

# SOLIDARITY WITH NICARAGUA, 1988-1989

## 1988

1988 began as a year of hope for Nicaragua, with the peace-plan for Central America, drawn up by President Arias of Costa Rica, being followed by the "Sapoa ceasefire" in Nicaragua itself. Several thousand *Contras* laid down their arms, and many of them returned to their homes.

Above all, 1988 was the last year of the war-mongering presidency of Ronald Reagan - the true leader of the *Contras*. In March, Reagan responded to a succession of military defeats inflicted by the Sandinistas on the rump of the *Contras* in the border area by sending 2500 US troops to Honduras; but it was immediately clear that US public opinion would not tolerate an invasion of Nicaragua and the troops went back to the USA after their futile exercise in sabre-rattling.

Reagan leaves the White House, having inflicted terrible damage on the Nicaraguan economy, but without having succeeded, or even come close to succeeding, in toppling the Sandinista government.

## Hurricane Joan

The departure of Reagan should have ushered in a period of hope for the long-suffering people of Nicaragua, and it was undoubtedly hailed with delight in Managua. Hope, however, has been dashed by the appalling damage caused last October by Hurricane Joan.

On Saturday 22 October, Hurricane Joan hit the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua. For the rest of the weekend, the storm wreaked havoc as it moved westwards. The path of destruction took in the towns of Bluefields, Rama and Managua and many of the most productive farmlands in the centre of the country. Flooding was widespread and damage to homes was on an enormous scale: over 300,000 people (one Nicaraguan in ten) were made homeless.

The efficiency of the Sandinista government, and its ability to mobilise the people, were once again shown in the face of this catastrophe. Mass evacuations and use of emergency shelters before the storm arrived kept loss of life comparatively low. The fact that a Third World country facing such a disaster could keep its death-toll to fewer than 70 represents a remarkable achievement.

Nevertheless, the scale of the chaos, displacement and destruction now facing the Nicaraguan people is awesome - far worse than anything caused by the CIA-*Contra* forces.

Nicaragua's need has never been more urgent.

## San Francisco Libre

1988 saw the setting-up of a twinning link between Reading and San Francisco Libre in Nicaragua. San Francisco Libre is a small rural town on the other side of Lake Managua (Xolotlan) from Managua. Its people live mainly by cattle-rearing, fishing, rural crafts and the growing of maize and beans.

When the Reading Nicaragua Solidarity Group (RNSG) was established in 1985, one of its stated aims was to organise a link with a Nicaraguan town. This has proved to be a long process, largely because communications with Nicaragua are so slow. In 1987 the Group was approached by Nicaragua-Verein Düsseldorf, the support-group in Reading's German twin-town, with a view to setting up a three-way twinning link with a "new town" on the outskirts of Managua, Ciudad Sandino. In the end, however, the Nicaraguan authorities decided that it would be preferable to set up two separate links, Düsseldorf-Ciudad Sandino and Reading-San Francisco Libre. We maintain good fraternal relations with our Düsseldorf friends, each supporting the others' activities.

## Priorities for 1989

The priorities for 1989 for the Reading San Francisco Libre Association and the Reading Nicaragua Solidarity Group will be to establish closer links with San Francisco Libre and to raise money for the Hurricane Appeal.

Hurricane damage in San Francisco Libre has been extensive. We understand that the town was evacuated before the storm arrived, and then was totally under water for several days. The whole district is in a state of devastation.

Friends and supporters can help us with both of our goals for 1989. First, if you know of anyone who is going to travel to the central Pacific area of Nicaragua and who might be prepared to take, and to bring back, messages etc., please let us know.

Second, if you are able to make a contribution, however small, to our Hurricane Appeal, or to suggest a way of raising funds, or to hold a collection in your trade union, church, social or other group, your help will be very much appreciated. Cheques should be made payable to the **Reading San Francisco Libre Association.**

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