station and agricultural programs. Over time, many local administrative functions were turned over to Miskito people. By 1983, 85% of new land titles in the region were for land in resettlement camps (Macdonald, 8/85).

A government document entitled "Tasba Pri" (3/1/82) describes the project: "The Tasba Pri program is not new nor improvised. It has as its immediate antecedent a feasibility study conducted by the revolutionary government through the Nicaraguan Institute for the Atlantic Coast (INNICA) in November 1980 for the purpose of improving and dignifying the living conditions of the Miskitos that inhabit [sic] the Nicaraguan shores of the Coco River…With resettlement, long standing problems of the inhabitants will be solved. These are subsistence agriculture, lack of fertile land, limited access to the zone with consequent difficulties for the transportation of basic goods, and floods that annually cause great damage to houses and crops."

A Sandinista news organ notes: "MIDINRA is also developing agricultural projects of a 'business/enterprise' type in the [Tasba Pri] settlements. For eight months Indians have been working in a nursery of 10,000 cacao plants to be replanted in an area of at least 4,300 hectares. It is anticipated that the cacao produced at Tasba Pri will go for export, already partially processed." (Barricada Internacional, 8/6/84)
As well as for military and safety considerations, clearly the relocation of the Indians provided a means to change conditions deemed "miserable and backward" by government planners, and to integrate Indian labor into the national economy. Approximately 3-5,000 Indians have also been relocated to camps on the Pacific interior to pick coffee. Conditions at these camps have been described as "intolerable" by US Senator Kennedy. (NYT, 11/27/85)

How did Indian residents feel about these settlements? They are now voting with their feet: Estela Miranda, a Miskito mother relocated to Tasba Pri, and a member of an agricultural cooperative there, was one of the first people to return to Rio Coco this June. At Tasba Pri, she says, "[y]ou could say that we were living well." But she did not hesitate to abandon the settlement when she heard that the government was to finally permit return to the river. She explains, "Here on the banks of the Rio Coco, we didn't have to buy anything; everything we wanted was here for the taking. There was lots of fruit and fish from the river, we kept chickens, cows and pigs, and the land didn't even need to be fertilized." (Barricada Internacional, 8/8/85)

The Return:

Dramatic changes in the government-Indian war have made it possible for Indians to return to their homes. This May 29, President Ortega announced that the Miskitos could return to their homes in an organized and planned move. The government reports that, as requested by the Indians, no soldiers will accompany the caravans of people returning. They also report that all government army troops have been withdrawn from the North Zelaya region except those guarding strategic points such as bridges and production centers. (Barricada Internacional 8/8/85) The return is coordinated by MISATAN, the Moravian and Catholic churches, and the regional government.

Evidently tired of government "planning," many Indians didn't wait, and by June 9, Barricada Internacional noted that nearly 3000 Miskitos had already left the Nicaraguan relocation camps. Miskito FSLN representative Cunningham points out that few of Tasba Pri's residents will remain. "The majority want to return to the river, it is in our blood." (BL, 8/8/85) "On the first day, people were running into the river with their clothes on, singing and crying," said Silva Miguel. "We could
never be happy outside of this place." (NYT 7/27/85) Tomas Borge, head of the National Commission on Autonomy expressed the Sandinista reasoning behind the return: "We trust that the Miskito people have a greater national awareness now than three years ago." A somewhat different perspective was offered by President Daniel Ortega: "We are respecting the will of our people." (BL 8/8/85)

Bilateral Negotiations:

By mid 1984, all Indian and Nicaraguan government attempts at negotiation, facilitated by the Organization of American States, had failed. Steadily worsening conditions on the Atlantic Coast prompted behind-the-scenes contact between Moravian Church leaders on behalf of the government, and Brooklyn Rivera. During the summer of 1984 they tried to find a basis for beginning peace negotiations. Nicaragua's Head of State, Daniel Ortega, opened the door to negotiations by publicly recognizing that opposition forces on the Atlantic Coast were not all the same, officially inviting Rivera to return to Nicaragua under the 1985 general amnesty. Rivera responded that he would come to Nicaragua provided that regional autonomy and land rights would be discussed. MISURASATA be recognized as a legitimate Indian organization, Indian prisoners released, and that his personal safety and freedom of movement and speech in Nicaragua would be safeguarded.

Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts took the initiative to get the negotiations started. With money provided by Cambridge based Cultural Survival, Inc. and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee for travel expenses, Senator Kennedy arranged for Rivera to travel in secret to New York City from Costa Rica. There, on October 3, he met one-on-one with President Ortega who was attending a U.N. session. On October 20, Rivera flew from Costa Rica to Managua, entering Nicaragua officially for the first time after three and a half years of self-imposed exile. During this time he had only moved underground within Nicaragua as a guerrilla commander. He reported being actively discouraged from negotiating by members of ARDE, the FDN, and the U.S. State Department. (Syracuse, 7/85) After meeting with Ortega and Luis Carrion, Vice Minister of the Interior, Rivera and seven international observers and two other Indian leaders traveled for 12 days visiting over a dozen Miskito, Sumu and Rama Indian communities and resettlement camps within the Atlantic Coast. Rivera was apparently well received by individuals and large gatherings of Indian people. The first prisoner exchange between the Sandinistas and armed opposition groups was completed.

On November 23, twelve Miskito leaders, including Rivera, attempted to visit the thousands of Indians in refugee camps in Honduras to further the peace initiative process. They were held incommunicado for 33 hours by the Honduran security forces, and deported back to Costa Rica only after they threatened a hunger strike for release. The source of the detention orders is unknown.

December 8 and 9, Bogota Colombian President Belisario Betancourt sponsored the first formal round of peace talks, with participation of international observers including the governments of France, Canada, Mexico, Colombia, Sweden, and Holland. Both MISURASATA and MISATAN participated. MISURASATA presented a "comprehensive written proposal calling for recognition of Indian rights to land and autonomy, for withdrawal of Sandinista armed forces from Indian area, and a formal ceasefire, for redress of a number of rights violations, and for negotiation of a bilateral treaty which would establish the foundation of a new relationship between the Indians and the Nicaraguan state." (ILRC, 1983)
The next round of talks set for January 20 and 21 never occurred. On the Atlantic coast, limited military actions resumed, the government and MISURASATA charging each other with having taken the offensive. Rivera reportedly was wounded in one of these exchanges. In March, President Betancourt urged Rivera to resume the talks. The subsequent round of talks took place March 26 and 27, 1983, in Bogota. Over 20 Indian leaders from Peru, Colombia, Ecuador, Costa Rica, and North America were present in support of MISURASATA. The Nicaraguan government delegation, headed by Luis Carrion, included Miskito and Creole members. Rather than respond directly to MISURASATA’s December proposal, the government had formulated its own plan for the Atlantic region.

The government proposal:

1. A ceasefire, applying only to those forces "clearly identified" as MISURASATA forces.
2. MISURASATA would agree to present autonomy demands within the framework of the National Autonomy Commission, an entity unilaterally formed by President Ortega, charged with studying Atlantic Coast autonomy and proposing legislation to the National Assembly for inclusion in the constitution.
3. MISURASATA would agree to support the government’s efforts to repatriate Indian refugees now outside the country.
4. The parties would agree to promote better communication between the Nicaraguan government and MISURASATA.
5. The government would assist in restoration of Indian villages destroyed by the government and resettled at Sangnilaya. [this would not include any border villages]
6. The government would recognize MISURASATA as a legal political organization with full guarantees for organizing and functioning within Nicaragua, "once the situation is normalized."
7. The government would agree to an "autonomous region" on the Atlantic Coast, "in conformity with both the historical necessities of the inhabitants of the coasts and the interests of the nation." Autonomy is not further defined.
8. The government would extend forward the December 1983 prisoner amnesty decree.
9. And: "The government of Nicaragua and MISURASATA declare that the solution to the crisis on the Nicaraguan coast is an internal matter to be resolved exclusively by Nicaraguans without external interference."

MISURASATA Proposal:

In response, MISURASATA agreed to provide a more detailed statement, which, drafted that night, was presented the following day, calling for:

1. The government to recognize the indigenous rights of the Miskito, Sumu, and Rama peoples to autonomy, including the right to freely determine their own political, economic, social and cultural development consistent with their own values, traditions, and histories.
2. Immediate recognition of MISURASATA as the legitimate organization for indigenous peoples of the Atlantic coast.
3. A bilateral negotiation process to resolve the autonomy issue.
4. A ceasefire under which MISURASATA security forces would replace government armed forces in the Indian areas.
5. Formal recognition of the rights of Indian peoples of Nicaragua to their traditional territory, including rights to land, water, and resources.
6. The government to join MISURASATA in promoting expanded international humanitarian assistance to help meet the needs of the people within the Indian territory.
7. The government to facilitate restoration of Indian communities and return of those Indians who are either displaced within Nicaragua or refugees in other countries.
All the demands were presented "within the framework of the Nicaraguan state and territorial integrity of the nation." MISURASATA also proposed that negotiations continue between MISURASATA and the government on issues of Indian territory demarcation, the autonomy proposal and its implementation, the exploitation and use of natural resources, and defense, agreeing to work towards bilateral agreements. A tripartite commission to oversee implementation of the agreements and arbitrate differences would be established, composed of representatives of the observers, the Nicaraguan government, and MISURASATA.

(ILRC, 1985)

**Government Response:**

According to the ILRC, the government responded that recognition of the rights MISURASATA was demanding would threaten the sovereignty of the Nicaraguan state. The government again proposed a ceasefire, including the registration and identification of all MISURASATA fighters and arms with the Nicaraguan government. This was seen by MISURASATA as calling for a virtual surrender, and was rejected. Both sides agreed to meet again April 22 in Mexico City. In Mexico City a joint communiqué was signed by the Nicaraguan government and MISURASATA on April 22, 1985. (See box) The parties agreed to reduce armed hostilities, reestablish food and medical supplies and subsistence activities in Indian villages, and release all Indian and Creoles imprisoned due to their involvement with MISURA or MISURASATA. This was not a ceasefire, nor a resolution of the other fundamental matters of land, autonomy, and natural resources. The last talks to date, again in Bogota, May 25, ended when Rivera accused the government of inflexibility, and withdrew. Rivera had pressed the need for "immediate discussion of the issues of land, autonomy, ethnic identity, and natural resources" within the bilateral forum. He noted that the government has pressured MISURASATA for a ceasefire without working with them on a solution to the causes of the conflict. Carrion reiterated that Rivera's proposals would negate the sovereignty of the Nicaraguan state, and flatly rejected his demand that army troops be withdrawn from the region. Both Rivera and Carrion stood by their previous agreement to avoid offensive military action.

**The Government's "Autonomy Plan":**

The Nicaraguan government has pursued its intention to unilaterally develop a regional autonomy plan with or without MISURASATA. Tomas Borge, Interior Minister, heads the National Autonomy Commission, with government appointed representatives of Sumus, Rama, Miskito, Creole, Garifuna, and Mestizo communities. Two regional subcommittees, north and south, have consulted with the six "ethnic groups" for the last six months. The draft "principles and objectives of the Atlantic Coast Autonomy ... will serve as the basis for widespread consultations among the people of the Atlantic Coast." The Principles thus far have included:

1. Better living conditions, together with the right to use and develop their own languages.
2. Safeguard of their land rights.
3. Respect of their cultural traditions.
4. The right to participate in decisions which directly affect them.

These principles would be assured through "regional autonomy", "granting specific rights to the various indigenous peoples and ethnic communities in a defined area within the national territory and a statute or norm to govern the existence and functioning of that area." This would include the right to "self-administration," and other rights established by statute, plus all the rights of being a Nicaraguan citizen.

"Socio-cultural rights" would also be recognized. The draft thus far proposes that the Atlantic coast be divided into two "autonomous" regions, each with a regional government. The two Regional Assemblies would

Continued on page 19
The delegations of the Republic of Nicaragua and the organization MISURASATA, which have met in Mexico City on April 20, 21 and 22 of the current year to continue the process of negotiations initiated in Bogotá last year, inform the Nicaraguan people and the international community of the following:

A) In the course of the talks, which were held in an atmosphere of frank respect, concrete advances were made in mutual comprehension and in the exploration of ways to promote the peace and well-being of the people of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua.

B) The delegations of the Government and MISURASATA, since they have not arrived at definitive agreements on the fundamental matters for a just solution to the present conflict and, as a consequence, no overall peace has been reached in the region between the armed forces of the Government and the forces of MISURASATA, will continue to discuss these issues (land, autonomy, natural resources, total cease-fire in the region, etc.) in subsequent rounds.

C) Both delegations, demonstrating their good faith and desire to make concrete progress in these negotiations, have established the following agreements for progress:

1. To bring immediate relief to the present suffering in the Indian communities of the Atlantic Coast and, in addition, to create a more favorable climate for the continuation of the negotiations, the government of Nicaragua and MISURASATA establish that:

   a) The government of Nicaragua commits itself to facilitating both the restoration of medical and food supplies through its institutions, and to facilitate assistance to the communities by humanitarian organizations in coordination with the government of Nicaragua. It will also facilitate the reestablishment of subsistence activities (fishing, hunting, agriculture and marketing) in the Indian and Creole communities affected by the present conflict in the region.

   b) MISURASATA will direct its forces to support these actions and insure observance of this agreement.

   c) The Government and MISURASATA commit themselves to avoiding offensive armed action between the armed forces of the government of Nicaragua and the forces of MISURASATA, to thus support the implementation of the commitment contained in subparagraph (a).

2. The government of Nicaragua will immediately extend the Amnesty Decree of December 1983 to include all those Nicaraguan Miskitu, Sumu and Rama Indians and Creoles still detained in Nicaraguan prisons due to their participation in any connections with MISURASATA and MISURA. This will become effective within seven (7) days of the signing of this document.

   d) The next round of talks will take place in the city of Bogotá on May 25 and 26 of this year.

E) Both delegations are grateful for the hospitality and facilities offered by the government of the United States of Mexico to help make the meetings possible.

Also, both delegations are grateful for the presence of the ambassadors and representatives of the governments of Canada, Colombia, France, the Netherlands and Sweden and the W.C.I.P. (World Council of Indigenous Peoples), all of whom have encouraged the efforts of the government of the Republic of Nicaragua and the organization MISURASATA. We wish to express our particularly deep gratitude to the Government of Colombia, which welcomed us in the first two meetings of this process.

Mexico City, April 22, 1985

For the Government of Nicaragua
Commandante Luis Carrion

For MISURASATA
Brooklyn Rivera
Puerto Rico: The Second Invasion

On August 30 of this year eleven members of the Puerto Rican independence movement were arrested, in what has come to be called the "Second North American Invasion" of this Caribbean island. More than two hundred agents of the U.S. government, backed by the Marine Corps and the U.S. Army, carried out a search of more than 30 Puerto Rican households. They searched and impounded materials from the offices of one political journal and two commercial publishing houses. For more than 8 hours the housing cooperative of Las Robles in San Juan, the capital, was occupied by FBI agents who intimidated residents and kept them from entering their homes.

This brings the total of Puerto Rican 'independentistas' imprisoned in U.S. jails to more than 35, for fighting for the independence of their nation. It has become more and more common for agencies of the U.S. government (the FBI, Grand Juries, etc.), rather than the Puerto Rican Administration, to handle the repression of the Puerto Rican independence movement. On August 30, the FBI did not even inform the governor, Rafael Hernandez Colon, of its 3 day operation. Hernandez, powerless in the face of the U.S. action, responded merely by protesting the 'lack of respect' shown towards his administration. The total disregard for the legal institutions and juridical structures of Puerto Rico demonstrates the colonial status of the island, despite U.S. allegations to the contrary. Even in the light of strong protests by many Puerto Ricans, government institutions and colonial parties were silent in the face of the repression of the independence movement by the North American invaders.

The repression of Puerto Rican independentistas was carried out both on the island (with 11 arrests) and in several locations in the United States and Mexico. A Federal Grand Jury investigating the September 1980 Wells Fargo robbery in Hartford, Connecticut indicted 17 Puerto Rican independentistas. They were accused of participating in the robbery and being members of the 'Macheteros', a clandestine group fighting for Puerto Rican independence.

Once again Puerto Rican independentistas are forced to appear in foreign courts where their full rights are not granted. The U.S. court in Puerto Rico ordered the deportation of the detained to the U.S., where they will be judged in accordance with federal law. The independentistas were arrested under the 'preventive detention' law, a provision of the Code of Detention. Their lawyers have protested that this law is in violation of the sixth amendment to the U.S. constitution (that a person is innocent until proven guilty). The lawyers have also protested the many irregularities that have occurred during the hearings of the Puerto Rican defendants. To date, magistrate Owen Egan of the Federal Court in Hartford, Connecticut has granted bail to only 3 of the independentistas. The cases of seven more are still pending in that court.

Numerous abuses and violations of civil rights have been committed against these 'companeros' who are struggling against U.S. colonialism. During the August 30 operation, federal agents broke down doors to get access to some homes, refused to show search warrants to anyone, barred lawyers, and occupied homes and offices for as many as 18 hours. Some of the people present were hit, pushed, verbally
abused and made to sit for hours on end without moving.

We make an appeal to the people of the United States and to the friends of the Puerto Rican Nation to demonstrate their solidarity with these companeros and the struggle they stand for. The FBI has announced new arrests as part of the U.S. plan to suppress the growing struggle for the independence of the Puerto Rican people.

The Comite Puerto Rico Libre is an ad hoc committee based in Ithaca and organized in response to the August 30, 1985 events in Puerto Rico.

Watch for a more detailed analysis of the Puerto Rican situation in our next Newsletter.

The Detained: Carlos Ayres, Angel Diaz Ruiz, Hilton Fernandez, Luis Alfredo Colon Osojo, Lodo, Jorge Farinacci, Isaac Camacho Negron, Filiberto Inocencio Ojeda, Juan Enrique Segarra Palmer (US), Elias Samuel Castro, Luz Ivonne Berrios (Mexico), Orlando Gonzalez Claudio, Avelino Gonzalez Claudio (missing), Ivonne Melendez, Norberto Gonzalez Claudio (missing)

*All were detained in Puerto Rico unless otherwise marked.

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**Political and legal aspects of repression of Puerto Rican Independistas**

Nov. 14
4:30pm
location to be announced

Presentation by Rita Zengotita, the president of the Comite Unitario Contra la Represion en Puerto Rico, and Rafael Anglada, Center for Constitutional Rights. Both Ms. Zengotita and Mr. Anglada have been very involved in pending cases of Puerto Rican political prisoners.

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**Roy Brown and Aires Bucaneros Perform in Ithaca**

Nov. 16
8pm
Martha Van Rensselaer Auditorium

Roy Brown and Aires Bucaneros are leaders in the Puerto Rican "new song movement". This musical form arose in the 1960's in response to the changing political and cultural environment in Latin America. From its folkloric origins, a new sound developed which has continued to be popular throughout Latin America.
The Guatemalan Elections

The upcoming elections in Guatemala for president, deputies and mayors, to be held on November 3rd, are the result of a political process which began almost two years ago with the call for a new constitution that would return Guatemala to a democratic form of government. Elections for delegates to a constituent assembly occurred in July, 1984 without centrist or leftist participation. Fifty percent of the voters abstained from voting or cast "damaged" ballots. The majority block of delegates represented just 20% of the eligible electorate.

Citing prospects for democracy, the United States reinstated military aid to Guatemala in October, 1984. Military assistance had been cut off by Congress since 1977 because of concern with the human rights crisis in Guatemala. In May 1985, the constituent assembly presented the new constitution which called for the "opening" of the political system to party politics to culminate in the November elections.

The parties participating in the election range from the extreme right-wing National Liberation Movement Party (MLN) led by Mario Sandoval Alarcon (well-known for his role as president of the World Anti-Communist League) to the center-left Social Democratic Party (PSD) led by Mario Solorzano Martinez. The 3 strongest candidates at this point are Jorge Carpio Nicolle of the National Centrist Union (UCN), Jorge Serrano Elias of the National Democratic Cooperation Party (PDCN), and Vinicio Cerezo Arevalo of the Christian Democratic Party (DC). Carpio is one of Guatemala's leading newspaper publishers. His access to the media and freshness in politics make him a strong candidate despite weaknesses in the UCN. The PDCN has an evangelical, fundamentalist orientation and may receive significant electoral support from the 25% of Guatemala's population who are protestant. Although the DC is a stronger party historically, it has lost support recently because of its increasing identification with the government's (i.e., the military's) programs. Cerezo has promised to respect the policies of the army and has aligned himself with the current posture of Guatemala in support of U.S. initiatives in Central America.

It is evident that the spectrum of political parties in Guatemala is narrowly defined. The major parties are not addressing the need for fundamental reform. They do not call for punishment of the perpetrators of government violence that has resulted in over 50,000 civilians killed since 1978. Nor do they propose a solution to the economic crisis reflected in an unemployment rate of 45% and rising inflation. Even if the parties did wish to pursue significant change, they would be restricted by the military. "I cannot advocate agrarian reform because it would not be tolerated by the military," explains Vinicio Cerezo, the leader of the Christian Democratic Party. "If I win the popular vote, the military might refuse to acknowledge my victory; even if I am inaugurated they might make it impossible for me to govern." (The New Republic, June 10, 1985)

The military has prepared well for its departure from positions of formal control over the civil government. It has extended itself into all provinces, and formulated provincial political relationships which give it authority over civilian governors. The constitution makes explicit the Army's right to interject "security matters" into civilian development and administrative programs. The military is an economic force, since it has invested in industry, and its leaders have appropriated huge tracts of land. Its wholly autonomous control of "security matters" is also explicit in the constitution, but the scope of "security" is undefined. In short, military power is pervasive throughout all sectors of Guatemalan society. Whoever wins the forthcoming elections will have to conduct the government in a manner that meets the military's approval.
The Reagan administration's position has been to cite the new constitution as evidence of a democratic opening in Guatemala. Last spring, the administration requested a 35% increase in overall aid to Guatemala. The requested increase included raising military assistance by 118 times over 1984 levels ($300,000 "military training assistance"). In August, Congress passed a foreign aid appropriations bill reducing the disbursement and placing restrictions on military assistance. The Senate-House Conference Committee compromise provided for the following restrictions: military assistance may be provided to Guatemala only if the president certifies that an elected government is in power which has submitted a formal request for military assistance, and that Guatemala has made progress in achieving control over military and security forces, eliminating kidnappings, disappearances, forced recruitment, other human rights abuses, and respects rights of the indigenous population." (Washington in Focus III:5 August 8, 1985)

If these conditions are met, Guatemala may be provided with up to $10 million for both fiscal years for construction equipment, and mobile medical facilities and related training. Funds may not be used to procure weapons and ammunition, and all military assistance is to be suspended in the event of a military coup. Neither military assistance nor development assistance and Economic Support Funds may be used for the "rural resettlement program" (part of the counterinsurgency). No restrictions have been imposed on military training assistance.

These limited restrictions have been explained by members of Congress as a manifestation of continued concern about the dismal human rights situation in Guatemala and of skepticism as to the legitimacy of the upcoming elections. The Reagan administration, however, clearly regards the November 3rd elections in Guatemala as the final requirement for the renewal of full-scale military aid. The certification process upon which military aid is contingent is vague and based entirely on the President's recommendation. Given both the circumscribed range of legal political activity in the country and the consolidation of military power, Congressional reticence is justified, and should be reinforced. It is crucial that constituents continue to pressure their representatives during and after the elections, to oppose military aid to Guatemala.

Guatemala Study Group

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The CUSLAR Newsletter provides CUSLAR members and other concerned individuals with the opportunity to present information and analysis on topics relevant to Latin America and the Caribbean. The positions of the authors do not necessarily reflect the positions of CUSLAR as an organization. If you are interested in writing an article for the Newsletter please call the CUSLAR office. We also welcome letters to the editors.
Bolivia Update

August 5: Victor Paz Estenssoro's MNRH (Historic Nationalist Revolutionary Movement) party wins a majority in the Bolivian Congress. Paz becomes the new president of Bolivia. The MNRH prepares a 'shock treatment effect' economic package in the hope of securing loans of up to one billion U.S. dollars from the U.S. Treasury, USAID, the World Bank and the InterAmerican Development Bank by the end of September. At the same time, the Bolivian military is promised salary increases and new hardware by the MNRH government. The COB (National Labor Federation) is worried about MNRH attempts to bolster a newly created parallel labor organization, the Confederacion General de Trabajadores de Bolivia.

August 29: Economic measures are announced, including the following:
- The peso is floated, and thereby effectively devalued by 95%.
- Wages are frozen until December.
- Gasoline prices are increased by 1,000%.
- Subsidies on basic foodstuffs are removed.
- The reorganization of state companies is announced, and dismissal of workers at state and private companies is authorized. Plans include closure of 4 state companies.

Two effects of these measures are a tenfold increase in some food prices, and a decrease in wages to the equivalent of $15-20 a month.

August 31: Bolivian miners begin a 48 hour strike. The COB is under growing pressure to call a general strike.

September 2: 10,000 workers march in La Paz in protest against the economic package. Miners and factory workers go out on strike, and other sectors threaten to join them. The police and army are 'on alert'.

September 4: A 48 hour general strike begins. During the following 2 weeks, attempts made by the Catholic Church to mediate achieve nothing. The strike is extended, and the COB states that the suspension of the economic austerity program is a precondition for talks. Troops are deployed to ensure the running of essential services.

September 19: The strike begins to 'fizzle out' in some sectors. The government declares a state of siege, to last for 90 days. Hundreds of soldiers supported by tanks take up positions in La Paz and other major cities. Riot police raid La Paz University, radio, and other buildings where strikers are assembled. An estimated 600 union leaders and strike supporters are arrested, including 18 members of the COB executive committee. Many are placed in internal exile and sent to remote northern areas near the border with Brazil. (Government figures show 145 in internal exile, but unofficial estimates claim up to 500.) Genaro Flores, leader of the Bolivian Peasant's Confederation, seeks refuge in Peru, along with 4 other leaders. Factory and mining workers, who form the core of the strike, go on a hunger strike with their families.

September 20 onwards: Between 3,000 and 5,000 people remain on hunger strike in the mining areas of Oruro and San Jose. The strikers say they will only negotiate with the government after the release of labor leaders.

October 3: The government announces the release of all those in internal exile, and offers to dialogue with the strikers. The State of Siege is to continue until December 19.
consist of delegates from each community, chosen by direct vote in proportion to the size of the community. The Assembly would pick an executive head to represent the region to the central government, and coordinate administration within the region. Both authorities must be ratified by the central government. Their powers would include: defining the socio-cultural and economic policies of the region; adapting national laws to the region's characteristics; proposing laws to the National Assembly; naming heads of local government institutions; participating in defining the best way to integrate the region's inhabitants into the nation's defense.

Although the region is to be "autonomous," clearly the process is not. The release of the Autonomy Plan has been delayed, apparently due in part to increased community desire for input, MISURASATA/ASLA involvement, and for debate by Commission members representing MISATAN. This suggests a growing participation at the local level, and demands for recognition of the Indian perspective—a good sign.

PART II
A CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The Left-Right Polarisation:

One third of the forces fighting the Nicaraguan revolutionary government have been Indian combatants fighting for Indian rights. Soon those forces may be fighting to defend their rights and land against the Contras, and with the Nicaraguan government—if the peace negotiations bear fruit.

The Indian war in Nicaragua has confused many people in North America. Opportunistic right-wing ideologues have praised and supported Indian warriors, with the result that
progressives, in turn, have discounted the integrity of the Indian cause. In an attempt to defend a beleaguered Nicaraguan government, opponents of US intervention in the region have tended to accept Sandinista policy on reflex.

In the ensuing chaos of charges and countercharges, the Indian position is rarely represented accurately — as a struggle independent of either the Left or Right. Sadly, by treating Sandinista "errors" lightly, and by assuming the Indians to be pawns of the Contras, the Nicaraguan government and its supporters have weakened their own cause of social justice.

If progressive non-Indian people, particularly whites, in North America are to begin to genuinely appreciate the high stakes in the struggle between the Sumu, Rama and Miskito peoples and the Sandinistas, there is first a lesson to be found in the history of Indian peoples in the US. Although many people in the solidarity movement automatically throw their support to the Sandinistas, we would never defend the ethnoicide, forced relocations, and the continuing desire by whites to possess and control the Indian land base in North America. In addition we would never defend cultural arrogance and racism — the polite "we know what's best for you" liberal racism, as well as acts of outright coercion — which characterize Indian-white relations on this continent.

Indigenous peoples have rarely experienced culturally respectful treatment at the hands of western-thinking societies anywhere in the Americas. Why, then, should progressive people be surprised when historically persistent problems arise in Nicaragua, a country in which prejudice by the dominant Hispanic culture against Indians is a historical legacy?

Russell Means, a prominent spokesperson in the American Indian Movement (AIM), emphasizes that the Indian struggle in Nicaragua "...is the same struggle that my people are involved in over our holy land that is South Dakota, and why the Dine [Navajo] Nation are fighting against forced relocation by the Reagan Administration. It is the same struggle, and it is not different from the tip of Tierra del Fuego to the Arctic Circle." (CSQ (9) 2)

Socialist ideology deepens an understanding of class divisions and has been a bulwark of progressive revolutions. But socialists have addressed racism and the domination by a majority culture only as appendages of class relations. A standard socialist formula was reiterated by Commandante William Ramirez, Minister of the Interior of the Atlantic Coast, in 1981: "By eliminating social classes, the Revolutionary Government will also eliminate the fundamental cause of racism and ethnocentrism." Revolutionary leftists have automatically reduced everyone within a nation to economic categories — working class, petit bourgeois, peasant. When Ladino Sandinistas entered Indian territory, ignorant of its unique history, and labeled Indian peoples as "campesinos," they were only following the predictable path dictated by ideological rigidity.

Indian cultures are different, very different, from European Judeo-Christian-evolved cultures. The socialist theory in use in Nicaragua, or in the U.S. among solidarity networks, is a European-based construct. When socialists meet face-on with people working from an Indian philosophical base, the assumption that socialism speaks a universal language, like the assumption of the universal appealability of Christianity, is going to have to be thrown out.

This is not to say socialist theory is no good — on the contrary. Socialist revolution can work hand in hand with genuine attempts to challenge cultural racism. But socialist thought is not enough; and, with its traditional emphasis on industrialism and economic centralism, is not necessarily appropriate for cultures arising out of an indigenous worldview.

After 1979, Indian peoples were generally optimistic that the revolutionary government would respect their rights. To their dismay, the FSLN initiated "development" policies for the Atlantic Coast which
were reminiscent of state and multinational
incursions onto Indian territory elsewhere in
the hemisphere. The Sandinistas proposed the
nationalization of huge portions of the Atlantic
Coast. Large-scale plantations under centralized
control were planned, some for export produc-
tion, some for local consumption. Many forest
lands were to be put in "preserve" status. Exclud-
ed from these nationalized tracts were the
parcels to be titled over to individuals or
communities. Indian communities were assur-
ed they would each be granted a community title
for the land on which its members live/reside
("habitats").

As reasonable as this may sound to people
accustomed to western concepts of property, it
is not the Atlantic Coast Indians' concept of
access to a traditional land base. Within the
territory of an Indian nation, indigenous people
have the right to use natural resources, hunt
and fish. Individuals or families might enjoy
use/tract rights over particular plots, but these
rights do not constitute ownership and often
shift over time. It cannot be overemphasized
that this concept of land use is integral to the
Indian culture, just as the idea of delineated
private property — whether held by an indivi-
dual, a corporation, or a centrally controlled
socialist state — is integral to western-thinking
peoples.

What's Wrong With Property Titles?

The concept of "aboriginal title" chal-
lenges the very idea that the Nicaraguan state,
or any state, possesses the right to grant titles
to Indian land. Fragmentation of Indian land
into discrete titled parcels — individual or
communal — endangers the basis of an
extended Indian nation: The very acceptance of
title to their own land from a central state is an
act of recognizing the jurisdiction of that
state. Titles, or the rights to land use accom-
pnying those title, can be bought and sold,
leased, encumbered, or transferred through
grants according to the changing laws of the
centralized government.

The Indian focus tends to be on implica-
tions for future generations. The Nicaraguan
government has made efforts to protect rights
by declaring the title non-transferable. But
what happens to Indian children who, through
movement or generational exclusion, no longer
have rights in a particular titled community?
Do they have the right to be anything but a
Nicaraguan citizen without any aboriginal
rights? This was precisely the intent of the US
government's Allotment Act in the 1890s, and
it could be the effect anywhere. Titled com-
community land may prove to be a strategy which
dispossesses a people of both land and culture
within a century.

That there is nearly always land "left
over" after titling — which can then go on the
market or revert to the state — is rarely a coin-
cidence. If an Indian individual can possess
aboriginal rights in any of the titled communi-
ties, what has been accomplished by title
except the drastic reduction — theft — of Indian
land? Iroquois scholar John Mohawk would be
correct in saying "Were the Sandinista position
to be adopted by the U.S., the Black Hills
would be automatically forfeited and the
Sioux claim would be limited to the town limi-
Socialist Transformation - What Went Wrong?

In early 1981, recognizing the implications of government land policy, Indian leaders were about to present a document for negotiations on the extent of their aboriginal territory. The document would also call for the territorial autonomy of Indian land within the Nicaraguan state. Indian-Sandinista relations had already been strained by cultural insensitivity by government representatives and the military presence. When 33 MISURASATA leaders were arrested and charged with a separatist plot, relations were shattered. Many coastal people, mostly Miskito, but including some Sumu, Rama, and Creoles, took up arms and, frequently, anti-communist rhetoric.

The Indians who mobilized along the Rio Coco began their armed struggle well before the Contras were a significant counterrevolutionary force on the Atlantic Coast. The hostilities originated in the government’s narrow focus on “development” objectives and its insensitivity over seemingly negotiable issues. Reports of harassment, arrest, and even the death of Indian dissidents provided a cruel contradiction to the original sense of an historic opportunity to control one’s own destiny brought by the revolution. In view of the depth of distrust between the Revolutionary Government and the Indians in 1981, the forced evacuation of Miskito villages along the Rio Coco was a poor strategy, to say the least.

Until very recently the Nicaraguan government and supporters have interpreted the Indian response as “counterrevolutionary.” Official documents and solidarity literature have asserted that the Indian people are “politically backward,” and prone to reactionary “manipulation.” These weaknesses are allegedly due to the filter of an “ethnic prism;” the “racism and separatism” of Indian leaders; the efforts of Moravian missionaries, British and Americans to poison their thoughts against the “Spanish;” and the “simple” ways and thoughts of the Indian people. Taking a prominent place are the manipulations of Steadman Fagoth of MISURA, who, one would think after reading much of the literature, is personally responsible for hoodwinking the majority.
of Indian fighters into battle against the FSLN.

If the Miskito, Sumu, and Rama peoples are able to think for themselves at all, and choose their own course of action based on a sense of their rights, this has been overlooked by uncritical supporters of the revolution. The "reasons" cited for Indian resistance—outside, manipulative forces, or Indian simpleness—cannot be the product of "moving too fast," and ignorant youthful overenthusiasm, or worse, that the good of the majority demands that the minority concede their rights.

Tragically, the Sandinistas have brought the anger of Indian peoples down on themselves. Anti-communist ideologues warned that the new government would steal the peoples’ land, take away their rights, herd people onto state farms, and make them toe a strict political line. When the Sandinistas proposed to unilaterally nationalize the Indian land base, arbitrarily arrested the entire Indian leadership, forcibly relocated over 40 (out of 200) Miskito villages onto preplanned settlements (expecting people to be grateful for material amenities), and denounced non-supporters as counterrevolutionary—what would any people with a measure of common sense conclude? These actions were in direct contradiction to the successful, community-based revolutionary projects on the Pacific Coast. Anti-communist rhetoric was predictably appealing.

The Negotiations in Perspective

Dispossession of Indian land and cultures has left a bitter resentment in the minds of Indian people up and down the Americas. The Miskito, Sumu, and Rama peoples in Nicaragua have the advantage of a historical perspective on the ways in which Indian people can be used as pawns between two colonizing powers. Within international networks like the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, and delegations to the United Nations Working Group, tribes and nations share their histories and concerns for the future. At the 1977 U.N. sponsored Forum on the Rights of the Indians of the Americas, indigenous spokespeople released a Declaration of Principles for the Defense of the Indigenous Nations and Peoples of the Western Hemisphere which outlined thirteen basic principles for indigenous land rights and self-determination.

Indian support for the MISURASATA position is consistent with the positions of this document and the stand many indigenous peoples are taking to defend their land base, from Canada to Chile. MISURASATA, and now ASLA, has formulated its demands within an understanding of the hemispheric alliance of Indian people, as well as an analysis of their own Nicaraguan realities. There are precedents for the kind of autonomy MISURASATA/ASLA is seeking within the Nicaraguan national territory, such as the Shuar Federation in Ecuador. Nothing in an autonomy treaty would necessarily exclude negotiations with the government for access to natural resources in Indian territory, nor alliance in mutual self-defense. Contrary to the image the U.S. State Department and the CIA are trying to create, the U.S. is recognized as a primary violator of Indian human, cultural, and land rights.

MISURASATA’s insistence on the participation of indigenous observers at negotiations should be understood within the context of a movement of indigenous peoples, working from their own philosophical base to settle questions of land-use and community status.

The government’s Autonomy Commission is a significant step, but its proposal ignores the central issue some 10,000 Indians have taken up arms to defend: the traditional land base of the Sumu, Rama, and Miskito peoples. In its place, the government proposes to disregard traditional territorial rights and treat each autonomous area as a unified piece of land under "regional ownership." Ratification and oversight powers are reserved for the central national government.

The autonomy proposal attempts to provide representation for each "ethnic" group: Sumu, Rama, Miskito, Creole, Garifuna, and Mestizo. In the last 30 years, thousands of Pacific Coast people have migrated to the...
Atlantic Coast cities and interior. Many immigrants to the area are poor Mestizo farmers who had no access to land under Somora’s regime. The advancing agricultural frontier sometimes overlaps traditional Indian territory, and Mestizos have become the majority population in the region.

The Autonomy Commission proposal itself does not specify how delegates to the Regional Assembly would be elected, and newspaper reports are conflicting: one states that representation will be proportional; another that each group will be equally represented. Proportional representation would assure Mestizo domination of political affairs in the southern region. With the continuing influx of Pacific coast settlers, administrators and technicians, there is no guarantee indigenous peoples would be a majority for long in the north.

However, if Indian territorial rights were to be settled in a negotiated treaty between Indian nations and the Nicaraguan government, a proposal to subsequently provide some form of equal representation for each cultural group in a regional council might be a creative innovation worth exploring.

Social and Economic Development and Race

Even ostensibly beneficial programs can be tools of assimilation. The pre-planned export agricultural projects in relocation camps are clearly intended to make Indians “contribute” to the national economy. But surely in a popular democracy they should be able to choose how and when.

Up and down the Americas, Indians have been moved onto western-style farms as a popular and explicit assimilation policy. As late as the 1950s, U.S. Cooperative Extension openly pursued this strategy.

The Sandinistas and supporters have consistently praised themselves for the health, literacy, and sanitation facilities at Tasba Pri as if those, in themselves, would legitimize other unacceptable policies, including the forced resettlement of a quarter of all Miskito villages.

Of course, a few people in any culture are willing to exchange their loyalty to their people for material goods. But would the Sandinistas ask an entire people to exchange their cultural identity and self-determination for desperately needed health care? If not, the Sandinista and solidarity literature should take much more care when weighing new sanitation facilities against the cause of Indian combatants.

A classic example of this kind of thinking is in the most recent Central American Bulletin (8/85), in a section entitled “Ethnicity and Class.” The article speaks of the disruption of traditional agriculture, housing arrangements, hunting and fishing, removal from the riverine/savannah environment to a tropical forest, and the break-up of family structures as alterations which have the seriousness of, say, an Anglo family moving from Chicago to the St.Louis suburbs. It enthusiastically continues, “On the other hand, positive reports of a self-sufficient and self-managed Tasba Pri with its numerous health, educational benefits have also emerged...Tasba Pri residents are also receiving subsidized basic foodstuffs, tools, potable water and electricity, which for the most part were not available to them on the Rio Coco.” In summary, the section notes that the question of “[Tasba Pri’s] overall popularity can only really be answered when conditions allow for an unrestricted Rio Coco resettlement option.” With the emptying of Tasba Pri, the answer is clear.
Popular Control and Democracy

Racism—the exercise of power by a group that perceives itself to be superior and which wields authority in a society— and discrimination will also continue in a myriad of stubborn everyday forms. The Ladino traders on the river, Pacific Coast administrators, many technicians and members of the army come from a culture which holds Indian people in deep contempt.

Although both parties have prejudicial stereotypes of each other, the racism flows only one way: exercising the sense of superiority of the dominant group. Despite the stated intentions of the Nicaraguan government, its policies, like the policies within the U.S., may put pressure on Indian people to take on majority culture habits in order to be treated without disdain. This is a form of ethnocide.

Official Sandinista documents still seem to interpret “culture” as singing and dancing, while assuring the reader that they intend to protect non-majority cultures. If an Indian people were to lose their traditional land base and aboriginal rights of self-determination, they would lose an essential defense against the violence of racism. Their indignation and repeated rebellion could only be expected.

The fight by Indian peoples in Nicaragua has revealed the ugly edges of any revolution which is directed by a cultural majority. If this chapter of socialist transformation has taught us anything, we can work to incorporate the following principles in future work:

1. Dynamic, non-reactionary worldviews exist outside the capitalist-socialist paradigm.
2. Racism/cultural arrogance is not simply a result of the economic structure of a society, but is a cultural factor embedded in the cultural practices and philosophies of some peoples. Capitalist and narrow socialist worldviews are the legacy of an expansionist European culture which has a tendency to see the options in terms of polar (correct/incorrect) ideologies, delineated property rights, and a pervasive belief in progress through conversion.

3. Social justice cannot be measured in health clinics, land titles, literacy campaigns, or running water provided for a people, but in the equality of access to social justice within a context of cultural self-determination.

The Miskito, Sumu, and Rama nations have been fighting a war which has been characterized by the left as a counterrevolutionary struggle—a policy arm of the CIA. We who support the revolution must expand our understanding at this critical time when there is an opening between Indian people and the Nicaraguan government. The efforts of Nicaraguan solidarity groups in opposition to U.S. intervention are crucial. Equally important will be the willingness of progressive people to educate ourselves about the movements of indigenous peoples to protect their cultural and territorial rights. Lack of knowledge of the indigenous perspective has been painfully evident in progressive literature, and has obscured the true activities of the CIA, distinct from Indian struggles for rights in a complex situation.

Non-Intervention

The legitimacy of a dynamic, independent, Indian struggle (such as ASLA’s) should become increasingly apparent to progressive people as the Contras and the U.S. State Department stonewall Indian efforts at genuine autonomy. Since it has refused to recognize Indian rights, all but a handful of Indians have cut their ties with UNO. The last thing the right wing wants to see is a treaty relation between the Nicaraguan government and Indian nations.

Indian alliances have been, excluding Steadman Fagoth, very pragmatic. Many Indian people accepted arms and aid from the Contras. Nonetheless, they fought their own war on their own terms.

The Indian-Contra alliance was fatally shaken by U.S. public opposition to U.S. military/CIA aid for the Contras. As Rivera has noted, there is little doubt that the Nicaraguan Government will be more amenable to Indian needs than the Contras. The Contras and their supporters have never been
interested in Indian rights.

Many Indian leaders were enthusiastic about the revolution in 1979. Now, despite betrayals and the ensuing war, many of those same leaders are still anxious to see the revolution succeed, "because it is a revolution of the poor." There is much at stake. As John Mohawk has noted in 1982, "If the Sandinista government continues its policy, it will build a wall between national liberation struggles and Indians in Central America which no amount of rhetoric about revolution can penetrate, and without the support and involvement of Indians, liberation struggle in Latin America is an impossibility."

Our most pressing task as progressive people is to stop U.S. intervention in order to protect the possibility of a just and culturally respectful revolution on both coasts of Nicaragua. If the revolutionary government and people of Nicaragua open the door to indigenous self-determination, and move through the crippling contradictions of colonial history, it will be a truly significant model for radical change worldwide. It is indeed a profound challenge.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Oct. 12</td>
<td>Sweet Honey and the Rock</td>
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<td>8pm  Bailey Hall</td>
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<td>Oct. 17</td>
<td>CUSLAR film: Up to a Certain Point (Cuba, 1984). The film, a</td>
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<td>social comedy about a married-middle aged screen-writer, is both a</td>
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<td>modern love story, and an insider's look at the daily life of</td>
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<td>8pm  Big Red Barn.</td>
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<td>Oct. 25,26</td>
<td>CUSLAR Annual Rummage sale</td>
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<td>10am-6pm One World Room, Anabel Taylor Hall</td>
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<td>Oct. 26</td>
<td>Marimba Band K'anil</td>
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<td>8pm  GIAC, 318 N Albany St.</td>
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<td>Music and Food.</td>
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<td>Oct. 27</td>
<td>Talk by Judith McDaniel, a member of the Witness-for-Peace delegation which was captured</td>
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<td>by the Contras. Unitarian Church, corner of Buffalo and Aurora Sts.</td>
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<td>Oct. 29</td>
<td>Curt Wands, Coordinator of the Guatemala Health Rights Support project will speak on the</td>
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<td>situation of health care and health care providers in Guatemala.</td>
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<td>Nov. 7</td>
<td>CUSLAR film: Short Circuit (Inside the Death Squad) (El Salvador, 1985)</td>
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<td>A first hand account of the internal workings of El Salvador's infamous death squads, and</td>
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<td>the involvement of the United States' CIA in that country.</td>
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<td>Uri's Auditorium. Premiere showing in Ithaca</td>
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<td>Nov. 10</td>
<td>Bright Morning Star</td>
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<td></td>
<td>8pm  Anabel Taylor Auditorium</td>
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<td>Nov. 14</td>
<td>&quot;Political and Legal Aspects of Repression of Puerto Rican Independistas&quot;</td>
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<td>Presentation by Rita Zengotita, the President of the Comite Unitario Contra la Repression</td>
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<td>en Puerto Rico and Rafael Anglada, Center for Constitutional Rights. Both Ms. Zengotita</td>
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<td>and Mr. Anglada have been very involved in pending cases of</td>
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<td>Puerto Rican political prisoners. Location to be announced.</td>
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<td>Nov. 16</td>
<td>Roy Brown and Aires Bucaneros Concert.</td>
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<td>8pm  Puerto Rican leaders in the 'New Song Movement'</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Martha van Rensselear Auditorium. (See inside also)</td>
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Cuslar

The Committee on U.S./Latin American Relations (CUSLAR), a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy, is a Cornell University-based group which works in Ithaca and the surrounding area to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. We are particularly concerned with the role of the United States in influencing the social, political, and economic conditions of the region.

The CUSLAR office is in G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall at Cornell. (256 7293) The office is open to the community on weekdays. Weekly meetings are held on Mondays at 5pm in Anabel Taylor.

Guatemalan Marimba Band Coming
October 24 and 26

For centuries, the native Maya people of the isolated mountains of Guatemala have called their communities together with the mellow but lively tones of the Marimba. The Marimba is an instrument resembling a vibraphone, with a series of wooden keys tuned to a scale. Marimbás vary in size, but most have 20 keys and are played by 4 people. With each performer playing a distinctive part, a bass, melody, and harmonies are created that often give the impression of listening to a group of different instruments. Maya Marimbás are played "by ear" through a painstaking process of memorization and coordination between players.

The Marimba K'anil is made up of 4 Mayas, 2 Jecaltecs and 2 Kanjobals, who until recently lived on two sides of a sacred mountain named K'anil. They are among thousands of Guatemalans who have had to flee their homes because of military attacks on their villages. Miraculously, they were able to carry out their Marimba on their backs into Mexico, and now, as in the past, it serves to bring together the remaining Maya community that cannot return home. Their music includes both sacred and festive pieces, as well as more popular Latin American songs.

CREDIT
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