

NICARAGUA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN ACTION GROUP (NSCAG) ANNUAL REPORT JANUARY – DECEMBER 2006

In 2006 NSCAG focused on work with trade unions in the UK and in Nicaragua, and a campaign against US interference in the Nicaraguan elections. This included a delegation to Nicaragua to observe the elections. We would like to thank all those who contributed to this work, whether a trade union individual, branch, region or national office.

Campaign against US interference in the Nicaraguan elections

While NSCAG decided not to support a particular political party we did campaign to support the right of Nicaraguans to elect the party of their choice free from US interference. We coordinated this work with the Nicaragua Network, our sister organisation in the US. A Nicaragua Network delegation to Nicaragua in June 2006 reported: *'with the exception of US Ambassador Trivelli, all persons interviewed (this included representatives of all major parties) believed that the US government had gone beyond what was appropriate and correct in its involvement in the electoral process to the degree that its involvement is seen and felt as unacceptable intervention.'* This interference included making threatening and inflammatory statements in the Nicaraguan press, pressurising candidates and funding groups that explicitly and implicitly supported a particular presidential candidate and party.

We published three election briefings with general information on the elections and details of ways in which the US administration attempted to influence the results through threats, political manoeuvring and financing of the Liberal Alliance (ALC).

We asked our members, supporters and affiliated groups to send **postcard and letters to** the Foreign Office and the US embassy calling for an end to such interference. In addition, we distributed information and cards at trade union and Labour Party conferences.

We wrote **letters to the press** highlighting the hypocrisy and impact of US interference, one of which was published in the Guardian.

This was followed up with a **meeting with the Foreign Office**, in which we highlighted our concerns about US interference and asked for reassurance that the UK government would respect the outcome of the elections.

We organised an elections **workshop** at a Latin America conference in London in December.

Election observer delegation

We organised a 10 person delegation to observe the elections through a civil society organisation called IPADE (Institute for the Development of Democracy). The purpose of the delegation was to support IPADE in monitoring election procedures in order to ensure free and fair elections. Another aim was to enable participants to gain an understanding of the electoral process and how it was carried out. The delegation visited 20 urban and rural polling stations in Managua and Esteli and took part in an IPADE press conference to present their findings. The delegation was very impressed by the high turn out (70%) and observed that *'people voted as they wished in a peaceful and participatory atmosphere.'* They reported impressive checks and balances to prevent fraud and the high level of involvement of women and young people in the process. The delegation published a report which was sent to the Nicaraguan election authorities and the Foreign Office. We also distributed the report widely.

Trade Union work

We facilitated the building of solidarity between unions in the UK and Nicaragua. In early 2006 **FETSALUD**, the health workers union held a **national strike**. NSCAG circulated information to union affiliates, raised money for the strike fund and sent solidarity messages. We also sent messages of solidarity to the **CST-JBE** regarding **attacks on their members** at the Mil Colores factory in the Free Trade Zone in Managua and sent solidarity funds to **sacked council workers** in San Juan del Sur.

We also supported UNISON Workingham in setting up a twinning link. In addition we helped with translation of documents and organised the sending of health and safety materials and safety hats from London UNISON to UNE the Nicaraguan public service union. We made preliminary contacts with Telford UNISON, who are interested in working with women in trade unions in Nicaragua.

We investigated grant funding for partner unions, by following up work on a **UNE application to UNISON International Development Fund** for their youth project. We did this through helping with translation and communication between UNISON and UNE. We also worked with the **FNT** (National Workers Front) to develop a **youth project to present to UNISON International fund**, which was eventually approved by UNISON. The project will support workshops and a national young conference for young members in Nicaragua, leading to the formation of a national youth council. We also searched for funds to cover the cost of a concurrent youth project in the UK.

We participated in a **Latin America fringe** meeting at the UNISON conference, along with representatives of other Latin America Solidarity Groups. We also had stalls at other trade union conferences including NUT, PCS and CWU.

Affiliations

11 national unions were affiliated at the end of 2006: AMICUS, BECTU, BFAWU, CWU, FBU, NUT, PCS, RMT, TGWU, UNISON & USDAW. The total number of branches and regions affiliated at the year end (2006) was 82. Others, not affiliated, donate when requested.

	Dec 2004	Dec 2005	Dec 2006
AMICUS / MSF	34	24	22
CWU	12	12	9
FBU	0	1	1
NUT	11	8	5
PCS	2	2	1
T & G	14	13	13
UNISON	29	29	28
USDAW	1	1	1
RMT(only affiliated nationally)			
TOTALS	104	91	82

This year only 5 new branches or regions affiliated. A major aim for 2007 is to produce a new TU affiliation leaflet and to have it distributed, where possible with a covering letter from the general secretary, to branches and regions.

Staff: Samanther Maher & Helen Yuill (election campaign only)

NSCAG Executive members

Ruby Cox, Jane Freeland, Dave Godson, Christine Oddy, June Plymen, Bernard Roome, Jessie Russell, Michael MacNeil, John Drewery, James Lazou, Joan Neary.