

Ominous threats from US against Nicaraguan Sandinistas

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In the wake of September 11, the Bush administration is threatening the Nicaraguan people over the possible election victory of Daniel Ortega, the presidential candidate for the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), in the Central American nation's November 4 elections. Polls indicate that Ortega has a thin lead over the candidate of the ruling Liberal Constitutionalist Party (PLC), Enrique Bolanos.

Washington is directly threatening the Nicaraguan population with what amounts to political and economic blackmail if they dare exercise their democratic rights and vote for the Sandinistas. In so doing, the administration is indicating its intention to return to the policy long pursued by US imperialism in the region, of both covert and direct military intervention to impose and keep its puppet regimes in power.

The FSLN came to power in 1979 after a long struggle to overthrow the regime of dictator Anastasio Somoza. Over the next 11 years, the Sandinistas combined land reform, literacy campaigns and other limited social improvements with a close relationship with Cuba and the Soviet Union.

The Reagan administration spent most of that time financing a clandestine war with a right-wing Contra army recruited and financed by the CIA. During this dirty war, the American government also mined Nicaragua's harbors, and sabotaged its economic credibility. In 1990, under pressure from US imperialism, then President Ortega agreed to elections, which the Sandinistas lost to right-wing candidate Violeta Barrios de Chamorro.

On May 27 of this year, US ambassador to Nicaragua Oliver Garza warned that a Sandinista victory would invite economic and political sanctions from the US government. Garza delivered a message from President

George W. Bush that an FSLN victory would result in violations of democratic principles. He demanded that Ortega return property confiscated during the years of FSLN rule as a condition for US acceptance of a Sandinista government.

On October 4, Secretary of State Colin Powell escalated US objections in a meeting with Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Francisco Sacasa. Powell indicated that five Nicaraguan passports had been found in the apartment of someone connected to the World Trade Center bombings, inferring that the FSLN might be connected to terror attacks.

Also on October 4, the US State Department issued a statement expressing "grave reservations" about the FSLN and charging the organization with links to terrorism. The next day, a State Department spokesperson delivered a speech at the University of Pittsburgh accusing three FSLN leaders, Thomas Borge, Lenin Cerna and Alvaro Baltonado, of having welcomed terrorists from the Middle East, Europe and Latin America. On October 16, at a meeting of the Inter-American Press Association in Washington, Marc Grossman, US undersecretary of state for Political Affairs, urged Nicaraguans to vote "wisely" in the upcoming elections.

The Bush administration accuses the FSLN of having ties with "rogue" states, defined as those that sponsor terrorism—including Libya, Iraq, the Colombian FARC (Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces) and the ETA (Basque Revolutionary Army). While it pledges to respect the result of the November elections, if Ortega were to win, the US would place Nicaragua on the "rogue" nations list. Cuba is the only American nation presently on that list. As a consequence, Nicaragua would then face economic sanctions and isolation from the US and international organizations such as the

World Bank and the IMF.

According to an article in the October 10 *Washington Post*, US policy toward Nicaragua and Central America is taking an ominous turn. The article reports that Bush is lobbying heavily for the speedy confirmation of Otto Reich—who was a supporter of the Contra army—as assistant secretary of state for Western Hemispheric Affairs. Evidence suggests that Reich attempted to obtain a US visa for anti-Castro terrorist Orlando Bosch, who was charged with planning the 1976 terrorist bombing of a Cuban airliner that killed 73 people, mostly Cuban athletes. After spending 11 years in a Venezuelan prison, Bosch entered the US illegally and received a full-pardon from former President George Bush in 1988.

In fact, there are few programmatic differences between FSLN candidate Ortega and the PLC's Bolanos. Issues in the campaign revolve around the corruption of the present regime, the alleged connection between the FSLN and Arab regimes and accusations of sexual misconduct by Daniel Ortega.

Nicaragua's economy is in shambles after the loss of \$170 million in reserves due to the collapse of two major banks last year. The government depends on the timely arrival of World Bank aid (\$35 million arrived in September). In the Western Hemisphere, only Haiti has a lower per capita income than Nicaragua.

Adding to this financial chaos is famine in the country's coffee-growing region, caused by the collapse of the world price of coffee. Under these conditions, the World Bank and IMF will dictate the policies of the future government. Even modest populist measures are out of the question for the Sandinistas, and there is no doubt that an Ortega administration would pursue the policies imposed on Nicaragua by international finance capital.

The FSLN has made it clear that it will continue the neo-liberal policies of the PLC, which include the privatization of public services and an economy that facilitates foreign investments. Ortega's modest reform proposals hinge on negotiating a new agreement with the nation's creditors, which he hopes will be more favorable to Nicaragua.

There is a real fear, however, that a Sandinista victory would raise mass expectations of social justice and economic equality that would be hard to contain. The possibility of a Sandinista victory already is causing

many to pull their investments out of the country.



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