

The Miskitu Question in Nicaragua

“...I objected to this and spoke about their [the *sandinistas*] duty, as revolutionaries, to give a positive example of their treatment of Indian peoples, because all the Indian peoples of Latin America were watching Nicaragua...”

—**Armstrong Wiggins**, a young Miskitu leader who fled Nicaragua in 1981, and now works with the International Indigenous Human Rights organization in Washington DC.¹

“...I keep thinking about this Reagan and what kind of a person can he possibly be? He’s either a brute or a horse’s ass.”

—**Indira Brigette Zacharias**, a 22-year-old Miskitu woman, living in Nicaragua, who has joined her local *sandinista* defense committee, people’s militia, medical brigade and the *sandinista* army — after describing the anguish of having to fight against her fellow Miskitu.²

The Nicaraguan revolution took place in the western part of the country, facing the Pacific. The vast, sparsely populated territory of Nicaragua’s eastern half felt the echoes of the revolutionary upheaval in the west. But it did not become embroiled in the revolutionary civil war, nor did it suffer the systematic white terror of the Somoza dictatorship. When the *sandinistas* conquered power and extended their authority to the Atlantic coast, they faced a whole array of social, cultural and political questions which they had not bothered to confront in the course of their struggle for power.

The Atlantic coast, whose population of about 300,000 makes up just over 10% of the total Nicaraguan population, contains some 75,000 Miskitu Indians, 5,250 Sumu Indians, 570 Rama Indians, and 25,000 African descendants (the latter concentrated

in Bluefields). The 186,000 *mestizo* Nicaraguans—i.e., those of Hispano-Indian origin, who predominate on the Pacific coast—make up around 60% of the Atlantic coast population^{3*}. The *mestizos'* eastward migration to the Atlantic coast under Somoza's reign was often resented by the Indian and African populations, who felt disadvantaged in the competition over land and jobs with the "Spanish" newcomers, who—to them—represented a foreign and domineering culture.

The Atlantic coast region, abysmally underdeveloped, was largely neglected by Somoza, who contented himself with making plump concessions to U.S. fruit, mining, lumber, and fishing companies. These companies would ravish the indigenous people's lands, natural resources and labor power while creating a heady economic prosperity that drew the people into the sticky network of commodity exchange—and would later pull their facilities out when the resources they were exploiting became exhausted, leaving the people desperately poor, more and more cut off from their communal social organization and subsistence economies. To maintain control over the Atlantic coast, Somoza established a patronage network of local bosses (*caciques*), who kept the people pacified by dispensing consumer goods regularly shipped in by Somoza.

When the Somoza administration collapsed under the impact of the revolution, the victorious *sandinistas* confronted a serious gulf in social formations, culture and religious values between the Pacific and Atlantic coast dwellers. The Miskitu, whose attempts to organize themselves into a political cooperative had been squelched by Somoza in the mid-1970's,⁵ were ambivalent towards the victorious revolution, whose partisans began arriving from the Pacific coast. "The Atlantic coast people didn't feel they had won anything, because they hadn't been involved in the fighting; it was like a change without knowing why," notes Myrna Cunningham.⁶ On the other hand, "our people were very positive toward [the *sandinistas*]," according to Armstrong Wiggins. "In fact, they went to get them in the mountains, to bring them to Puerto Cabezas, the city, because we had heard them express

*These statistics are open to dispute. Norman Bent, a Miskitu pastor, set the total number of Miskitu, Sumu and Rama Indians living in Nicaragua at about 120,000.⁴ The contradiction between these figures and the Nicaraguan government figures cited above might be only an apparent one, explainable by the fact that not all of the Indians in Nicaragua live along the Atlantic coast.

on the clandestine radio that they were fighting a revolution of the poor, and who is more poor than the Indian?"⁷

Instead of struggling to *bridge* the cultural gulf through free and voluntary initiative on *both* sides, the FSLN leaders, with their rude, ignorant and bureaucratic drive to "integrate" the Miskitu into the new Nicaragua, managed to *widen* the gulf violently, driving thousands of Miskitu youths into the camp of the armed counterrevolution. This has led to a fratricidal civil war among the Miskitu people, strengthening the hand of U.S. imperialism in the region and sharply setting back the revolutionary movement throughout the Americas. The partial corrective actions taken by the FSLN regime, in a selfcritical spirit, since 1983 have lessened the regime's isolation from the Miskitu people and helped win a number of young Miskitu who have remained in Nicaragua, over to the side of the revolution. But the underlying presumptions and practices of cultural chauvinism towards indigenous peoples have yet to be uprooted.

Historical Background to the Conflict

The Spanish and Portuguese colonial invaders of the Atlantic (Caribbean) coast region considered the area economically worthless. So they massively enslaved the indigenous peoples and shipped them off to toil in the mines of Perú and elsewhere in South America. The Atlantic coast region was thus depopulated by around 90%. When colonial settlers later began establishing large plantations in Central America, they had to import African slave labor to fill out their workforce in the now sparsely populated land.⁸

At the time of the Spanish colonial invasion, the Miskitu were organizing their society along the lines of the *village community*. They lived through hunting, fishing, and slash and burn agriculture—clearing small plots from the tropical rain forest, which they planted for up to three years and then let go fallow and return to its natural state. Their land was held in common by the entire village. The whole village worked together at agricultural tasks, and in constructing huts for individual families. The fruits of the hunting and fishing expeditions were shared out equally among the villagers. There were neither rich nor poor, nor money, nor prisons, nor church, nor state. The people governed themselves through democratic councils of elders, rather than hereditary chiefs.

But the traumatic and demoralizing experience of the colonial invasion and massive enslavement they suffered must have imposed upon the Miskitu a cruel new ethic: Enslave or be enslaved. Towards the end of the 17th century, Miskitu men began launching widescale slavehunting expeditions, first into the territory of their indigenous neighbors, the Sumu.* The women and children captured in these expeditions were either kept as domestic slaves, or sold into slavery to Jamaican traders who occasionally arrived at the coast. The slavery which the Miskitu imposed on their indigenous neighbors was mild and humane, compared to the chattel slave system organized by the European colonialists. Slave boys working in the Miskitu communities were allowed, once reaching the age of puberty, to take a Miskitu wife; the children of such marriages grew up as free members of the tribe.⁹

To counteract Spanish colonial power, the Miskitu made an alliance with French and English pirates, who lived by preying on Spanish commerce in the Caribbean. Many Miskitu served for three or four years on the pirates' ships, fishing and hunting sea turtles to feed their crews. Learning either French or English through the experience, these Miskitu were paid in iron tools for their service.¹⁰ They also gained access to guns in the process.

The worldly wise Miskitu now had a decisive edge over the other indigenous peoples, and were growing into a threat to the Spanish colonial settlements as well. Their territory was expanding at the expense of other indigenous peoples, and their population was growing rapidly thanks to the capture of Sumu women and children. Led by their allies the pirates, Miskitu warriors launched incursions deep into Honduras and Nicaragua by ascending the larger rivers in fleets of canoes, each carrying 20 or more armed men. They surprised and plundered the nearest Spanish settlements, capturing their women and children. Penetrating south into Costa Rica, they disrupted and ruined Spanish cacao plantations. Their armed expeditionary raids along the Caribbean coast ranged as far south as Panamá, and as far north as Mexico's Yucatán peninsula. These expeditions against the Spanish colonists became a source of boastful storytelling by older men in the Miskitu communities, and thus an integral part of Miskitu cultural psychology.¹¹

*The Miskitu and Sumu were evidently once a single people; the Miskitu emerged through an intermingling with other ethnic groups thrust together along the Atlantic coast, such as the Creoles and Chinese immigrants.

As England gained the upper hand over Spain in the slave trade and established a fabulously profitable "sugar and spice empire" that included several Caribbean islands, a strategic alliance with England became a logical (if not natural) choice for the Miskitu in their efforts to deter Spanish settlements pressing eastward from the Pacific coast region. England had wrested Jamaica from Spain in 1655, taking over its sugar plantations with the intention of preserving and extending the slave system. But the slaves had other plans. They rose in revolt, many of them fleeing to the mountains to form breakaway communal societies where they could live in freedom. These rebellious descendants of enslaved Africans, who became known as the Maroons, posed a mortal threat to the system of colonial slavery; realizing that they could not long remain free while their brothers and sisters remained enslaved, they periodically came down to the lowlands and attempted to rally the remaining slaves to rise up and overthrow their colonial owners for good.

The British colonial rulers, in their struggle to crush the maroon revolt, made handy use of their alliance with the Miskitu. In 1697 in Jamaica, the British crowned a Miskitu king to rule over Nicaragua's Atlantic coast region—the first in a series of 15 Miskitu kings to be recognized by the British monarchy over the next two centuries. In 1720, the British governor of Jamaica signed a counterinsurgent agreement with the Miskitu king Jeremy. Two hundred Miskitu soldiers were shipped into Jamaica, organized in companies under their own officers. They were paid 40 shillings a month and a pair of shoes to hunt down maroon rebels. Remaining in Jamaica for several months, they "rendered valuable services to the English."¹² A few years later, a fresh maroon rebellion broke out, and the British shipped in 100 Miskitu soldiers to help suppress it. In 1738, a new maroon rebellion brought 200 Miskitu soldiers to Jamaica. White guides were assigned to each Miskitu company, to lead them to the maroons' places of refuge. "...The maroons were soon pressed on all sides, cut off from their provision grounds, and compelled to make peace" with the slaveowners.¹³

The imposition of a Miskitu king, as a puppet of the British colonial empire, over the indigenous peoples of the Atlantic coast region climaxed the erosion of Miskitu selfgovernment since the Miskitu were swept up into the European slave trade and mercantile capitalism. The Miskitu king extracted tribute from the Sumu

and Rama peoples in the form of canoes, cattle, etc. "The rule of the Miskitu 'king' was absolutely despotic. His orders were carried out by his quartermasters. Every Indian was compelled to render him assistance, lodge him, sell him food, and furnish him with the means of continuing his journey, against reasonable pay. That the Indians of the interior did not pay much attention to such commands need hardly be told."¹⁴

The British policy of "indirect rule" over the Atlantic coast peoples contrasted with the Spanish policy of widespread military invasion, aggressive colonial settlement and overturn of indigenous societies in the Pacific coast region. "The conquest of the Pacific coast by the Spanish and by the catholic church was nearly complete," notes Wiggins. "As a result, it was passed down to us by the grandparents that the catholic church had destroyed Indian cultures there. Traditionally, the principal enemies that we [Miskitu] identified were the Spanish and the catholic church."¹⁵

Thus, by the time Central America declared independence from Spain in 1821, the social and cultural division between Nicaragua's Pacific and Atlantic coasts was pronounced. Neither the Spanish language nor the catholic church had taken hold on the Atlantic coast, where natural (subsistence) economy was still the rule. The Atlantic coast peoples spoke their native languages or English, which was spoken by the African descendants living in Bluefields.* The Atlantic coast region, continuing to support a Miskitu monarchy under British sponsorship, remained politically separate from the rest of Nicaragua until 1894, when the Liberal government of José Santos Zelaya militarily invaded the headquarters of the Miskitu reserve in Bluefields and announced the "reincorporation" of the Atlantic coast region into Nicaragua.¹⁶

U.S. Monopolles Invade, Proletariat Emerges

With the rise of U.S. imperialism to hegemony over Central America by the beginning of the 20th century, U.S. companies established enclaves of largescale production of cheap raw materials and foodstuffs amidst the jungles of the Atlantic coast:

*Some of the Atlantic coast blacks live in isolated communities which are ethnically and linguistically distinct, and number at least five. Their historic origin is still a matter of speculation. At least some of them are likely descended from Africans who revolted on the slave ships where they were confined, took command of the ships and sailed them to the Atlantic coast and freedom.

mines, lumber harvesting and sawmills, and banana plantations. This created the first modern proletariat in Nicaragua, laboring under desperate conditions reinforced by a racial caste system: The Indians were at the bottom, *mestizos* in the middle, and whites on the top. The early 1920's saw a wave of strikes against the U.S. fruit, lumber and mining companies; some of the strikes ended in massacres of the workers. In 1926, plantation workers struck against every U.S. banana company on the Atlantic coast. This strike went over to an armed uprising. And just at that time, Augusto César Sandino returned to Nicaragua from his oil-worker's job in Mexico.¹⁷

The Miskitu and Sandino

The uprising of the largely Indian proletariat paved the way for the revolutionary people's war led by Sandino, a Liberal general, against the U.S. marines starting in 1927. Sandino, himself of Indian origin, found a powerful base of support for his movement among the Indian communities near the Rio Coco. The Miskitu contributed a number of military leaders to Sandino's movement; their most famous was Adolf Cockburn, whose struggle ended in assassination by the national guard headed by the traitor Anastasio Somoza García. Miskitu prostitutes servicing European contract laborers on a Standard Fruit plantation turned the tables on their imperialist pimps; organizing themselves, the women plunged into the guerrilla struggle of the *sandinista* movement and liberated Puerto Cabezas in 1929.¹⁸ So tenacious and daring was the popular resistance inspired by Sandino's movement in the face of genocidal assaults by the U.S. armed forces, that in 1933 the marines were withdrawn from Nicaragua.

Decline of the Atlantic Coast

But the subsequent annihilation of Sandino and his partisans by the U.S. puppet Somoza—a cruel defeat greatly helped along by Sandino's own political vacillations—caused the Atlantic coast region to sink into deep political and economic decline. With the world price of Nicaragua's agro-exports plunging due to the world depression, and a plant disease ravaging the banana plantations, many of the Atlantic coast's big capitalist enterprises shut down completely. The combative Indian proletariat was thus dispersed. The dynamic growth in capitalist agriculture

(especially in cotton) which was to sweep the Pacific coast under the Somoza dynasty, passed the Atlantic coast by.

Men and Women In Miskitu Society

To be sure, the Miskitu still maintained strong links with their subsistence, semicomunal social organization. While land plots were now owned individually, men of the whole community would work together to clear them from the jungle. Women, while long ago deprived of their selfgoverning status and subordinated to the social power of men, continued to play a highly active and respected role in social and family based production.

After the men cleared the forest and prepared family plots for cultivation, women planted, weeded and reaped the harvests. Women also fished with hooks; all other methods of fishing (using spears, nets, etc.) were reserved for men, who manufactured the fishing and hunting implements. The carrying of heavy loads was usually left to women, who used backstraps attached to their foreheads for that purpose.¹⁹ This shows that the sexual division of labor in Miskitu society had nothing to do with any biological difference in physical strength between the sexes. The key to the prime "male" functions was that they guaranteed the men a monopoly over *weapons* (machetes, spears, guns) and practice for warfare. This prevented the women from rising up to overthrow the patriarchal order.*

Cooking and most other domestic industries were pursued by women. But tailoring was often done by men, some of whom even made the clothes for their wives. Men also barbecued the game they had hunted. Remnants of women's social autonomy still existed, as when a woman going through menstruation would seclude herself from men for three days, in a temporary hut built by her husband. Divorce was available by mutual consent, and the children remained with their mother. But a widow continued in the status as property of her husband, becoming the property of his relatives.²⁰

*I have not come across any information—either in objective anthropological findings or in the mythological tradition of the Miskitu—that casts a direct light on the primordial women's society (matriarchy) and its armed overthrow by men, which paved the way for later Miskitu society. However, I am inferring this sequence of events from general considerations based on "primitive" peoples' creation myths (especially the historic transition from nature worship, to goddess worship, to polytheistic god worship, to monotheistic god worship), and on such world anthropological data as has filtered through the sexist biases, neglect and distortions of the "mainstream" anthropologists.

The Moravian Church and Capitalism

Amidst the traumatic ups and down of capitalist enterprise in the Atlantic coast's extractive and agroexport industries, capitalism had a steady ideological implant among the Miskitu in the form of the Moravian church. Moravian missionaries, evangelical protestants whose church originated in eastern Europe at the onset of the bourgeois reformation, first arrived at Nicaragua's Atlantic coast in 1849. They soon established a permanent mission among the Miskitu, and translated the bible into the Miskitu language (which already had a written form). Preaching and teaching in both English and Miskitu, the moravians established mission schools in Puerto Cabezas and Bluefields, as well as a modern hospital in Bluefields.

Over the generations, the moravians made deep inroads into the spiritual and cultural life of the Miskitu. Their message was one of bourgeois sobriety, selfrestraint, thrift, and humility before earthly and heavenly authority—just what was needed to convert the Miskitu into a productive and docile labor force for the invading capitalist enterprises. Threatening the Miskitu with the burning punishment of hell in their daily sermons, the moravian missionaries declared dancing and liquor drinking banned. Earthly joys were allowed only in the afterlife. To the moravians, it made no difference that dancing *enhances* sensual pleasure and exerts a socially *binding* force—whereas heavy alcohol drinking *dulls* sensual pleasure and provokes violent conflicts among the people (notably the men). Both customs were lumped together as “evil” and declared prohibited. There was, to be sure, a definite social logic behind this: In banning dancing the moravians were undermining the Miskitu's communal traditions, while in banning liquor they were shaping the Miskitu up for disciplined labor—all to the benefit of capitalist penetration and profit. Over time the moravian preachings were fairly effective—although the “evil” customs persisted.²¹

One of the main reasons for the moravians' success among the people of the Atlantic coast has been their training of Miskitu and Creole lay pastors, who now form the majority of the moravian pastors in Nicaragua. These lay pastors have been trained in the conservative ideology of North American “democracy.” But they stand fairly close to their own people, and are thus (potentially) capable of voicing truly democratic and progressive

aspirations coming from the people of their neighborhoods and communities. The position of the white moravian *hierarchy* is quite another matter. The moravian mission leaders, whose headquarters are in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, do no productive labor, nor have they integrated themselves into the Atlantic coast's indigenous communities. They live in luxury in Yankee style settlements, in houses prefabricated in England and assembled on the Atlantic coast, sporting swimming pools and the other trappings of civilized parasitism. They employ indigenous people as their servants in both their homes and the mission schools.

The two main mission schools in Bluefields and Puerto Cabezas give instruction only in Spanish and English, not in any of the indigenous peoples' languages. They impose stiff tuition and strict rules upon the students. If a student is late for class, s/he is fined 25¢; if late by more than 15 minutes, s/he is fined \$1 for the day—a hefty sum for most youths living on the Atlantic coast.²²

The Trauma of Dependent Capitalism

Following world war 2, the Somoza regime granted a huge lumber concession to a U.S. company in the far northeastern region of Nicaragua. The company levelled vast tracts of forest, driving many Indians from their ancestral lands. When it pulled out of Nicaragua in 1966, Somoza decided to revive the lumber industry by “nationalizing” the Indians' forest lands. With the collaboration of the UN's Food and Agricultural Organization, Somoza created a state institute which aimed to develop the Atlantic coast region without the consent of, and at the expense of its indigenous peoples.²³

The Miskitu people were further wrenched from their traditional lives by the border dispute between the bourgeois/military cliques ruling Nicaragua and Honduras. Before 1960, the border between Nicaragua and Honduras lay north of the Rio Coco, so that most of the Miskitu communities, which lie along both sides of the river, fell within Nicaragua's state territory. However, a 1960 World Court decision of the border dispute between Nicaragua and Honduras—a decision provoked and argued by lawyers representing competing U.S. agribusiness firms operating in the region—moved the border south, to become the Rio Coco itself. This virtually split the Miskitu communities into two, with over 100,000 Miskitu living north of the Rio Coco now falling under

Honduran sovereignty. The arrangement also allowed Somoza to forcibly relocate thousands of Miskitu south of the Rio Coco, into Nicaragua.

The coastal Miskitu, meanwhile, were being drawn into a network of world commodity economy that was finer still than the nets they used to catch the great sea turtles. Turtle fishing, providing protein rich meat throughout the year, traditionally formed the backbone of their subsistence diet, along with the starchy foodstuffs cultivated by the women. "Agriculture, hunting, fishing and gathering were organized seasonally according to weather and resource availability and provided adequate amounts of food and materials without overexploiting any one species or site."²⁴ That was before commercial fishing and hunting took hold. The Miskitu began selling a portion of their turtle catch to processing plants, which in turn exported the meat to gourmet markets in Europe and North America, providing turtle soup for the leisure rich.

Once the Miskitu became accustomed to money exchange, they bought more consumer items in town. These consumer goods, mostly produced in the big capitalist countries, eased some of their domestic chores, but also tempted them to abandon key aspects of their subsistence livelihoods. The ready availability of canned food and processed flour caused them to stop planting many subsistence crops. Commodities they had once considered luxuries now became necessities, and the race for cash earnings was on.

The turtle hunters sold more and more of their catch for cash, sharing out fewer and fewer turtles among their fellow villagers. Communal generosity was assailed by selfish lust for cash. "Kin expect gifts of meat, and friends expect to be sold meat. Besieged with requests, turtlemen are forced to decide who will or will not receive meat... The older Miskitu ask why the turtlemen should have to allocate a food that was once available to all. Turtlemen sell and give to other turtlemen, thus ensuring reciprocal treatment for themselves, but there are simply not enough turtles to accommodate other economic and social requirements."²⁵ By the time of the revolution, the Miskitu were selling between 70% and 90% of the turtles they caught.

The Miskitu diet thus suffered terribly, both in quality and quantity, and the health conditions of the people worsened. Hardest hit were those people too old or too sick to provide for

themselves, who could no longer count on receiving meat or money from their relatives. Infant mortality increased; 40% of Miskitu babies died before reaching the age of two. The Miskitu (semi)communal villages fragmented and hardened more and more into nuclear family units, each enmeshed in the selling and buying of commodities at the losing end of the world market. Under the lash of capitalist demand, the sea turtle population has declined catastrophically. So have the populations of sea otters, crocodiles and leopards, which the Miskitu have also been driven into overhunting by the capitalist north's demand for luxury items. Capitalist shrimp enterprises would destroy their massive fish catches scooped up along with the shrimp—since the fish were not nearly as profitable to them as the shrimp.

As the capitalist threat to their livelihood and cultural identity intensified, the Miskitu began to awaken politically. In the mid-1970's, after Somoza had suppressed their attempt to build a political cooperative, they reached out to their former antagonists the Sumu, to form the Alliance for the Progress of Miskitu and Sumu Indians (Alpromisu). It was a unique attempt at Indian self-organization, going beyond the narrow scope of local tribal governments and the conservative fatalism of the moravian church. Somoza refused to give legal recognition to Alpromisu, and moved to coopt its leaders by offering them cushy government jobs.²⁶

The Miskitu and the Revolution

By now, the social and political consciousness of the Miskitu was sharply contradictory. Some Miskitu, especially those most actively and successfully participating in commodity exchange, were locked into a cash/export mentality; since they viewed capitalist penetration as a boon, they were not the least bit hostile towards the neocolonial Somoza regime. Other Miskitu, grasping the devastating impact of foreign capitalism on the Miskitu communities, favored a return to communal traditions, and may well have been sympathetic to the anti-imperialist aims of the *sandinista* liberation front.

But practically all the Miskitu, along with the other Atlantic coast dwellers, were isolated from the revolutionary agitation, upheavals and organization, and the counterrevolutionary terror, that convulsed the Pacific coast region as it moved through its lightning pre-revolutionary epoch. While the catholic church had

some influence on the Atlantic coast, it scarcely felt an echo of the liberation theology movement that was sweeping the base of the church in the Pacific coast region. The catholic church on the Atlantic coast thus solidly remained its old, reactionary self. And the Miskitu still maintained their historic distrust towards the "Spanish" intruders from the west; for many, this ethnic distrust clouded over any political distinction between the revolutionary *sandinistas* and the counterrevolutionary Somoza clique. Since the *sandinistas* had done nothing to overcome this ethnic/cultural barrier in the way of developing an indigenous revolutionary movement among the Atlantic coast peoples—instead confining their activities to the western half of the country—the only Miskitu who were sharply aware of the revolutionary struggle against Somoza were those living in the Pacific coast region.

In 1978, prior to the September insurrection in western Nicaragua, the "broad opposition front," a coalition of the bourgeois opposition parties and labor unions (in loose tactical alliance with the FSLN), invited Alpromisu to join the anti-Somoza coalition. But the leadership declined the offer. Steadman Fagoth Mueller, a Miskitu university student in Managua who was ardently pro-*sandinista* (at least outwardly), denounced the Alpromisu leaders for selling out to Somoza.

The Situation After Somoza's Overthrow

The overthrow of Somoza brought the fate of the Atlantic coast peoples to a crossroad: On the one hand, it opened up exciting possibilities for the regeneration of Miskitu and the other native cultures on a revolutionary basis, making them available to the people of all Nicaragua and the world. On the other hand, it opened the possibility for reactionary elements at the head of the native peoples to rally them demagogically against the new regime in Managua—taking advantage of the added material hardships brought on by the collapse of the old regime which the Atlantic coastdwellers had not played an active part in destroying. The region's fragile commodity network collapsed overnight, as the Somoza clique's merchandise ships pulled out (or were destroyed by the national guard), and the Chinese merchants, widely resented by the Indians for their exploitative commercial practices, fled in fear of expropriation. The road which the Miskitu people would take depended, above all, on the policy of the *sandinista* leaders.

After the revolution's triumph in 1979, the Alpromisu leaders, discredited by their nonopposition to Somoza, were pushed out and replaced by Steadman Fagoth, Brooklyn Rivera and Hazel Lau, all expressing strong support for the *sandinista* revolution.²⁷ At the same time, the Miskitu began reclaiming their tradition of selfgovernment from decades of corrosive moravian church influence, organizing a council of elders in every village.

In the Name of Sandino...

Instead of uniting with this progressive development among the Indian people, the FSLN leaders at first tried to *oppose* it.* They insisted that the Indians dissolve the mass organization which they had created, and join the *sandinista* mass organizations established in the Pacific coast region. In November 1979, FSLN leader Daniel Ortega appeared at an assembly in Puerto Cabezas, which was attended by 900 delegates from all the Atlantic coast villages. Refusing to recognize the delegates as genuine leaders of the Atlantic coast peoples, Ortega demanded the dissolution of Alpromisu into the *sandinista* organizations. He was told at meetings around the region that the Indian people supported Alpromisu as their organization. Ortega returned to Managua and backed off from his collision course with Alpromisu. But when he came back to the Atlantic coast, he showed that he had not grown much in wisdom or tact: While haughtily "allowing" the organization to continue as the mass organization of the Indian villages, he now demanded that it change its name so as to incorporate the word *sandinista*.²⁸

Although there were some objections to this, "the people accepted the name change and reported to *comandante* Ortega that it was an honor to include *sandinismo* in their organization,"

*Supporters of the FSLN leadership have since claimed that the councils of village elders organized during this period were set up as traditionalist rubber stamps for the personal ambitions of Steadman Fagoth. It is not clear to me, from the information and accounts available, to what extent there was truth to this charge. One thing, however, is clear: The FSLN leaders did not understand the social and historical background of the councils of village elders, and dogmatically rejected them as a "backward" and "counterrevolutionary" form of local government. They should have worked patiently to bring the democratic aspirations of the Miskitu people (especially the Miskitu women) to bear on the revived elders' councils, to purge them of any subservience to treacherous leaders like Fagoth, and—when the people *themselves* decided—to replace them with new forms of local selfgovernment that would better reflect the people's desires and needs.

relates Norman Bent, a Miskitu moravian pastor who sympathized with the revolution. "They had defended Sandino against the U.S. marines in his early days, and he was very meaningful to them."²⁹ Thus Alpromisu changed its name to *Sandinista* Unity of Miskitu, Sumu and Rama Indians (Misurasata).

...a Chauvinist Policy Is Imposed

Ortega's "commandist" approach towards the Indians' organization was symptomatic of the fact that the FSLN leadership maintained a chauvinistic, paternalistic attitude towards the Indian peoples. The program of the "united people's movement," a coalition of mass organizations which the FSLN had built in preparation for the September 1978 revolution, had called for "a development and integration program for the Atlantic coast region."³⁰ No mention was made of the need for the integration to be *voluntary*, nor for the development program to be worked out and implemented by the Atlantic coast peoples themselves, on the basis of *territorial autonomy* for the culturally distinct region.

During their struggle against Somoza, the FSLN cadres had never bothered to build strong roots among the Atlantic coast peoples, learn their languages nor study their cultural traditions, history and psychology. Now the FSLN leaders, compounding their ignorance with the heady arrogance born of a fresh revolutionary triumph, raised the rude slogan of "complete integration" of the Atlantic coast region. While the FSLN leaders intended unilaterally to integrate the Atlantic coast into Nicaragua, they had no intention of integrating the Atlantic coast peoples' representatives into their "revolutionary" government in Managua. Misurasata was given a token seat in the legislative council of state. In the national junta, the governing body, there was room for ambitious bourgeois politicians like Alfonso Robelo and a potbellied bourgeois lawyer like Rafael Córdova Rivas (who continues to sit on the national junta to this day). But there was no room for the Indian and Creole peoples' representatives from the Atlantic coast. To the Miskitu, the "integration" they were promised by Managua must have appeared as a new campaign of "Spanish" colonial domination.* The FSLN leaders, lacking any grassroots organization or base of popular support among the Miskitu, counterposed their internal state security organs and

*And the Miskitu word for Spaniard means "our enemy."

military commanders to the "backward" councils of village elders organized by Misurasata.³¹

Contradictions of the Literacy Campaign...

The 1980 *sandinista* literacy campaign, which was so liberating and effective among the Spanish speaking people of western Nicaragua, ran into sharp obstacles on the Atlantic coast. Despite the fact that, according to a Misurasata survey, scarcely over 5% of the Miskitu spoke Spanish, the FSLN leaders insisted on conducting the literacy campaign among the Miskitu in Spanish.³² This led to mass resentment, and two successive waves of literacy brigades sent to teach Spanish to the Miskitu left the region without accomplishing their goal. The people were demanding literacy training in their own language.

A dispute over the question took place between the Misurasata leaders and the FSLN leaders. Finally the FSLN reversed its policy, allowing literacy training to be conducted in the Miskitu language, whose written grammar was further developed in the process. The new campaign began in October 1980, at the end of the Spanish literacy campaign.

...and State Industrial Policy...

Misurasata also began protesting the discharge of chemical wastes from a nationalized gold mine into the river Bambana, along which most of the Sumu communities are located. The people, lacking wells, were accustomed to drinking their water straight from the river; the polluting chemicals, including arsenic, could be deadly. According to Wiggins, in a single day over 20 Sumu children died from drinking the polluted water. And the chemicals were also destroying the fish and other wildlife which the Sumu needed for subsistence.³³

When the Misurasata leaders raised their criticisms over this situation, the FSLN leaders reacted like callous bureaucrats. Insisting that there was no proof of chemical poisoning, they went on to explain that the gold mine was too important to the national economy to be shut down: It was necessary for generating foreign exchange, especially U.S. dollars. Paying off Nicaragua's monstrous foreign debt to the imperialists, which the FSLN had slavishly inherited from the Somoza swindlers, was thus considered more important than the lives of Indian children.

Such were the flesh and blood consequences of that pragmatic, “nondoctrinaire” policy for which muddleheaded apologists of the FSLN have praised the Managua regime.

...and Heavyhanded Bureaucracy...

Unwilling to deal with Misurasata as a fraternal organization enjoying autonomous governing powers, the FSLN leadership set up a bureaucratic apparatus, the “Nicaraguan Institute of the Atlantic Coast,” which sought to bypass and isolate Misurasata. It was headed by William Ramírez, a Pacific coaster unfamiliar with the Indian societies and cultures. The FSLN then tried to coopt the Misurasata leaders into bureaucratic posts under Ramírez. The Indian leaders refused, considering Ramírez hostile to their interests.³⁴

Nervous over the possibility of a U.S./*somocista* invasion and occupation of the sparsely populated Atlantic coast region, the FSLN leaders were, above all, interested in militarily “securing” the region. Crude military considerations came first, and the indigenous people came second. In January 1981, a young Miskitu fisherman was killed by the FSLN military. It was a “wanton overreaction—and for three days the Indian people held mass demonstrations. They were angry because the military had hidden the body and had, again, tried to cover up the incident...”³⁵

...and Land Rights Policy

Meanwhile, Misurasata was conducting a comprehensive land survey of all the Indian villages, to demarcate Indian land claims to be negotiated with the Managua government. The date set for Misurasata to deliver the land survey results to the FSLN leadership was 28 February 1981.

But just a few days before the date arrived, FSLN police arrested the entire top and middle leadership of Misurasata (including Steadman Fagoth, Brooklyn Rivera, Armstrong Wiggins, Hazel Lau, and others), along with some Miskitu and Sumu youths who were just winding up the literacy campaign—33 people in all.³⁶ The charge levelled against them was “separatism.” Sergio Ramírez, a member of the national junta politically close to the FSLN and author of *The Living Thought of Sandino*, publicly stated, “We are going to destroy Misurasata.”³⁷ Hundreds of Miskitu men and youths, having lost all confidence in the govern-

ment, began fleeing into Honduras. Two weeks later, the government dropped the charges and released all the jailed Indians, except Misurasata head Steadman Fagoth.

The Case of Steadman Fagoth

Fagoth, a university student fluent in both Spanish and Miskitu, had become the most popular leader among the Miskitu, who elected him as their representative to the council of state. Energetic and articulate, Fagoth had not only defended the *sandinista* revolution against *somocista* elements on the Atlantic coast, but had aggressively agitated and mobilized the Miskitu masses to protest the chauvinist policies of the FSLN leadership — whereas the more cautious Misurasata leaders preferred to bargain quietly with the FSLN behind closed doors.

Soon, however, it became clear that Fagoth's struggles were based not on a coherent principle, but on personal ambition. "When he would return to the coast [from Managua]," relates Myrna Cunningham, "he told people that everything they received from the government, the vaccines and doctors, were his doing, and people believed him. He also told people that if anything were to happen to him, it was because the government was communist, and made them swear by tribal law to fight against communism..."³⁸ Shortly before his arrest, FSLN security officers had tracked Fagoth's movements in Managua, as he met with the U.S. embassy and rightist political parties.³⁹ Now, the FSLN leaders announced they had unearthed police documents proving that Fagoth had been an undercover agent for Somoza and, while studying at the university of Managua, had fingered students and professors working with the *sandinista* underground, leading to the death of four people at the hands of Somoza.*

The FSLN leaders did not bother to explain why these documents linking Fagoth to the Somoza intelligence apparatus, which ought to have been in their hands for the 1½ years since the overthrow of Somoza, were only being exposed now that the government had declared war on Misurasata. After all, on two occasions Fagoth had been chosen by delegated assemblies of the Miskitu people as their political leader with FSLN leaders pres-

*According to Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, Fagoth, while under arrest, publicly admitted his secret work for Somoza. But I have not seen this assertion corroborated by any other source, and Dr. Dunbar has taken a tendentious pro-FSLN position on the Miskitu question.

ent, and the FSLN had raised no objections: in November 1979, when Fagoth was chosen as general coordinator of Misurasata in the presence of Daniel Ortega and culture minister Ernesto Cardenal, and in the spring of 1980, when he was elected representative of the Atlantic coast to the council of state.⁴⁰ So it seems that either the FSLN leaders had been sitting on the evidence of Fagoth's *somocista* treachery all that time, or they simply fabricated the evidence.

At any rate, even documents proving that Fagoth was in the *somocista* camp could not save the FSLN's Miskitu policy now. Instead of isolating Fagoth from the Miskitu people, the maneuver only backfired, revealing how dangerously isolated the FSLN regime had become from the Miskitu people. "...The reaction in the communities by that time was, 'If Fagoth is a *somocista*, then we are *somocistas*.'"⁴¹

The Turning Point

And the FSLN regime was by no means ready to end its campaign of arrests of Miskitu leaders. It ordered the arrest of Elmer Prado, a Miskitu leader in the mining sector. FSLN soldiers attempted to carry out the arrest in the midst of a meeting in a moravian church, where 600 youths had assembled to celebrate the end of the literacy campaign. The following account of what happened next is given by Norman Bent, a Miskito moravian pastor generally sympathetic to the FSLN regime and its progressive achievements*:

"...Four military men armed with machineguns walked into the church, and five others surrounded the building. While the minister was preaching, one of the military men stepped up to the pulpit and asked to speak. He said he was looking for the young Miskitu leader [Prado]. The young man lifted his hand and said, 'I am he.'

*Norman Bent, tragically trapped between his sympathy for the *sandinista* revolution and his loyalty to his own Miskitu people, described his position in these words: "I...have a political, ideological conviction. I don't believe in capitalism as a system. I think it's finished. What I hope for in Nicaragua is a model for the third world. Therefore, I believe in the struggle of the revolution. Already I can see that this revolution has benefitted the poor.

"But I have a personal problem. The revolutionary leadership does not trust me because I am a church leader of the Indian people. Neither am I trusted by my own people, because of my revolutionary approach to interpreting the scripture. So you see where I am: I am the meat of the sandwich."⁴²

"The military man asked, 'Will you follow me?'

"The young man replied, 'We are in the midst of a religious ceremony. Can you wait until the ceremony is over? Then I will willingly follow you.'

"Another military man who was at the door shouted, 'Why wait? Shoot him!' and opened fire. At that, the young people in the church jumped on the military men. Four civilians and four of the military were killed. The military men outside the church dropped their guns and ran."⁴³

That was the turning point in the relationship between the FSLN and the Miskitu. The Managua government was hellbent on sliding down the inclined plane which it had greased with the blood of both Miskitu youths and FSLN soldiers. Sergio Ramírez frothed that the four Indian literacy teachers killed in the church incident had been "subversives," and the FSLN launched a propaganda campaign denouncing Misurasata as a counterrevolutionary, separatist, and racist (!!) movement.⁴⁴

A General Strike against the FSLN

The Miskitu began holding mass demonstrations and vigils of prayer and fasting in the churches, demanding the release of Fagoth, freedom to organize for Misurasata, and public recognition by the government that it had been at fault in the death of the eight people in the church incident. But the government responded with still more military repression, driving the protesting Miskitu out of a church at gunpoint on at least one occasion.⁴⁵ As hundreds of more youths fled into Honduras, the Miskitu remaining in Nicaragua, furious at the government, stopped sending their children to school and refused to do farming or accept any medical aid.⁴⁶ Miskitu miners and factory workers laid down tools, and the Atlantic coast economy was paralyzed.

FSLN military units were sent to confront some of the Miskitu demonstrations. A large demonstration in the town of Prinzipolka was shot up, with several people killed.⁴⁷ Young Miskitu men began capturing weapons from the FSLN military and going off to the mountains, beginning an armed resistance which had wide popular support in the local communities. The Managua government placed the Miskitu communities under direct military supervision. "The presence of military people in their area was very much a shock to the Indians," says Norman Bent. "Even Somoza had not had an army there."⁴⁸

Fagoth Bolts to Honduras

In mid-May 1981, the Managua government, piling one folly on top of another, released Fagoth, but on the following three conditions: 1) Fagoth was to spend at least five days restoring industrial activity on the Atlantic coast, convincing Indian parents to send their children back to school and accept medical services once again; 2) he was to go to Honduras and convince those Miskitu who had fled there to return—"which was a dangerous task since the *somocistas* were already there as counterrevolutionary forces making use of the Miskitu."⁴⁹; 3) he would accept a scholarship to study in a Soviet bloc country for a year.

Intelligent people throughout Nicaragua—of which there are many—must have been asking themselves: What is the point of sending out a supposedly proven *somocista* agent to defuse his own people's militant hostility towards the FSLN government, and then expecting him to spend a year studying in the Soviet bloc (presumably there to assimilate the collected speeches of Leonid Brezhnev on peaceful coexistence, *détente*, noninterference in the internal affairs of sovereign states, etc.—and the Soviet bloc bureaucrats would no doubt have deeply appreciated having a *somocista* agent in their university system). As it turned out, Fagoth fled quickly into Honduras, made contact with the U.S. puppet military dictatorship there, and joined the counterrevolutionary forces.

Fagoth had been Misurasata's undisputed leader. Now, in broadcasts in Miskitu from the powerful *somocista* radio station established in Honduras with CIA sponsorship, Fagoth urged his followers to disband Misurasata and join him in Honduras. In strident anticommunist agitation over the airwaves, he warned that the Miskitu would be massacred by the FSLN army if they remained in Nicaragua. He also echoed the Reagan administration's claims that the Cuban Communists had "taken over" Nicaragua—adding that Cuba was "colonizing" the Atlantic coast. And this radio station soon became the most listened to station on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast.* As the FSLN regime pressured the Miskitu

*Propaganda of this sort, conducted along the lines of CIA psychological warfare, also made a profound impact among the African descendants (Creoles) living in the Atlantic coast city of Bluefields. With the people increasingly insecure over the worsening economic conditions brought upon their region by the collapse of the Somoza regime, rightist elements whipped up anti-Cuban, anticommunist feelings among them—claiming that Cuban

to openly dissociate themselves from Fagoth, several Misurasata leaders, struggling to continue their work in Nicaragua, put out a press release condemning Fagoth's action. But under the increasingly polarized conditions, Misurasata ceased functioning as a mass organization.

Chauvinism Assumes Legal Form

It could come as no surprise to the Miskitu to find that the FSLN regime had disregarded Misurasata's land claims in drawing up the agrarian reform law in the summer of 1981. Article 31 of the law provided for the splitting up of the Indians' communal lands, "with the resulting loss of much of the territory and...in complete opposition to our culture and traditions."⁵⁰ The agrarian reform law was thus more accommodating to the bourgeois landowners—who were not faced with any limit on landownership, nor with expropriation as long as they used all their land productively—than to the indigenous peoples.

After two years of riding roughshod over the democratic cultural and political aspirations of the indigenous peoples, it was only logical for the FSLN to give its chauvinist practice a formal, legal expression. This came in the "Declaration of Principles of the Sandinista Popular Revolution in Relation to the Indigenous Communities of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua," released on 12 August 1981. As usual, the declaration was a unilateral fiat emanating from Managua; no attempt was made to solicit a declaration of the principles of the indigenous communities of the Atlantic coast in relation to the *sandinista* popular revolution.

Point 1 of the declaration established the "principle" of Hispanic chauvinism: "The Nicaraguan nation is one, single territory politically and cannot be dismembered, divided, or cut up in its sovereignty and independence. Its official language is Spanish."⁵¹

volunteer teachers, technicians and medical personnel were hellbent on taking jobs away from the people of Bluefields. This agitation culminated in *antisandinista* demonstrations and riots in October 1980, involving some 10,000 out of Bluefields' 25,000 people. The riots were put down militarily by the FSLN army, with several people killed. FSLN leaders then travelled to Bluefields and held mass public meetings in which the people aired their grievances against the government. The FSLN leaders criticized themselves for their insensitive policy towards the local people. While the FSLN's policy towards the English speaking Creoles has been bound up with its chauvinist policy towards the Atlantic coast in general, it has not had as devastating consequences as has its policy towards the Indians.

The writers neglected to add that the FSLN, through its antide-mocratic denial of *territorial autonomy* to the Atlantic coast peoples, so deeply antagonizing them, had given a tremendous boost to the counterrevolution and U.S. imperialism—thus *opening wide the danger* of the reactionary dismemberment of Nicaragua. Point 6 hammered home the fact that the Indians had no say over the use of their land and natural resources: “The natural resources of our territory are the property of the Nicaraguan people, represented by the revolutionary state which is the only authority able [!] to establish their use rationally and efficiently...”⁵²

Lenin vs. the FSLN

It is ironic that the FSLN’s hamhanded policy towards Nicaragua’s Indians has been viewed by the Indians themselves as a result of the *sandinistas’* adherence to “marxism-leninism”—thus deepening the conviction of many American Indians that *both marxism-leninism and capitalism*, as world outlooks promoting industrial development, are fundamentally hostile to the cultural identity and democratic aspirations of indigenous peoples. In fact, the FSLN’s policy has had *nothing in common with Lenin’s approach to indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities*.*

Most selfstyled marxist-leninists have completely “forgotten” Lenin’s actual views on the subject of national and ethnic minorities (if they ever bothered to study them in the first place); instead they select only those of Lenin’s writings on the national question (e.g., his polemics against the narrow nationalism and cultural aloofness of workers’ organizations basing themselves on ethnic minority groupings within a multinational state) which they can use, in a distorted way, to prop up their own, *oppressor nation chauvinism*.

A bolshevik resolution dealing with the rights of national/-cultural minorities in Russia, passed in 1913, called for “...wide

*The FSLN policy has, on the other hand, had much in common with the *stalinist perversion of leninism on the national question*: Stalin’s trampling on the rights of the non-Russian nations of the Soviet Union, a chauvinist policy which has been continued by Stalin’s successors in power. To be sure, the FSLN leaders had no need to consciously “imitate foreign models” in order to fall into a stalinist mold in their national policy; stalinism is, in essence, bourgeois ideology and policy grafted onto the proletarian dictatorship, and as such tends to manifest itself quite spontaneously among the upper strata of a workers’ state.

regional autonomy and fully democratic local selfgovernment, with the boundaries of the selfgoverning and autonomous regions *determined by the local inhabitants themselves* on the basis of their economic and social conditions, national make-up of the population, etc.”⁵³ In the same set of resolutions, and in several articles published by Lenin the same year, Lenin and the bolsheviks denounced the idea of *any* language being imposed as the compulsory official language, and called for public school instruction in *all* the native peoples’ languages. Lenin stood for the right of every child (and youth) to receive *general* education in the language of his or her choice, within the public school system. He was also for the right of all people to use the language of their choice in daily public life—whether in the factories, universities, professional institutions or in dealings with the government.

Positive Aspects of FSLN Policy

The 1981 FSLN declaration on the indigenous communities did state, to its credit, that “The government of national reconstruction supports the rescue of the different cultural expressions, granting to the Miskitu, Creole, Sumu and Rama communities of the Atlantic coast the means necessary to promote their own cultural traditions, including the preservation of their languages.” (point 3).⁵⁴ There has since been a cultural renaissance among the Atlantic coast peoples. Teams of young cultural workers have gone out to the village elders, collecting folklore and the peoples’ history, reviving their dances, music and languages.⁵⁵ The first dictionary of the three dialects of the Sumu language is being compiled by a Sumu leader, Ronas Dolores. The Rama Indians’ population, by the time of Somoza’s overthrow, was down to 570, only 25 of whom spoke their native language. Yet their language has been developed into written form under the FSLN regime. Ernesto Cardenal, head of the cultural ministry which has guided this linguistic work, also inspired the creation of a university of the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

Indian schoolchildren are now supposed to receive education in their native languages up to the fourth grade, at which point the general curriculum switches to Spanish. For adults, however, education in Miskitu has lapsed since the violent end of the literacy campaign in February 1981. Hazel Lau has had to continue struggling with Hispanic chauvinist bureaucrats over the need for bilingual and bicultural education.⁵⁶ Both in its conception

and practice, the FSLN's language policy has fallen well short of the leninist, consistently democratic language policy, according to which the Atlantic coast peoples should *not have to* learn Spanish if they do not want to—just as the non-English speaking nationalities in the U.S. will not have to learn English, once the revolution abolishes English as the official language.

The 'Red Christmas' Plot

In December 1981, Miskitu fighters headed by Fagoth launched an intensive campaign of assaults against FSLN soldiers, health workers and teachers along the Nicaraguan side of the Rio Coco. It was coordinated with terroristic raids by *somocista* ex-national guardsmen upon Nicaraguan border villages, and undoubtedly directed by CIA covert operations based in southern Honduras. At the same time, the U.S. mass media floated false stories that the FSLN army had massacred hundreds of Miskitu civilians. The "red christmas" plot to provoke a secessionist uprising among the Miskitu, dynamite the Managua oil refinery and ultimately overthrow the FSLN regime was on.

Had all or most of the Miskitu crossed the Rio Coco to join Fagoth's forces in Honduras, that would have been a tremendous psychological victory for the U.S./*somocista* counterrevolution, which could then have launched a fullscale invasion of eastern Nicaragua behind the banner of avenging the FSLN's "genocide" against the Miskitu. But, while Fagoth retained much sympathy and support among Miskitu remaining in Nicaragua, their positive response to his calls for mass flight across the river had been far from unanimous. Fagoth now attempted to force the issue. His fighters occupied several Miskitu villages within Nicaragua and tried to strongarm their residents into joining forces with them.

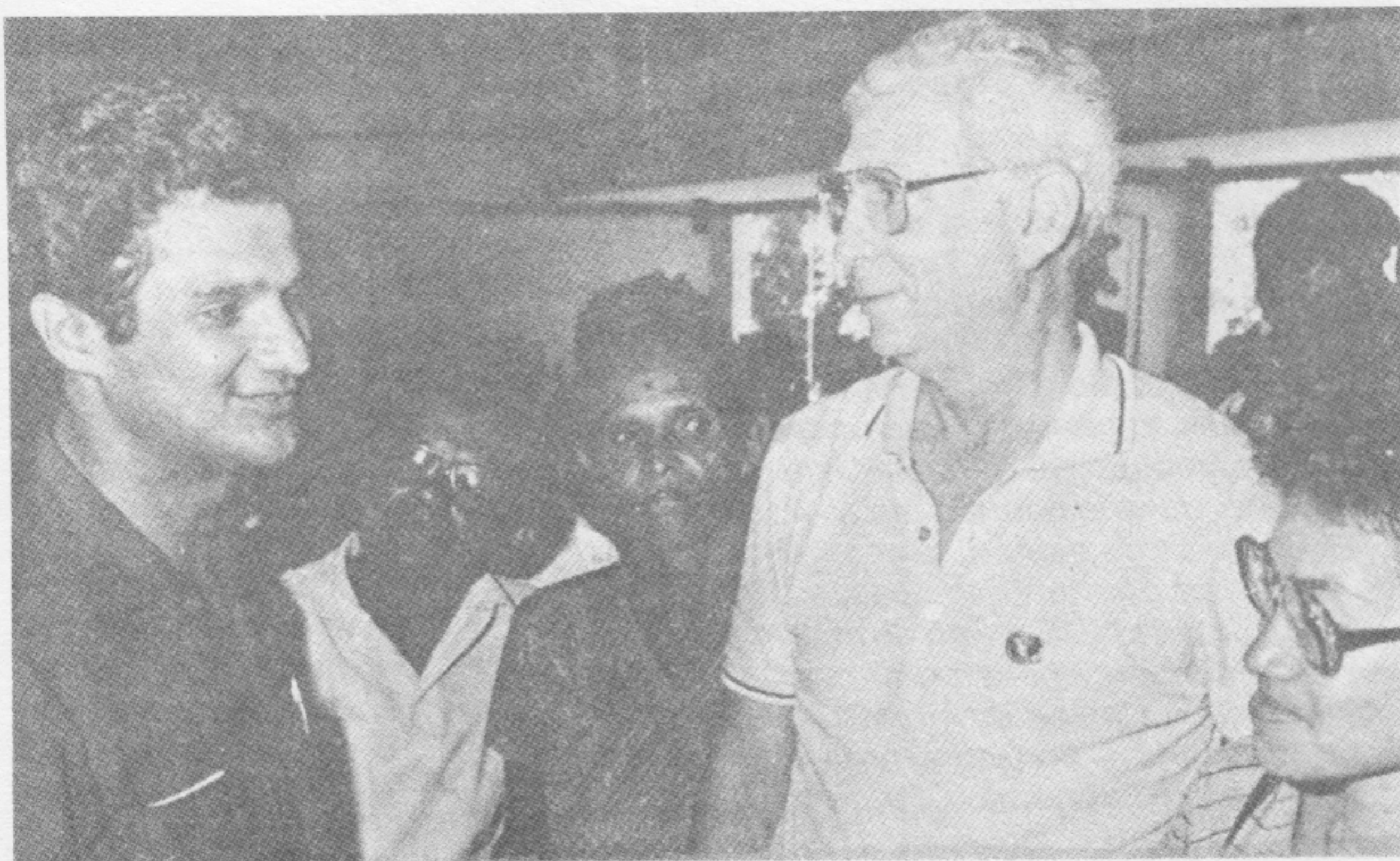
As with the *somocista* thugs attacking border villages farther west, Fagoth's forces soon selected health workers and teachers—vanguard workers for the revolution—as special targets for their terror. Myrna Cunningham, the only Miskitu doctor, has organized a campaign of mass vaccination of the Miskitu against rampant malaria, tuberculosis and measles, in collaboration with the Nicaraguan government. She was kidnapped, along with other health workers, by Fagoth's men at the end of 1981. The women were driven into Honduras, tortured, raped, and threatened with execution before finally being released back in Nicaragua.⁵⁷

Mass Relocation of the Miskitu from their Ancestral Home

Faced with this tense military and social situation, the FSLN decided to relocate 33 Miskitu border villages *en masse* into the Nicaraguan interior. Beginning in January 1982, over 10,000 Miskitu were thus moved out, on foot, from the region where they had lived for centuries. Their homes, crops and livestock were destroyed, "to prevent use by the counterrevolutionaries." The Miskitu were given the choice of moving to Honduras—which some 10,000 others did⁵⁸—or elsewhere in Nicaragua, if they did not want to move to the designated settlement areas some 100 kilometers to the south. The relocation march, while well organized, was very traumatic for the Miskitu. According to the FSLN, two Miskitu died during the relocation—one of a heart attack, the other of hepatitis.⁵⁹

So far had the FSLN slid down the road to antagonizing the Miskitu and driving them towards an alliance with the *somocista* counterrevolution, that the Miskitu had become a *part* of the "security problem" along the eastern Honduran border, and had to be cleared away like so much troublesome undergrowth. Had the FSLN pursued a correct policy towards the Atlantic coast, the Miskitu would eagerly have organized and armed themselves *against* the *somocista* thugs and Miskitu traitors such as Fagoth. They would then have become a *part* of the *solution* to the security problem, and their continued location along the border would have been an *advantage* to the revolution. A correct policy would have helped the Miskitu become revolutionary *subjects* of history. But the false policy made them hapless *objects* of history, chafed between the chauvinist Managua government and the counterrevolutionary CIA/*somocista* bloc.*

*Predictably, U.S. imperialism leapt at the opportunity to score easy propaganda points against the *sandinista* regime. Addressing a senate subcommittee on western hemisphere affairs, U.S. ambassador to the UN Jeane Kirkpatrick seized on the Miskitu question to denounce Nicaragua as "the worst violator of human rights in Central America."⁶⁰ Kirkpatrick "forgot" to consider the genocidal slaughter of Indians by the U.S. allied military dictatorship in Guatemala—or, for that matter, the U.S. government's paramilitary campaign to expel over 8,000 Navajo and Hopi people from their traditional lands in the Big Mountain region of the "U.S." southwest. At the same time, Ronald Reagan had a field day brandishing a photo published in the French magazine *Le Figaro*, supposedly showing FSLN cadres burning Miskitu corpses. It was soon revealed that the photo actually showed the corpses of



Brooklyn Rivera (left) returns to Nicaragua on 20 October 1984, for a ten day visit. At right is Hazel Lau, who, along with Rivera, was a leader of Misurasata until the organization was wrenched apart by the traumatic events of 1981 and Rivera fled to Honduras and pursued armed resistance against the FSLN regime in the Atlantic coast region. At right center is Fernando Cardenal, jesuit priest and minister of education. (Barricada Internacional, 25 October 1984)



Claudia Gordillo

Residents of a Miskitu resettlement village in northeastern Nicaragua.



Norman Bent, the Miskitu moravian pastor who is sympathetic to the sandinista revolution. "...So you see where I am: I am the meat of the sandwich."
(Sojourners magazine).

Loren Tapaha/Navajo Times



Myrna Cunningham. The only Miskitu doctor, she has organized a mass vaccination program in collaboration with the FSLN government.

A Heavy Hand against the Miskitu, a Light Hand against the Somocistas

Starting in January 1982, the FSLN army arrested some 500 Miskitu in the border area, accusing them of either carrying out counterrevolutionary activity or sympathizing with it. "It is a case again of racism, overreaction, and mistrust," noted Norman Bent.⁶² Meanwhile, the Miskitu refugees in Honduras have been living under terrible conditions, their squalid camps policed by Honduran soldiers and armed *somocistas*, who ruthlessly crush any sign of opposition and pressgang young Miskitu men into fighting the FSLN.⁶³ Thus some Miskitu returned to Nicaragua, hiding out in their former villages. They, along with other Miskitu bringing food to them, were viewed as "counterrevolutionary" by FSLN security officers, and many of these people were swept up in wanton arrests.

The FSLN's jailing and imprisonment of several hundred beleaguered Miskitu, often on spurious charges of counterrevolutionary activity and with no right to a trial, formed an ironic contrast to Tomás Borge's "good will" release of 3,000 captured national guardsmen right after the revolutionary victory in 1979—despite the fact that those professional counterrevolutionaries were deeply hated by the Nicaraguan masses who had suffered their official terrorism.⁶⁴ The remaining 5,000 arrested guardsmen were all brought to public trial. Typically, they defended themselves by insisting that they had been strictly "noncombat" personnel, serving as cooks, chauffeurs, etc. Many of these cynical war criminals were acquitted for lack of eyewitness evidence against them.⁶⁵ And many of the released guardsmen immediately set up camp in southern Honduras, renewing their terror attacks against the Nicaraguan people.

Here are the bitter fruits of the FSLN's vaunted "pluralistic" regime, a regime that showed generosity towards the *oppressors* (the bourgeoisie and national guard), and chauvinist hostility towards the *most oppressed* (the Indians): The FSLN succeeded not only in building the *revolutionary* army that destroyed the Somoza regime and brought the proletariat to power, but *also*

Nicaraguan victims of Somoza's white terror being burned by the Red Cross (for hygienic reasons) during the 1978 revolution and counterrevolution.⁶¹ Even so, Reagan continued bullheadedly spouting his slander against the *sandinistas*.

virtually built up the *counterrevolutionary* army now assaulting Nicaragua, by giving thousands of *somocista* guardsmen a free ticket to Honduras and then driving thousands of Miskitu youths into their arms.

From the christian standpoint, this would perhaps be considered charity to the counterrevolution. From the marxist standpoint, it has been opportunist sabotage of the revolution. The fact that the counterrevolution, despite its ferocity, has yet to make any serious headway in its campaign to destroy the new class regime, shows that the revolutionary activity and consciousness of the Nicaraguan masses is still stronger than the opportunism of their leaders.

Miskitu Leaders Choose Up Sides

In the course of the traumatic events of 1981-2, practically the entire leadership of Misurasata fled to Honduras or Costa Rica. A notable exception was Hazel Lau, who has remained with her people in Nicaragua, adopting a position of critical support towards the FSLN regime. The fact that Lau was also the only woman among the main leaders of Misurasata can scarcely be accidental. The Miskitu women stood closer to their people's communal traditions than did the men; they felt more keenly the brutalizing impact of capitalist penetration and the chase for personal profit—upon themselves, their children and the elderly. They were thus less likely to be enamored of U.S. capitalism and its dazzling offers of a military alliance against the FSLN regime. Lau has had to continue struggling against the chauvinist aspects of the FSLN's Indian policy, while facing the continual danger of kidnapping and/or assassination at the hands of the Miskitu warriors based in Honduras, who consider her—along with all other Miskitu who have worked with the FSLN regime—a traitor to the Miskitu cause.

Brooklyn Rivera, who fled Nicaragua in mid-1981, set up an anti-FSLN military organization while ironically maintaining the name Misurasata, and formed a bloc with Edén Pastora's Democratic Revolutionary Alliance (ARDE), based in Costa Rica. Steadman Fagoth, joined by several rightist moravian pastors,*

*According to Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, the *official* moravian church on the Atlantic coast *denounced* the Miskitu's flight to Honduras. This probably had nothing to do with any sincere opposition to the counterrevolutionary forces based in Honduras, and everything to do with the moravian hierarchy's parasitic instinct for selfpreservation.

formed a new organization, Misura—an acronym for the Miskitu, Sumu and Rama Indians (but without the “*sandinista* unity” which Daniel Ortega had foisted onto the Indian organization’s name in 1979). Misura works closely with the *somocista* Nicaraguan Democratic Forces (FDN), and its combat units are reportedly commanded by ex-national guardsmen and foreign mercenaries on a regular basis. Rivera’s Misurasata, not wanting to be openly associated with *somocismo* and the CIA, has publicly distanced itself from Fagoth’s Misura—just as Pastora’s ARDE has publicly distanced itself from the FDN. But, while Pastora’s “independence” from the FDN/*somocista*/CIA bloc is demagogic and self-serving, Rivera’s independence from Fagoth’s counterrevolutionary movement seems sincere.

Fagoth’s Misura has failed to put forward a coherent program for the social and political liberation of the Miskitu people. His warriors seem to be fighting, above all, out of a desire for blind revenge against the FSLN for having trampled Miskitu aspirations in 1979-82. But if the Misura fighters lack a positive program, their U.S. imperialist sponsors do not: *They* are consciously striving to reimpose capitalist class rule and U.S. hegemony over Nicaragua. These Miskitu warriors are thus being cynically used as cannon fodder by U.S. imperialism in its war aims against the Nicaraguan revolution—just as Miskitu warriors were used as cannon fodder by British imperialism in the 18th century, in its war against the revolutionary maroons of Jamaica.

FSLN's Amnesty and Self-Criticism

On 1 December 1983, as the Miskitu and counterrevolutionary attacks against the FSLN regime were intensifying and the U.S. was mounting a huge military buildup in Honduras, Daniel Ortega proclaimed a general amnesty for Miskitu, Sumu and Rama Indians who had clashed with the government over the previous two years. Over 300 Miskitu prisoners were released, many of them having spent up to two years behind bars without charges being brought. Ortega criticized the forced relocation of Miskitu villagers as an “error,” and Tomás Borge portrayed the conflicts on the Atlantic coast as the result of “stupid errors on our part.”⁶⁶ “We have become the victim of our own mistakes,” said Borge. “We have driven the Miskitu into the arms of the CIA.”⁶⁷

[continued on page 112]

The Miskitu Question as Viewed by North American Indians

The conflict between the FSLN and the Miskitu Indians has led to a painful split within the North American Indian movement: Some groups have defended the Miskitu unconditionally, denouncing the FSLN policy as oppressive and unjust. Other groups, in their desire to defend the Nicaraguan revolution against U.S. imperialism and its counterrevolutionary campaign, have supported the FSLN with little or no criticism.

Perhaps the most vocal partisan of the pro-FSLN camp has been Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, a professor of Native American studies at California State University who works with the International Indian Treaty Council, edits the excellent bilingual paper *Indigenous World/El Mundo Indigena*, and has spent a great deal of time among the Miskitu of Nicaragua's Atlantic coast. Dr. Dunbar Ortiz has done valuable work in exposing the CIA's propaganda slanders against the *sandinista* regime and Reagan's deceptive hypocrisy in "championing" the Miskitu cause. But she has publicly tended to apologize for the FSLN's chauvinist Indian policy, uncritically supporting the forced relocation of Miskitu of early 1982.

An expression of this tendency can be seen in Dr. Dunbar's sympathetic formulation of the FSLN's approach to Nicaragua's ethnic minorities: "...In the *sandinista* view,...within the revolutionary process it is necessary to develop a goal of emancipation for the *historically subordinate* ethnic minorities on a level of respect, *equality* and *friendship*."⁶⁸ (emphasis added). How the ethnic minorities can be at once "historically subordinate" to, and "equal" to the ethnic majority, Dr. Dunbar did not bother trying to explain. She has raised no public objection to the FSLN's imposition of Spanish as the official language over Nicaragua, or to the FSLN's steamrolling of the Miskitu's land claims, which denied them territorial autonomy (see above).

On the other side, *Akwesasne Notes*, a bimonthly newspaper and official publication of the Mohawk Nation in New York state, has strongly defended the Indian peoples against the FSLN regime—while demarcating its position from that of the counterrevolutionary U.S. government. *Akwesasne Notes* ran a long and remarkable interview with Armstrong Wiggins in its autumn 1981 issue, and has since published a number of thoughtful articles on the Miskitu/FSLN conflict. But it did not interview Hazel Lau or any other Miskitu willing to work with the FSLN regime, and dogmatically closed its pages to North American Indians supporting the FSLN position. Worse still, *Akwesasne Notes* uncritically published an article on the conflict by Bernard Nietschmann, a geography professor at the University of California/Berkeley who, despite his excellent fieldwork among the Miskitu in the 1970's, has taken a reckless and irresponsible

political stance since the conflict between the Miskitu and the FSLN regime broke out into the open. Nietschmann has sweepingly characterized the conflict as a fullscale counterinsurgency war by the FSLN military against the Miskitu people, whose warriors, he claims, are waging an "autonomous revolution" whose goals are in no way determined by the tactical "marriages of convenience" they have made with "antisandinista groups."⁶⁹ Nietschmann has made public accusations of war atrocities by the Nicaraguan military against Miskitu civilians—namely, aerial bombardment of Miskitu villages in the zone of conflict. But he has provided no documentation for his claims, and visitors to the villages in question have reported no evidence of bombardment. Nietschmann has dishonestly "overlooked" the fact of CIA/*somocista* military support and guidance of the Miskitu warriors based in Honduras—as well as the trend of politically conscious Miskitu who are working with and supporting the FSLN, despite its chauvinist policy of the past.

Some American Indian Movement (AIM) leaders, such as Vernon Bellecourt, have sided with the FSLN regime, while voicing mild criticisms of some of its erroneous policies towards the Atlantic coast Indians. Bellecourt has pointed out that *Akwesasne Notes* used to be the principal organ of AIM and the International Indian Treaty Council. "But now," he adds, "it's controlled by people who have never been to Nicaragua, and only accept the viewpoint of people on the antisandinista side of the issue... We've sent them volumes of documentation, but they've generally chosen to ignore it."⁷⁰

Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, despite holding some critical views of the FSLN's Indian policy, has chosen to confine these criticisms to closed door discussions with FSLN leaders; in public, she maintains a position of 100% support to FSLN policy, not even acknowledging the FSLN leaders' sharp selfcriticism of their Indian policy at the end of 1983. Evidently, Dunbar Ortiz feels that any public criticism of the FSLN would play into the hands of U.S. imperialism and its psychological and military campaign against Nicaragua.

I do not believe that the Nicaraguan revolution is so fragile that it cannot withstand frank public criticism by its supporters; if it were that fragile, it would have been overthrown a long time ago. *Revolutionary* criticism of the revolution's errors, to the extent that it reaches and educates the working masses, can only *strengthen* the revolution in Nicaragua and worldwide—no matter how much such criticism grates against the nerves of the *opportunist misleaders* of the revolution.

The FSLN/Miskitu conflict holds crucial lessons for North American marxists. And, to put things in proportion, one must admit that, compared with the approach of most U.S. leftist groups towards the Native American struggle, the FSLN's Indian policy has been positively *enlightened*.

In the "model" Tasba Pri resettlement village, the Miskitu have begun taking command of their own lives. They have made big increases in rice production since the village was established. As in much of the Nicaraguan countryside, they have made advances in nutrition, health care and education. The Hispanic directors of the four Miskitu resettlement villages have now been replaced by Miskitu directors. In three of the villages, the Miskitu residents carry arms and have formed local defense militias.⁷¹ Still, the resettled Miskitu are clamoring to return to their homeland along the Rio Coco.⁷² And for those Miskitu who have attempted to maintain a more traditional and autonomous lifestyle in their war torn land, conditions have been far worse, including hunger.⁷³

As the FSLN partially corrected its chauvinist Indian policy, and the armed incursions by Miskitu fighters based in Honduras became increasingly antipopular and repressive, the political sympathies of the Nicaraguan Miskitu shifted away from Steadman Fagoth, towards a cautious willingness to work with the FSLN regime and its grassroots social movements. Some 200 Miskitu who had fled to Honduras—both civilians and fighters—took advantage of the FSLN's amnesty program and moved back into Nicaragua with citizenship rights.⁷⁴

Repression of Miskitu by Honduran Army

The slowing down of this stream of repatriation seems due not to a lack of desire to move back, but to increasing bureaucratic and military repression against Miskitu refugees by the Honduran government. In January 1984, a Latin American human rights organization touring the area denounced the massacre by the Honduran army of some 200 Miskitu men who were attempting to move back into Nicaragua. The massacre was confirmed by a Honduran Miskitu leader, Baltimore Kumi, who added that such repression by the Honduran army occurs frequently.⁷⁵

Brooklyn Rivera's Return

In their approach to Brooklyn Rivera and his armed partisans (as well as to the majority of Fagoth's supporters), the FSLN leaders have made a "standing offer" for them to lay down their arms, return to Nicaragua with a full guarantee of their safety, and work for the Miskitu people in a nonantagonistic way.⁷⁶ But

they have refused to open unconditional negotiations with Brooklyn Rivera and his fighters, considering that prospect an unacceptable "surrender" of Nicaraguan "sovereignty."

It would be quite wrong to politically *equate* Brooklyn Rivera with his counterrevolutionary ally, Edén Pastora. Pastora was a *sandinista* leader who, due to his political sympathies with the liberal bourgeoisie and his unbridled personal ambition, betrayed the revolution and launched an unprincipled armed insurgency against it. Rivera and the other Misurasata leaders were representatives of the poorest people in Nicaragua; they were rudely disregarded, shoved aside, falsely arrested, threatened and humiliated by the FSLN regime, in the context of a chauvinist campaign of forced assimilation of their peoples. Rivera and his supporters' uprising against the FSLN regime was initially based on just historical and political grievances—even if it has taken on a dangerously reactionary momentum.

But, if the FSLN leaders did not draw a clear political distinction between Rivera and Pastora, Rivera himself made the distinction clear when he partially accepted the FSLN's amnesty offer and returned to Nicaragua on 20 October 1984. After meeting with top FSLN leaders to secure safe passage, Rivera visited Indian communities and Miskitu resettlement villages, "with the aim of speaking with the brothers, listening to their concerns and trying to find a solution to the problem of the separation of the Miskitu people." Recognizing the improvements in the FSLN's Indian policy and the need for peace, Rivera rejected the notion that the interests of the Miskitu stand in contradiction to the positions of a people's revolution. "Indeed, I believe they are complementary: The aspirations of the indigenous peoples have to be fundamental pillars of the revolutions of Latin America. The *sandinista* government, or any other one, must give a just response to the land claims and recognize a territory within which the indigenous peoples can govern their own lives and communities, within the framework of the Nicaraguan state."⁷⁷

A New Miskitu Organization

In June 1984, a new organization of Nicaragua's Miskitu people formed, calling itself Miskitu Aslatakanka Nicaragua. Its declared aims are: 1) reunification of the Miskitu family (torn apart by the war conditions and militarization of the border); 2) government recognition of the Miskitu language as an official national

language; and 3) a call upon the government to “pay more attention to the indigenous communities and...respond to their problems.”⁷⁸

The formation of Miskitu Aslatakanka Nicaragua, which the FSLN has formally welcomed, shows both the FSLN regime’s fresh willingness to tolerate peaceful opposition organizing among the Miskitu, and the fact that the historic injustices committed against the Miskitu are far from having been overcome. At the same time, the organization’s formation on a strictly Miskitu basis marks a step back from Alpromisu’s and Misurasata’s efforts to unite all the Indian peoples (see above). And the organization’s response to the FSLN’s Hispanic chauvinist language policy—calling for Miskitu to be added as another “official” language of Nicaragua—is ill considered, failing to challenge the whole bureaucratic conception of language policy. There should be *no* official language, so that *all* the people can freely use the language of their choice.

The FSLN’s Indian policy has improved considerably since the tragic events of 1979-82 which paved the way for the present armed conflict. But, for there to be a chance of a revolutionary resolution to the traumatic conflict, the FSLN leaders would have to go far beyond their pragmatic selfcriticism of their pragmatically chauvinist Indian policy—which has led to only partial corrective actions. If revolutionary theory (dialectical materialism) is indispensable for sustained and systematic revolutionary action, then pragmatism (a superficial bourgeois outlook which defines truth as *that which is useful for the given moment*) is an inevitable intellectual product of bureaucracy. And the FSLN leaders are sitting atop an increasingly bureaucratic political structure which—out of its parasitic self-interest—requires the subordination of the weaker nationalities. Since the FSLN leaders have shown no revolutionary inclination to struggle against the bureaucracy, it is unrealistic to expect a fundamental transformation of their Indian policy.

The task of reclaiming the honor of revolutionary socialism in the eyes of the indigenous peoples of the Americas now falls to those revolutionaries who have passed through painful defeats and regroupment, to fruitful fusion with the struggling Indian majority of their country: the revolutionaries of Guatemala.

Chapter 3: Miskitu Question

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2. *Navajo Times*, 20 Jan 1984. Reprinted in *Indigenous World/El Mundo Indígena*, San Francisco, vol. 3, no. 2, 1984, p. 16.
3. Population statistics compiled through Nicaraguan government literacy campaign, 1980-1.
4. Interview with Norman Bent, *Sojourners* magazine, Washington DC, March 1983, p. 28.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
6. Interview with Myrna Cunningham, *Nicaraguan Perspectives*, Berkeley, summer 1984, p. 31.
7. Interview with Armstrong Wiggins, *op. cit.*
8. *Indigenous World, op. cit.*, p. 1.
9. Eduard Conzemius, *Ethnographic Survey of the Miskito and Sumu Indians of Honduras and Nicaragua*, Smithsonian Institute Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 106, Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1932, p. 84.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 85.
11. *Ibid.*, pp. 86-7, 115. Also Bernard Nietschmann, *Caribbean Edge: The Coming of Modern Times to Isolated People and Wildlife*, New York: Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1979, p. 68.
12. Conzemius, *op. cit.*, p. 87.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
15. Interview with Armstrong Wiggins, *op. cit.*, p. 6.
16. John Mohawk and Shelton Davis, "Revolutionary Contradictions: Miskitos and Sandinistas in Nicaragua," *Akwesasne Notes*, spring 1982, p. 8.
17. George Black, *Triumph of the People: The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua*, London: Zed Press, 1981, pp. 16, 20, 212.
18. *Navajo Times*, *op. cit.*
19. Conzemius, *op. cit.*, p. 39.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 148-50.
21. Author's interview with a Nicaraguan of African origin from Bluefields, June 1984.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Mohawk and Davis, *op. cit.*
24. Nietschmann, *op. cit.*, p. 176.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 185-6.
26. Interview with Norman Bent, *op. cit.*
27. *Ibid.*, and Interview with Armstrong Wiggins, *op. cit.*
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 25-6; and Interview with Armstrong Wiggins, *op. cit.*
29. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
30. Black, *op. cit.*, p. 121.
31. Interview with Armstrong Wiggins, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
32. *Ibid.* Also speech by Vernon Bellecourt, San Francisco, 27 Mar 1983.
33. *Ibid.* (Wiggins).
34. *Ibid.*
35. *Ibid.*
36. *Ibid.* Also Interview with Norman Bent, *op. cit.*
37. *Ibid.*
38. Interview with Myrna Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
39. Interview with Norman Bent, *op. cit.*
40. Interview with Armstrong Wiggins, *op. cit.*
41. *Ibid.*
42. Interview with Norman Bent, *op. cit.*, p. 27.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
44. Interview with Armstrong Wiggins, *op. cit.*
45. Interview with Norman Bent, *op. cit.*
46. *Ibid.*
47. Interview with Armstrong Wiggins, *op. cit.*

48. Interview with Norman Bent, *op. cit.*
49. *Ibid.*
50. Interview with Armstrong Wiggins, *op. cit.*
51. "Declaración de Principios sobre Comunidades Indígenas," *Barricada Internacional*, Managua, 21 Aug 1981, p. 6. The original Spanish text read: "La Nación Nicaragüense es una sola, territorial y políticamente y no puede ser desmembrada, dividida o lesionada en su soberanía e independencia. Su idioma oficial es el español."
52. *Ibid.*: "Los Recursos Naturales de nuestro territorio son propiedad del pueblo nicaragüense, representado por el Estado Revolucionario quien es el único capaz de establecer su explotación racional y eficiente."
53. "Resolutions of the Summer, 1913 Joint Conference of the Central Committee of the RSDLP and Party Officials," *Lenin Collected Works*, vol. 19, Moscow: Progress Publishers, p. 428. Emphasis added.
54. "Declaración de Principios sobre Comunidades Indígenas," *op. cit.*: "El Gobierno de Reconstrucción Nacional apoya el rescate de las diferentes expresiones culturales, otorgando a las comunidades miskitas, criollas, sumos y ramas de la Costa Atlántica los medios necesarios para el fomento de sus propias tradiciones culturales, incluyendo la conservación de sus lenguas." Note that the terms *rescate* ("rescue," "redemption," or "ransom") and *lenguas* (literally "tongues"—as opposed to the normal word for languages, *idiomas*), have a condescending ring to them.
55. Harriet Rohmer, developer of bilingual educational materials, speech in Berkeley, 19 July 1984.
56. Charles Hale, "Ethnopolitics, Regional War, and a Revolution's Quest for Survival," *Nicaraguan Perspectives*, summer 1984, pp. 37, 33.
57. Interview with Myrna Cunningham, *op. cit.*, p. 33.
58. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 35.
59. Mohawk and Davis, *op. cit.*, p. 7.
60. *NACLA Report on the Americas*, New York, Jan/Feb 1982, p. 37.
61. *New York Times*, 3 Mar 1982.
62. Interview with Norman Bent, *op. cit.*, p. 28.
63. *Ibid.* Also *Guardian*, New York, 11 Jan 1984, p. 17.
64. *Sojourners* magazine, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
65. Black, *op. cit.*, p. 238.
66. *Akwesasne Notes*, winter 1983, p. 3.
67. According to Norman Bent. Report on the Atlantic coast by Richard Gonzales, KPFA radio, Berkeley, 22 May 1984.
68. Roxanne Dunbar Ortiz, "The Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua and the Miskito Indians," p. 13.
69. Bernard Nietschmann, "Indian War and Peace in Nicaragua," *Akwesasne Notes*, winter 1983, p. 3.
70. Vernon Bellecourt, speech in San Francisco, 27 Mar 1983.
71. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 37.
72. Richard Gonzales, "War on the Atlantic Coast: An Eyewitness Report,"

Nicaraguan Perspectives, op. cit., p. 40.

73. Interview with Norman Bent, *Akwesasne Notes*, early spring 1984.

74. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

75. *Indigenous World, op. cit.*, p. 14.

76. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

77. *Barricada Internacional*, 25 Oct 1984, p. 1; and 8 Nov 1984, p. 16.

78. Nicaraguan Information Center *Bulletin*, Berkeley, Sep 1984, p. 5.