

HEROIC NICARAGUA

- Mayford Ngxobe

Victory has come to the fighting people of Nicaragua! Before assessing this victory let us look into the background to this country and its fight for freedom.

Nicaragua is a central American state with a population of slightly over two million people. It is an underdeveloped agrarian country. Farming accounts for 24.3% of the gross national product and the manufacturing industry for 15%. There are deposits of gold, silver, nickel, mercury, lead and lignite. Forty per cent of the territory is covered with forests rich in valuable timber species.

Economy is based on agriculture, major crops being cotton and coffee. A large part of the arable land belonged to latifundists (large-scale land owners) and foreign companies. Industry is underdeveloped with most enterprises processing farm produce. There are some mining concerns engaged chiefly in gold, silver and copper production. Somoza's family, controlled, to varying degrees, all branches of the economy, finance and state institutions and owned most of the fertile lands. United States monopolies held key positions in the economy. American capital controlled both home and foreign trade.

Nicaragua was 'discovered' by Christopher Columbus in 1502. It was a Spanish colony until 1821 when it won its independence. It joined the 'Mexican Empire' and in 1823 became part of the Central American Federation; from which it withdrew in 1838 and became an independent Republic. All through the 18th century, the situation in the country remained unstable due to the power struggle between the Conservative Party, which stood for the interests of the church and latifundists and the Liberal Party, which stood for the interests of trade and the petty bourgeoisie.

American capital started its intrusion in the Nicaraguan economy at the end of the 18th century. American monopolies seized mining industries and vast tracts of land. In 1912, under the pretext of

"safeguarding the homes and lives of North American citizens", the United States occupied Nicaragua. Reasons for the occupation were, however, to be found in treaties imposed on the Nicaraguan people. The treaties gave the United States a monopoly right to build an inter-oceanic canal that would connect the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans across the country and to set up naval bases in strategically important areas.

The Liberals and Conservatives, the two main political parties at that time, disputed among themselves on how to share the plunder of Nicaragua with American imperialism. Each party sought the protection of the Americans to further the interests of its supporters. On their part, the US violently trampled the rights of the Nicaraguan people.

It was in October, 1926, when Sandino, a worker-peasant, along with a group of workers, began fighting against the puppet Conservative government of Adolfo Diaz. Augusto Cesar Sandino, general of the Army of Free Men for the Defence of the National Sovereignty of Nicaragua, was to become a source of inspiration to the Nicaraguan people in their struggle against US imperialism and internal reaction. Liberals were also waging a war in the interest of the petty-bourgeoisie and in this process, aligned themselves with the enemy of the people, US imperialism.

In 1927 the struggle of the Nicaraguan people reached a turning point. In January, 3,900 United States troops, 215 officers and 865 marines landed in Nicaragua. Both the campus of the University and the Cathedral of Leone - the most renowned church in Latin America - were converted into barracks for the US soldiers - who committed all sorts of barbaric acts against the people.

It was in February of that year, 1927, when Sandino having reorganised his forces, developed an offensive from the North to the Central part of the country. With hundreds of peasant guerrillas he repeatedly routed the Conservative government forces on their march.

The Liberal Party, openly betrayed the people, when on May 4, José Moncada signed a pact with the

US representative in Nicaragua, Stinson, in which he agreed to hand over rebel arms to Stinson. Sandino defied the betrayal and continued fighting. He declared: "I do not intend to surrender my arms when everyone does so. I would rather die with a few who accompany me because it is preferable that we die as rebels rather than live as slaves".

Though enemy forces were equipped with the most modern arms, their material advantage could not help them stop the war. The Sandinist guerrillas, being largely of peasant origin from the combat areas, were thoroughly acquainted with the terrain; added to this advantage was the support that they received from the rural population - whilst the invaders regarded all the peasants in the Sandinist regions as enemies. Faced with this mounting war of liberation, in December 1927, the Liberals, Conservatives and US imperialism agreed on forming the National Guard, which was to gain notoriety in its bloody massacres of the Nicaraguans. For his part in betraying the Nicaraguan people, the Liberal José Moncada, was rewarded with the Presidency after an electoral farce held in 1928. In 1932, in full agreement with US imperialists, he named an obscure individual, Anastasio Somoza García, as head of the National Guard.

In 1933, Juan Sacasa, assumed power in Nicaragua. He started negotiations with Sandino on ending the war. Sandino agreed to sign an accord only after the withdrawal of the Yankee invaders from the Nicaraguan territory. This withdrawal of American troops was the culmination of a great military victory for the Sandinista guerrillas. The US imperialists could no longer maintain its forces in the territory. Among other contributing factors, was the increase in the revolutionary activities in Latin America during the 30s and the economic depression that afflicted the financial coffers of Wall Street.

During one of his trips to Managua for discussions with the Sacasa government, on February 21, 1934, Augusto Sandino, together with some of his fellow fighters were assassinated. Two years later Juan Sacasa quietly resigned and Somoza directly

assumed power. Following an electoral farce, Somoza officially occupied the Presidency on January 1, 1937. Supported by the US and the notorious National Guard, Somoza's family remained in power till its overthrow this year.

After Sandino's assassination, the guerrilla chief, Pedro Altamirano, stayed in the mountains for several years at the head of a small and isolated troop, till 1939, when he died in enemy hands.

The Nicaraguan struggle enjoyed the support of the progressive people internationally. Prominent anti-imperialist figures urged solidarity with the Nicaraguan people. Fighters from other Latin American countries, like the Salvadoran communist martyr, Farabundo Marti and Carlos Aponte, who fell on Cuban soil, participated in the Nicaraguan war.

Besides the military victories that the Sandinista guerrillas scored, and the support that they received from the peasants, the war lasted for seven years ending with the Somoza police-military dictatorship consolidating its position through bloodshed. Carlos Fonseca, a Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) leader, attributed the setback to the fact that "the conditions that the nascent character of the people's anti-imperialist modern movement imposed, did not allow Sandino's correct military strategy to coincide with a correct political strategy that guaranteed the continuation of the revolutionary process".

The Nicaraguan people's determination for freedom was not to be arrested. In 1956, the founder of the Somoza dynasty, was executed by the Nicaraguan patriot, Rigoberto Pérez. This resulted in the unleashing of a campaign of terror by the National Guards. Thousands of people were imprisoned, tortured, others made to 'disappear' or murdered. The transitional period, when the tyrant's sons, Luis and Anastasio Somoza, reaffirmed the dynasty's dictatorial powers, was extremely bloody.

The victory of the Cuban Revolution in 1959 opened new horizons for the struggling people in Latin America and indeed of the whole world. In Latin America, Cuba is the bastion of peace and progress; the first socialist state on the continent. Commenting on that glorious victory, Carlos

Forseca writes: "With the victory of the Cuban revolution, the Nicaraguan spirit of rebellion recovered its resplendency. From the last months of 1958, year after year, on more than a hundred occasions there has been guerrilla combat which will lead Nicaragua to final liberation".

Anastacio Somoza Debayle, was to have himself proclaimed President by means of fraudulent elections on January 22, 1967; the campaign ended with a bloody massacre that claimed the lives of 400 people in Managua. The dictator's National Guards resorted to increased acts of violence in a vain attempt to destroy the legacy of the heroic Sandino.

The struggle against the Somoza dictatorship was to grow in intensity in the 70s, led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front. The government reacted by increasing its violent reprisals against the people. In 1972, a devastating earthquake hit Nicaragua. International relief aid that was sent to Managua could not reach the victims of the earthquake because of corrupt government officials who used the aid to enrich themselves. Hundreds of people, therefore, perished from starvation. Opposition to the dictatorship was daily mounting.

In 1977, Chamorro, an editor of an opposition newspaper, was murdered. This led to a series of strikes. The government massacred the people in reply. The Sandinista Liberation Front intensified the struggle all over the country - in the North and South of the country, in the rural areas and the cities.

Somoza's violence could not contain the fighting spirit of the people. The US embassy, big bankers and industrialists, in an attempt to dampen the people's fighting spirit and isolate the popular FSLN, planned strikes for September, 1978, during which they would replace the Somoza dictatorship with a puppet government that would be more acceptable to the people. On realising the plan, the FSLN published a document explaining its objectives to the people. When the strike began, in a daring operation, the FSLN seized the National Palace. (The seizure of the Palace had been planned much earlier but was timed to pre-empt

the coup that was being prepared against the tyranny). Holding members of Parliament as hostages, the FSLN guerrillas managed to secure the release of their fellow combatants from Somoza's dungeons and made it safely to Panama. Nicaraguans came out in their thousands in open support for the guerrillas. The entire working class, the peasantry, the whole people decided to fight together against the dictatorship. The people had been politically organised and prepared.

The US in an attempt to impose a dictatorship without Somoza, introduced a so-called "mediation commission". The mediators proposed the setting up of a provisional government and the holding of a referendum. The FSLN rejected these moves for their objective remained the liquidation of the whole system that had brought tragedy to the Nicaraguan people.

The programme of the joint national leadership of the FSLN called for;

- the setting up of a government of national unity;
- programme of national reconstruction;
- land reform and an agrarian revolution;
- expropriation of the Somoza property;
- proper school system;
- formation of a national army;
- foreign policy of non-alignment.

The document described the broad democratic alliance of all the forces opposed to the Somoza dictatorship as the legitimate alternative to the shameful Somoza regime. The unity of the Nicaraguan people paved the way for victory.

1979 saw an intensification in military operations of the FSLN. National Guard terrorists fled in panic in the face of the advancing Sandinista fighters. Sandinistas controlled the rural areas, town after town was captured. The frustrated National Guards resorted to bombarding towns and villages. Somoza faced an insurmountable political and economic crises. Military aid from the US was increased through third parties, chiefly through Zionist Israel. Financial aid from the Interna-

tional Monetary Fund (IMF) amounted to millions of dollars.

But nothing could save the Somoza regime. The armed struggle and mass political struggle had reached the stage of general insurrection.

The hated Somoza dynasty collapsed like a pack of cards. His army demoralised and defeated, the hated dictator fled to the USA with his bags packed with the country's gold and dollars.

A provisional government of national reconstruction took power, with the joyous support of the people.

After twenty years of armed struggle the Sandinistas had liberated the country from the yoke of the dictator.

Not only the Sandinistas, but the toiling masses of Nicaragua have understood the power of their own strength and unity.

Their victory is hailed by progressive mankind. Fidel Castro has said that their sacrifice, determination and heroism inspires us all.

As for the unfolding process of the revolution we see that it is on an unflinching anti-imperialist course. But the country is bankrupt and faces many difficulties. US imperialism will seek to hold back the struggle by fostering moderates and non-revolutionary groupings and creating economic problems. The outcome depends on the alignment of class forces within the Nicaraguan movement and people. But in our epoch history is certainly on the side of the working people of town and country.

THE STRUGGLE CONTINUES AND VICTORY IS CERTAIN!

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"WHAT IS THE USE OF SO MUCH
BLOODSHED IF AT THE END OF IT
ALL WE DO NOT CONTROL THE
WEALTH OF OUR COUNTRY"?

- AGOSTINHO NETO -