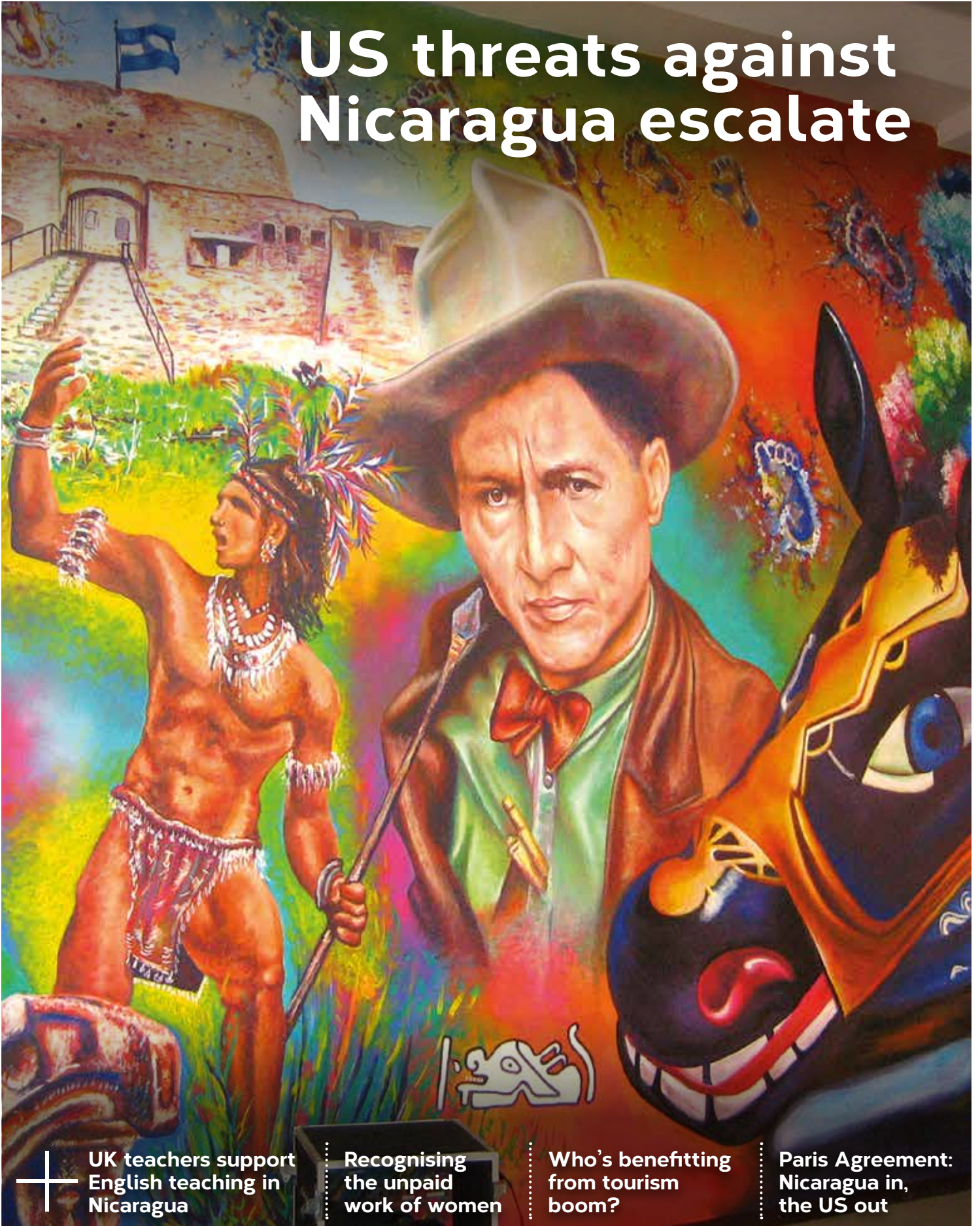


US threats against Nicaragua escalate



UK teachers support
English teaching in
Nicaragua

Recognising
the unpaid
work of women

Who's benefitting
from tourism
boom?

Paris Agreement:
Nicaragua in,
the US out

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NICARAGUA NOW

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COVER PHOTO Mural depicting the history of Nicaragua in the Ministry of Education building in Managua painted by Rolando Bojorge Photo credit: Gill Holmes

DESIGN Tom Lynton

The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign has taken all reasonable care to ensure that the information contained in this edition of Nicaragua Now is accurate on the stated date of publication. The views expressed in the articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, unless otherwise stated.

Tropical and political storms converge

Nicaragua's location, in both the 'backyard' of the US and the path of storms and hurricanes, has determined the shape of the country's history over the past two centuries; developments in the first week of October epitomised the kind of political and environmental pressures the country faces as a result. On 3 October, the US House of Representatives approved the Nicaraguan Investment Conditionality Act, the so-called NICA Act. The following day Tropical Storm Nate caused the death of 16 people and extensive destruction with its heavy rain and winds.

If approved by the Senate and signed off by Trump, the NICA Act would see the US using its influence in international lending institutions to block all loans to Nicaragua from the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank and other institutions. Running at US\$250 million annually, these loans are being invested in education, social programmes, electrification, roads and other infrastructure initiatives.

It would create economic instability and reverse the Nicaraguan government's highly successful poverty reduction programme; the most impoverished will suffer the most serious consequences. It could also have a knock-on effect across the region and increase the flow of migrants to the US.

The NICA Act has met with near unanimous condemnation in Nicaragua

from the government, the National Assembly, trade unions, the private sector, almost all political parties, religious leaders and 77% of Nicaraguans, according to the most recent opinion poll. The Organisation of American States (OAS), that has a delegation in Nicaragua to observe the 5 November municipal elections, has also criticised the Act as 'counterproductive'.

The Nicaraguan government described that Act as 'irrational, offensive, harmful to the human rights of Nicaraguans, and a violation of Nicaragua's sovereignty.'

According to the US-based Nicaragua Network, the NICA Act is likely to face greater opposition in the Senate, reflecting the view of Texan Democrat Vicente Gonzalez in the House of Representatives. He objected to the bill because it could strain relations with Nicaragua and lead to instability and migration to the US through his Texas district. He also pointed out Nicaragua's advances in reducing poverty, increasing economic growth and addressing climate change.

As Nicaragua once again struggles to get back on its feet after the death and destruction of Storm Nate, we condemn the efforts of some members of the US Congress who, rather than offering a helping hand, seem intent on crippling the country's growth and its poverty-reduction initiatives.

The Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign (NSC) and NSCAG work with Nicaraguan organisations and social movements fighting for social and economic justice by promoting and seeking support for their activities. We carry this out through * speaker tours of the UK by representatives of our partner organisations * facilitating mutual

solidarity between UK and Nicaraguan trade unions * organising events to raise funds and awareness about Nicaragua and our partners' work * publishing news, briefings, articles and online updates * providing support for Wales NSC and 12 towns and communities in the UK with twinning links in Nicaragua

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NSC www.nicaraguasc.org.uk NSCAG www.nscag.org

f Nicaragua-Solidarity nicaraguasc

Wales NSC www.walesnicaragua.wordpress.com

Twin towns and other groups with projects in Nicaragua
www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/solidarity/twin-towns

Paris Climate Agreement: the US out, Nicaragua in

John Perry, representative in Nicaragua of the Leicester-Masaya Link Group, explains why, despite scepticism, Nicaragua has decided to sign the Agreement.



While Donald Trump gives the appearance of wavering over his decision to pull the US out of the Paris Climate Agreement, Nicaragua has decided to sign it. It was one of only two countries not to sign in Paris in 2015, the other being Syria. Nicaragua abstained out of principle that the agreement didn't go far enough. The target – to prevent the average global temperature from rising no more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels – was not only too high but also very unlikely to be met. An unfair burden was being put on developing nations and not enough money promised to help build low-carbon economies.

When President Daniel Ortega returned to power in 2007 after 16 years of neoliberal governments, most of Nicaragua's electricity was produced by burning oil. Nicaragua was the poorest country in Central America but had the highest electricity prices. Shortages led to daily blackouts.

Ten years later, blackouts are much less frequent, prices have stabilised and more than half the electricity comes from renewable sources, with a realistic aim of reaching 90 per cent by 2020. Costa Rica has already exceeded that target, but three-quarters is via hydroelectricity, which may become increasingly vulnerable as climate change worsens.

'The technology exists, the capital exists, the urgency exists, what is lacking is greater political will on the part of the largest emitters.'

Dr Paul Oquist

Nicaraguan Minister for Public Policy



Nicaragua's energy matrix is more balanced, using wind, geothermal, solar and biomass alongside hydro. See page 6.

While Latin America has plentiful renewable sources for electricity generation, the next challenge in reducing emissions is transportation. Even in the bigger cities, public transport is often inefficient and deemed unattractive to the growing numbers who can afford cars. Weaning people off petrol or diesel cars and onto public transport demands a major change in mindset for the increasingly affluent whose point of reference is Miami. In a continent where railways have fallen into disuse and only the poor take buses, infrastructure investment means building more roads.

Latin America is a major supplier of 'ecosystem services', principally the huge tropical forests that absorb carbon. North of the Amazon, Nicaragua has the largest area of tropical forest in the hemisphere, but it is under constant threat from settlement, especially for cattle ranching. President Ortega has granted a Chinese company, HKND, the rights to build an inter-oceanic canal, rivaling Panama. He argues that the income from the canal will strengthen the economy which in turn will enable Nicaragua to protect water sources, defend the remaining forests and replant as many areas as possible.

Nicaragua has suffered several years of limited rainy seasons. The prognosis is for the droughts to worsen, threatening production of food, coffee and other crops. Yet the country generates only 0.03% of global carbon emissions – a negligible 0.8 metric tonnes per head annually. By comparison, Costa Rica produces twice that amount per head, the UK eight times and the US twenty times.

If developed countries are serious about the Paris Agreement, they will put money into helping poor countries achieve higher living standards without raising emissions. Even the IMF agrees. But Nicaragua's scepticism about the likelihood of it happening is more than justified, even when, as an 'act of solidarity' with the poorest and most vulnerable nations, it goes ahead and signs.

This is an edited version of an article first published in the *London Review of Books* blog, 3 October, 2017

UK teachers support English teaching in Nicaraguan schools

In 2016, **Christine Blower** and **Samidha Garg**, International Secretary and International Officer of the then National Union of Teachers (NUT)* visited Nicaragua at the invitation of their sister union ANDEN.

The purpose of that visit was to re-establish relations between the NUT and ANDEN and look at ways in which the NUT could provide practical solidarity. During the visit, ANDEN identified English language teaching as a priority area, given its importance in terms of boosting employment prospects for young people and promoting Nicaragua as a tourist destination. (See page 9.)

As a result, in July this year a delegation of 11 teachers, all NUT members, embarked on a three-week visit to the Nicaraguan teachers' union, ANDEN.

The visit focussed on the methodology of teaching a second language. The NUT members, all of whom were experienced teachers of Spanish as a second language,

“This was an amazing opportunity; I have grown and developed not only as a teacher but as a person and I believe my students will further benefit from this.”

*On 1 September, the NUT merged with the Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) to form the National Education Union, NEU. With more than 450,000 members, the NEU is now the UK's largest education union.

took part in workshops and practical sessions with Nicaraguan English teachers.

During the visit, they stayed in the homes of ANDEN members and learned something about the Nicaraguan way of life.

On returning to the UK, members of the group met in London to discuss their experiences and ways the NEU (NUT Section)* might follow up the initiative next year, both in Nicaragua and the UK. They are already sharing their experiences with their own schools and union branches, promoting the importance of international solidarity and enhancing knowledge about other countries.

Delegation member Catherine Wright commented: “This was an amazing opportunity; I have grown and developed not only as a teacher but as a person and I believe my students will further benefit from this. It has also been very useful to see another educational model, one which I think our Government could learn a lot from.”

Education centre stage for the Nicaraguan government

Before the FSLN (Sandinista National Liberation Front) was re-elected in 2007, education in Nicaragua had been privatised during 17 years of neo-liberal governments. From 1990-2007, maintenance and infrastructure funds were withheld, teachers were the lowest paid in Central America and parents had to pay for school fees, uniforms, tests, janitorial services, grade completion certificates and more. For many families it was a stark choice between feeding their families and sending their children to school. The FSLN's return to government meant a return to revolutionary ideals, giving everyone the right to education, health care, decent housing and proper nutrition. One of President Ortega's first acts was to reverse the privatisation of education. Although Nicaragua is the second poorest country in the Americas, education is a priority for the Government, which has increased the education budget year on year.

The FSLN government introduced social programmes to ensure that all children can

benefit from education. Among these is the school meals programme, which guarantees all pupils one good meal a day. In poor urban neighbourhoods and rural areas where food security is a major issue, the meals programme and school garden programme provide incentives for families to keep their children in class. Pupil retention rates now stand at 95% in primary and 86% in secondary schools. Continual teacher training has been introduced throughout the country to encourage young people into the teaching profession.

NUT delegation member Joe Wittington commented: ‘Saturday schools for rural communities and specialist teacher training colleges for students as young as 16 help to establish education as a platform from which Nicaraguans can realistically dream of a release from poverty’.

Unite the Union stands in solidarity with the people of Nicaragua

www.uniteunion.org

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[Uniteunion1](https://www.facebook.com/Uniteunion1)



Len McCluskey,
General Secretary

Tony Woodhouse,
Chair – Executive Council



NUT delegation with José Antonio Zepeda, ANDEN general secretary; Antonia Vilchez, Finance Secretary; and Bernarda López, Organisation Secretary and Training Co-ordinator

A warm welcome in Nicaragua

British teachers are not usually treated as celebrities, but a three-week stay in Nicaragua organised by the National Union of Teachers, Nicaraguan teachers' union, ANDEN, Nicaragua's Ministry of Education and the NSCAG gave eleven of us an unexpected fifteen minutes of fame.

We were recognised in the street, having appeared on national and regional television and radio channels. Extended news features showed us teaching lessons and delivering professional development sessions to teachers, as well as direct interviews. Coming from the UK, where teachers are more likely to be criticised than praised in the media, it was a pleasant surprise to be the focus of such positive coverage.

Since returning to power in 2007, the FSLN government under the presidency of Daniel Ortega has placed education centre stage, and the latest step in ensuring Nicaraguan secondary school students are prepared for the future is to increase

the focus on learning English. Our role was to share the everyday good practice of UK Modern Languages classes with Nicaraguan teachers.

Resourceful lessons without resources

That said, Nicaraguan secondary school classrooms are challenging environments. Most classes have up to fifty students seated in seminar-style chairs with no technology and little by way of resources apart from a white board. Classrooms are hot; the only ventilation comes through open doors and windows which also let in outside noise.

These limitations forced us to reassess our heavy reliance on technology, as we planned and delivered a two-day conference in Managua for sixty Nicaraguan English teachers using mainly markers and flipcharts. The Nicaraguan teachers had fun finding out how classroom games build confidence and knowledge, and took home new ways of learning to practise in their classrooms and share with other teachers in their schools.

Walking the walk

Following a week's stay in the capital, Managua, we travelled in pairs to Masaya, Granada, Carazo, Chinandega, Estelí and Managua, where we were allocated to schools and lived with families.

As we wanted to walk the walk, as well as talk the talk, we taught grades seven to ten (ages twelve to sixteen), to show how the practice, pedagogy and methodology familiar to UK teachers can work in Nicaraguan secondary schools.

Why would we spend three weeks of our summer holiday teaching in more challenging conditions than in the UK? Seeing the determination with which Nicaraguans are putting a history of war and deprivation behind them to focus on a future in which education is the key to progress, made this a rewarding and gratifying exchange, as was witnessing what can be achieved when the teachers' union and department of education work in harmony.

Julie Lamin, delegation member

Nicaragua: ‘A model for the world in the shift to green energy’

Nicaragua Now explains how the Nicaraguan government and community energy programmes are transforming energy generation to renewables.

Since 2007, one of the Nicaraguan government’s priorities has been to end the country’s dependence on oil, transform energy supplies to renewables, prioritise efficiency, and achieve universal access to energy.

In 2007, only 25% of Nicaragua’s energy came from renewable sources. By 2014 this had increased to 52% in

what Inter-American Development Bank President Luis Alberto Moreno, described as “a model for the world on the shift to renewable energy.”

A combination of a favourable location, political will, and economic stability has created a positive climate for investment in renewables. Harnessing the country’s volcanoes, sun, wind and water has

transformed energy generation through solar, geothermal, hydroelectric, and wind power, together with biomass from sugar cane, palm oil, and urban waste.

As part of Nicaragua’s contribution to the global fight against climate change, the government target is 90% renewables by 2020. Nicaraguan Minister for Public Policy Paul Oquist points out: “If Nicaragua, the poorest country in the Americas can make these advances, surely the largest carbon emitters can increase their levels of ambition.”

Community renewable energy transforms lives

Since 1994 community energy has transformed the lives of the 8,000 inhabitants in the remote mountain towns of San José de Bocay and El Cua.

From sleepy towns that went to bed at 8pm at night and rose at 4am in the morning, these war-torn villages with roads that were pure mud or dust, have prospered greatly since their small hydro plants began running. The plants serve homes, farms, small businesses, cell-phone towers, health posts, two large hospitals, churches, and rural schools.

The plants were constructed by the NGO, Nicaragua Association of Rural Development Workers – Ben Linder (ATDER-BL), whose engineers, contract workers and local volunteers built the turbine, dam and 1,300 metre pipeline. ATDER-BL also provides solar panels, trains farmers in soil conservation and runs reforestation campaigns.

ATDER-BL founder Ben Linder was a US mechanical engineer who worked on the Bocay hydroelectric plant in 1985 during the US-backed contra war. He was killed by the contra in 1985 and remains a symbol of international solidarity.

Further information: www.atder-bl.org

Installing solar panels to provide power to pump water from the well to the tank to supply water to the community and irrigate crops



Solar powered irrigation system enables families to make a living

The community of El Timal, Masaya, is in the almost forgotten area between Nicaragua’s two large lakes, with practically no transport links and no electricity supply.

After the US-backed Contra War ended in 1990, Northern Nicaraguan families were relocated here, and 20 families now live on the site of an abandoned sugar mill, eking out a living through farming.

The soil is very fertile but could only be farmed in the rainy season – May to November – because of the lack of irrigation. The well that once served the sugar plantation is deep and has a narrow bore, making it very difficult to operate by hand.

A group of women from the community approached rural development association ADIC seeking

support to set up a solar-powered pump to irrigate their land using the well water.

With funding from the British Embassy and Leicester (Masaya’s twin town), the pump, powered by two solar panels, was installed inside the well. The water feeds into a header tank that provides the community with a 24-hour water supply and irrigates their crops.

The constant water supply helps the community produce more vegetables and fruit for their own consumption and to sell at the markets.

ADIC has a bid pending with the German embassy in Nicaragua for a second scheme on a similar site in the area.

Further information: www.twoworlds.me/latin-america/solar-powered-irrigation-system-starts-to-pump-water/
www.leicestermasayalink.org.uk

Protecting a rural community's lifeline – its water source

International Citizen Service (ICS) volunteer ***Douglas Mascarenhas-Keyes** describes how the community of El Bálsamo, Matagalpa, protect their water source.

On a brisk winter morning the men, women, and children from nearly every household in El Bálsamo struggled up the steep hills with equipment ranging from sharpened machetes to soap and old rags to fix and clean the community's ageing water system.

El Bálsamo is a village of sixty-three households living mainly from subsistence farming of coffee, maize, bananas and plantains. Many families live on less than US\$5 a day. Stretching across a 4km circumference of the main road, the community relies on a simple yet efficient water system.

The system's infrastructure consists of a network of concrete water tunnels, a 7m² concrete tank, a large tube network and protective fences. Built in 1998 to provide clean drinking water for a population which has since doubled in size, it is nearing the end of its life.

Added to this, Nicaragua is ranked the fourth most susceptible country in the world to climate change. This means

the country will be increasingly prone to irregular weather patterns, decreased rainfall and a higher risk of drought, even in the rainy agricultural region. A clean, regular, reliable water supply has never been more important.

So at 6am on 19 July many of its beneficiaries, organised by the **Clean Water and Sanitation Committee (CAPS) started fixing and cleaning the system. This is vital to the health and wellbeing of the population as pressure leaks, animals, and any contamination can inflict serious problems. To prevent contamination by agriculture and wildlife, the community constructed a new fence around the water source, and mended damaged pipes to ensure the efficiency of the network.

It is not only the community-wide maintenance of the infrastructure that protects the water source, but also a co-ordinated approach that includes peer-to-peer education and training.

Volunteer promoters of FECSA (Envi-

ronmental Education Strategy for Integrated Sanitation: Families, Schools and Communities) train community members on sanitary and health practices, and the importance and maintenance of natural resources, such as safe drinking water. At El Bálsamo's school pupils learn about the Nicaragua's geography, water resources, and environment, and how they can help protect them.

The Raleigh International team of 12 young volunteers from Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Britain and Norway spent 12 weeks living and working with families in El Bálsamo. They contributed through a WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) project, and also conducted peer-to-peer training, workshops and awareness raising activities on waste management and upcycling. As part of the project, they also trained local entrepreneurs looking to start business that would benefit the community. Roger, one of them, has started his own business building eco-latrines that reduce the risk of long-term soil and water contamination.

In El Bálsamo it is clear to see the benefits of practical action as well as awareness raising with the local community at its forefront to protect not only its water source but the general wellbeing of the community.



Building a fence to protect the water source from wildlife

*Douglas was an International Citizen Service (ICS) volunteer with Raleigh International, a sustainable development organisation working through, for and with young people to create lasting change. ICS is a UK governmental initiative that sends 18-35 year olds on volunteering projects in nineteen countries.
Further information: www.volunteer.ics.org
www.raleighinternational.org

**Nicaragua's water law defines the state as the owner of all water resources. In order to ensure community access to clean water and sanitation, particularly in rural areas, the law gives communities the right to manage their water resources through setting up Drinking Water and Sanitation Committees (CAPS). These committees also have wider responsibilities for environmental protection and the wellbeing of their communities. There are over 5,000 CAPS in Nicaragua responsible for water supplies for over one million people.

Invisible link: recognising the unpaid labour of women in Nicaragua

Signe Akmenkalne interviews **Felicity Butler** about her PhD on how the previously unpaid labour of women and girls can be not only recognised but also integrated into the pricing of products.

Felicity's research has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and The Body Shop, who source sesame oil from Juan Francisco Paz Silva cooperative in Achuapa. The research involves a collaboration between Nicaraguan co-operatives, The Body Shop and the ethical trading company ETICO, to transform pricing policies so that unpaid work is remunerated.

Women's work is starting to be recognised in the Fair Trade (FT) industry, but the shift is slow. As Felicity explains, "Traditionally, the price for commodity products such as sesame and coffee includes only direct inputs and labour costs and fails to recognise or take into account the unpaid work that supports production." This labour is an essential contribution not only to production but society as a whole: women run households, raise children, cook and wash for the men who then go out to work in the fields.

Felicity's research will enable new policies and pricing methods to be designed

"The highly unequal distribution of unpaid and paid work is at the root of all-pervasive gender inequalities... we need to discuss these issues more and push for what some feminists call a people centred economy driven not by profit but the prioritisation of human needs and wellbeing."

Felicity Butler

to include a premium that recognises the previously ignored labour.

ETICO, an ethical business initiative working within coffee and sesame production chains in co-operation with partner organisations, is changing its pricing policy to allow a premium which recognises the unpaid labour mainly but not exclusively done by women. The initiative aims to "create a revolving credit fund for women to access. The sesame co-operative decided to make it compulsory for the women to have individual and group savings as well as individual and group businesses. They hope it will lead to collective empowerment with a potential for not only an economic impact but also a social shift. It has great potential to positively affect pricing strategies and create a race to the top for ethical buyers with other buyers wanting to match this successful pricing scheme. It could also change and influence certification standards which is particularly pertinent as there is an increasing interest in women's empowerment and climate change."

"The pricing initiative has started discussions on women's contribution within Nicaragua and far beyond. "The highly unequal distribution of unpaid and paid work is at the root of power relations between men and women and all-pervasive gender inequalities. The predominance of women in this work is not a result of their free choice or their relative efficiency or inefficiency. The division of work between men and women is largely a social construct determined by patriarchal traditions and values, and therein the way we measure economies is inherently sexist."

Over the four year period of her research Felicity has witnessed significant change and benefits. Examples include more women joining co-operatives and becoming coffee growers, and shifts in gender relations with men taking on more domestic responsibilities as increasing number of women move into co-operatives and access more training.

The potential of this goes beyond economic benefits. It could go as far as creating a more equal and therefore empowered, and better off society as a whole. And Nicaragua, with its strong tradition of co-operatives, is further ground for ethical trading.

www.etico.net



Tourism booming in Nicaragua

'We had a great walk through the coffee to the rainforest in the hilltops. We saw sloths, oriole birds, wonderful butterflies and Nicaragua's national bird, the guardabarranco. Eco tourism allows farmers to diversify their income and encourages the community to preserve the environment. It's a win-win for tourists and the local community together.'

Steve Lewis



Steve Lewis

of this tourist boom reach ordinary Nicaraguans by promoting folk fiestas, food fairs, local crafts, and co-operatives. Working with municipalities, Intur is helping local initiatives by equipping small start-ups and training local guides. Tourism, when properly managed, has the potential to bring great benefits to some of the least developed areas of the country.

Speaking on World Tourism Day, INTUR Director Anasha Campbell stressed the enormous potential for tourism growth and reiterated that the "government wants to promote responsible tourism that is respectful of our environment, culture and, our people,"

Travel writer **Russell Maddicks** describes the reasons for the dramatic growth in tourism and how to ensure it benefits local people.

It was only a matter of time before the millions of tourists who visit Latin America annually, woke up to the wonders of Nicaragua. For years prized as Central America's "best kept secret", the country first came to the world's attention in the 1980s – courtesy of Ronald Reagan – when tens of thousands of brigadistas and other solidarity activists visited Nicaragua to support the Sandinista Revolution in the face of attempts by the US to destroy it.

After taking part in literacy campaigns, environmental projects and coffee picking, they returned home to form part of an international solidarity movement against the brutal US war on Nicaragua. During that period the Central American nation was regarded as a war zone where few tourists ventured.

In the 1990s, the surfers were drawn to Nicaragua by perfect Pacific breaks, year-round surf and laid-back beaches. Subsequently it was the backpackers who got the word out that here was a country with all

the attractions of neighbouring Costa Rica for a fraction of the cost. It has also helped that Nicaragua is consistently rated as one of the safest countries in Latin America.

Now Nicaragua is talked of as the next 'big thing', with tourism being the fastest growing sector of the economy. Visitor numbers reached 1.5 million in 2016, generating US\$720 million and 100,000 jobs.

The growth of tourism is due to Nicaragua's reputation as a safe, secure country coupled with the government's investment in infrastructure improvements over the past decade. All over the country, rutted dirt tracks that were once washed out by rainy-season downpours are being replaced with smooth roads. This makes it faster to travel around the tourist circuit of Granada, León and San Juan del Sur, but also to get off the beaten track by visiting national parks, rural villages and co-operatives that run eco tourism initiatives.

Nicaragua's National Tourist Institute (INTUR) wants to ensure that the benefits

adding that the country had been recognised by UNESCO for its emphasis on cultural tourism.

Opportunities abound for travellers committed to protecting the environment, respecting local people and ensuring the money they spend benefits local communities: homestays in national parks like Miraflor above Estelí, visits to coffee co-operatives in Matagalpa and Jinotega, volunteering opportunities, and visits to towns and communities with twinning links in the UK.

If you want to support Nicaragua, visit it: get involved, meet the people, learn the language, soak up the history, enjoy the delicious food, joyous music, vibrant culture, and find out why Nicaragua is the safest country in the region with a growing economy. Discover Nicaragua for yourself and get involved with the work of NSC, or your nearest twin town when you return!

Further information: www.nicaraguasc.org.uk/solidarity/volunteering/

www.theculturetrip.com/central-america/nicaragua/articles/15-epic-places-in-nicaragua-you-should-visit/

UK-Nicaragua Solidarity

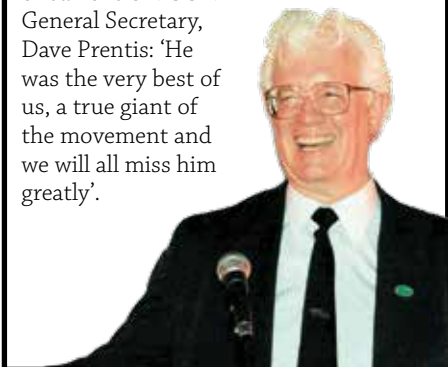
Campaigning against the NICA Act

Through circulating online information and through the speaker tour of trade unionist Mercedes Sanchez, NSCAG has continued raising awareness and condemning the potential threats posed to Nicaragua by the NICA Act (see page 2). As Mercedes pointed out in a speech at the 'No to Trump' event in London organised by the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign, 'Trump's NICA Act is designed to stop Nicaragua from being able to reduce inequality.' NSCAG also continued contacting key journalists and publishing information to counteract the plethora of distorted, negative coverage of Nicaragua in the media.

Further information: www.nscag.org

Rodney Bickerstaffe – A tribute

On 3 October, we lost an inspirational trade union leader and true internationalist with the passing of Rodney Bickerstaffe, former General Secretary of UNISON. Throughout his life, Rodney fought against oppression, social injustice and inequality. In the 1980s, Rodney stood by our side as we campaigned against the brutal contra war unleashed on Nicaragua by the US. He fought for decades against the Cuban blockade, the evils of apartheid South Africa and the unjust treatment meted out by Israel to the Palestinian people. He was founding Chair of the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign and President of War on Want and worked tirelessly to stand up for the poorest and most vulnerable in society. In the words of current UNISON General Secretary, Dave Prentis: 'He was the very best of us, a true giant of the movement and we will all miss him greatly.'



Mercedes Sanchez, on the 'No to Austerity' march in Manchester during Tory Party Conference. Mercedes informed UNISON participants that in Nicaragua these days such marches only take place when there is something to celebrate!

Louise Richards

Nicaraguan trade unionist visits the West Midlands

From 27 September - 8 October, Mercedes Sanchez, Women's Officer of the higher education support staffs' union FESITUN, visited the UK at the invitation of UNISON's West Midlands Region. Based in Birmingham, she spoke at an international seminar organised by the Region and at a meeting of the women's group of UNISON's Birmingham branch as well as visiting South Birmingham University's trade union study centre. A tour of Wolverhampton University was also organised by UNISON's Wolverhampton University branch, who had helped to sponsor the visit. The programme also included a visit to Liverpool invited by UNISON's North West Region and meetings with representatives of the TUC and UNISON's National Executive Council in London. The visit achieved its objective of strengthening relations between UNISON and FESITUN and raising awareness of the situation in Nicaragua among UNISON branches. Mercedes also participated in a 'No to Trump' London event organised by the Venezuela Solidarity Campaign where she spoke about the threat of the NICA Act.

Further information: Louise on nscag@nicaraguasc.org.uk www.nscag.org

From plant to product: learning about sustainability in Masaya

Through the Geography curriculum, Leicester schools are learning about resourcefulness and resilience from their Masaya counterparts through exploring how maize permeates Nicaraguan life. Every part of the plant is used: fresh corn on the cob, the ubiquitous 'tortillas', the toasted maize and cocoa 'pinillo' drink served in carved gourd 'jicaras', greetings cards decorated with dyed maize husks, and medicinal uses of maize silks. As well as handling artefacts from Masaya, pupils think about how the Leicester Masaya Link Group's projects in rural communities are making a positive contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals including access to water, clean/affordable energy, gender equality, poverty reduction and climate change mitigation.

Further information: www.leicestermasayalink.org.uk



Year 5 pupils in Leicester connect maize production in Masaya to the Sustainable Development Goals.

Lee Jowett

Volcanoes: generating energy, attracting tourism

On 27 September, the Sheffield-Esteli Society and Students for Esteli organised an event on the importance of volcanoes to Nicaragua. Volcanologist Dr Tom Pering, Department of Geography, who visited Nicaragua in July, described his ongoing research into a low cost monitoring technique using the Raspberry Pi and its application to the Masaya volcano. Nicaraguan Ambassador Guisell Morales-Echaverry then talked about the importance of volcanoes to Nicaragua as a tourist attraction and also as a source of energy (14% of the country's renewable energy is geothermal).

The diverse audience included emeritus professors, the Lord Mayor of Sheffield, members of staff, PhD students, undergraduates, and supporters of Sheffield's link with Esteli. Dr Pering commenting on the meeting said: 'Meeting the ambassador and having the opportunity to talk to such a uniquely diverse group was a fantastic experience, it was certainly one of my best experiences of outreach and science communication so far. It was also great to engage with those whom your research may directly help in the future.'

Further information:

www.sheffielddestelisociety.org.uk

www.studentsforesteli.wordpress.com



Masaya volcano lava lake

NSC team at Latitude Festival



Bethan Pierce-Jones

Volunteering at festivals, raising funds for NSC

Since 1993 NSC has been raising funds through finding volunteers to do bar work at festivals through the Workers Beer Company. This was an amazingly successful season so thanks to everyone who took part. We had 70 people working on the bars, with hardly anyone at more than one festival. NSC raised an incredible £9,380, the highest amount since 1993!



The Santa Rosa Fund (SRF) launches the 50th edition of its newsletter

On 24 November 2017, the SRF launches the 50th edition of its six-monthly newsletter at an event in Tavistock, Devon. The SRF has supported educational initiatives and projects in Nicaragua since 1988

and became a registered charity in 1994. The newsletter and the event will celebrate the almost 30 years of achievements by the Fund, including the provision of and support for libraries, computer provision, street children's organisations, youth centres and centres for people with learning and physical difficulties.

Further information: www.santarosafund.org



Researching the value of twinnings

In July, Dr Holly Ryan, Senior Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at Manchester Metropolitan University, visited several of the Nicaraguan towns with UK twinning links as a part of a scoping exercise for a proposed research project exploring the civic, cultural and political value of town twinning. Dr Ryan visited Managua, Masaya, Leon, Esteli and Tisma to build a picture of the twinnings, their histories and the projects that UK twinnings have supported.

The visit enabled her to get a Nicaraguan perspective on empowering marginalised groups and fostering a two-way exchange of knowledge, skills and understanding between Nicaraguan towns and their British counterparts. What came across strongly was the level of personal commitment involved in maintaining these relationships and the many strong friendships that have been formed.

Murals are the people's billboard in Nicaragua

John Kotula, a US artist and writer who lives in Managua, describes the remarkable artistic phenomena that took place in the 1980s Sandinista Nicaragua.

In those halcyon days of the “new Nicaragua”, the arts were an integral part of the popular revolution. Mural brigades used outdoor walls to portray the struggles of history and the promise of the future. There are more than 300 documented revolutionary murals; many painted by international brigades of cultural workers who came to support the new government and to solidify the vision of the revolution.

The murals functioned as the people's billboards, presenting ideals of literacy, anti-imperialism, national sovereignty,

women's rights, and solidarity. They used powerful images to document the abuses of the dictator Somoza and US imperialism, and made no apology for armed revolution. One mural in Esteli says, “*Los Derechos se tomen, no se piden. Se arrancan, no se mendigar.*” “You don't ask for rights, you take them. Don't beg, get going.”

The quality of the murals varied from the primitive to works rivalling Diego Rivera's Mexican masterpieces. Overall *El Muralismo de Nicaragua* was recognised as a cultural movement of world importance.

This recognition took on added urgency after the Sandinistas were defeated in the 1990 elections and the new US-backed government began to systematically destroy them. However, “The new government may remove images of Sandino from the walls, the ramparts and the electric posts, but not from the hearts of the people, because Sandino lives,” said Nicaraguan poet Ernesto Cardinal.

Muralismo is still a living art form in Nicaragua. Organisations like *Movimiento Cultural Leonel Rugama* continue the tradition by creating politically-informed street art and training young artists. The rich political dialogue that is part of the Nicaraguan character continues to take place in public spaces across the nation.



I recently visited the Managuan Cultural Centre *Héroes y Mártires de Batahola*. Its most striking space is a large open air auditorium where concerts, plays, dances and masses take place. At the back of the stage is a very striking mural: *El Nuevo Amanecer* (The New Dawn), painted by *Boanerges Cerrato* Collective in 1988, which measures 16 feet high by 65 feet across.

As an artist, I was humbled by the skill

and hard work that had created this wonderful painting, and I was inspired by its power to impact communities. The focal point is an infant laying on straw that can be read as the telling of the birth of Christ – an image with a powerful resonance in a predominantly Catholic country – but the baby is brown-skinned and black-haired. He is surrounded by a specifically Nicaraguan community: historic figures of the revolution, campesinos,

coffee pickers, and people with baskets of tropical fruit and vegetables. A young man with a guitar perhaps playing ‘Nicaragua, Nicaraguita’ to the baby. (“...But now that you are free, Nicaragua, I love you even more.”)

The baby is both the newborn Christ and the newborn nation. Women are prominent, the men mainly stay in the outer circle; four large women hover over the child like guardian angels, but without wings. One look at them and you know that there are powerful forces looking out for him. The mural says, ‘We, the community, will take care of this child’ and is a non-

verbal civic pledge to safeguard the new nation and the new society.

John Kotula and the US-based Alliance for Global Justice are planning an artists’ trip to Nicaragua in summer 2018. Further information: ✉ johnkotulapchn@yahoo.com For information on Funarte, an Esteli art organisation working with children and young people see 🌐 www.funarte.org.ni