



NICARAGUA SOLIDARITY CAMPAIGN ACTION GROUP (NSCAG) Annual Report 2012

2012 was a tough year for NSCAG as UK trade unions became more focussed on defending the rights of their members in the face of government austerity measures. However, despite this adverse context we managed to achieve some significant successes. NSCAG continued to focus on the solidarity links between Nicaraguan and UK trade unions, particularly between young activists.

Speaker tour by Nicaragua public sector trade unionists



Photo: Steph Henthorne

Nicaragua trade unionists Emerson Silva and Arelis Lopez at Unison National Delegates Conference with Mandy Richards (Hackney Youth Parliament) and Unison general secretary Dave Prentis.

The highlight of the year was a ten day visit by two Nicaraguan public sector trade unionists Arelis López and Emerson Silva as guests of Unison International Department and NSCAG. During the Unison National Delegates Conference and in meetings in north Wales, London, Oxford and West Midlands, Arelis and Emerson inspired hundreds of people with their descriptions of how their union UNE confronted austerity measures imposed by a succession of right wing governments from 1990 – 2007. **On hearing about the tide of cuts being implemented by the UK government, their advice based on experience across Latin America was “Don’t go where we’ve been – it doesn’t work!”** They also talked about how Nicaragua has entered a period of growth since the re-election

of a Sandinista government in 2007 with greater respect for employment rights and a substantial growth in trade union membership particularly among young people. The average age of trade unionists in Nicaragua is 33, compared with 54 in the UK.

The key points that Arelis and Emerson made in their presentations were:

- A range of new laws protects Nicaraguan workers’ rights including collective bargaining
- Education and healthcare is now free to all
- The ‘50/50’ law aims to ensure equal numbers of female and male candidates in elections
- Femicide is now recognised as a specific crime.
- Nicaragua has seen the highest economic growth of any Central American country, 4.4%
- The government target for energy from renewable sources by 2017 is 96%.
- Young people comprise 60% of the population and are therefore critical to the future of the country. They are organised in work, unions, schools, neighbourhoods, and disaster prevention committees. Being involved in social structures from a young age is seen as instrumental in bringing about positive social change. Arelis and Emerson said **“We are in no doubt – the future is in our hands.”**

Arelis and Emerson emphasized how much they had benefitted from the leadership skills training for young people financed by Unison and CWU in 2010. Arelis reported **“In addition to our union organising work the training helps us communicate and raise awareness among young people”.**

Unison funding for UNE legal office



Photo: Liz Light

Office manager Lizzette Lopez and lawyer Henry Rodriguez in front of the Unison funded UNE legal office in Managua.

UNE received funding from August 2011 – August 2012 to set up and run a legal office. Thanks to this support, for the first time ever UNE has the capacity to address members' problems, to enable the union to negotiate collective bargaining agreement more effectively and to provide training in employment law for union leaders. This was achieved despite a major setback at the beginning of the project when the lawyer, Emilio Arias was seriously injured in a traffic accident.

"The capacity to provide legal advice is critical to securing workers rights and to UNE's growth and consolidation." Domingo Perez, UNE general secretary.

After the finalisation of reports on the project, NSCAG worked with UNE to draft a proposal for further funding to consolidate the functioning of the office and to seek other sources of funding for 2013 - 4.

Nicaraguan giants brought solidarity greetings to demonstration against public sector cuts

NSCAG members with two very visible Nicaragua giants took part in this massive TUC organised demonstration against the cuts in October. The eye catching giants with the 'Nicaraguan unions supporting you' sash and flyers with a message of solidarity from UNE were well received by the marchers.

'UNE and Unison have a thirty year history of mutual respect. UNE has backed Unison's struggles in the UK and support Unison's positions at international conferences of the Public Service International.' Domingo Perez, UNE general secretary.

Presence at trade union conferences

We had stalls at the following trade union conferences to raise awareness of the work of NSCAG, to promote the work of Nicaraguan trade unions, to encourage unions to affiliate and to sell our fair trade products: Unison, Unite, CWU, and PCS.

Trade union delegations

Despite extensive publicity through the trade union movement and successful speaker tours in 2011 and 2012 we were again not able to find sufficient participants to enable us to go ahead with a planned trade union delegation. This is an issue that the Executive Committee will address in 2013.



Photo: Helen Yuill

Nicaraguan giants at TUC march in London, October 2012

Affiliations

Ten national unions were affiliated at the year end: BECTU, BFAWU, CWU, FBU, NUT, PCS, RMT, UNISON, UNITE and USDAW.

- The number of affiliated branches and regions was 68, a small drop compared with 72 in 2011. The majority of affiliations were Unison and UNITE.
- There were only two new affiliations in 2012, the same as in 2011. This compares with 15 in 2009. Of the latter, many of them affiliated as a result of circulating the TU affiliation leaflet produced in 2008. When we last produced a new leaflet (2003) 57 new branches and regions affiliated in that year alone, the main reason being that the national offices sent them our with a covering letter.
- Four trades councils are affiliated. Two resulted from the fact that in 2010 – for the 1st time for many years – all 100 plus trades councils were mailed.

	Dec. 2007	Dec. 2008	Dec. 2009	Dec. 2010	Dec. 2011	Dec. 2012
CWU	8	9	15	15	16	14
FBU	1	1	0	0	0	0
GMB	0	0	1	1	1	2
NUT	5	8	9	8	6	6
RMT	0	0	1	1	1	1
UNISON	24	30	24	24	20	21
UNITE	31	32	25	28	27	23
USDAW	1	1	1	1	1	1
TOTALS	70	81	76	78	72	68

Staff

Mark Jackson (until May), Stephanie Henthorne (from May)

NSCAG Executive members

Ruby Cox (resigned during the year), John Drewery, Rita Drobner, Pauline Fraser, Bob Hardie, Christine Oddy, Martin Prior, Matt Egan

We would like to thank all those who contributed to NSCAG's work, whether a trade union individual, branch, region or national office. A full copy of the NSCAG accounts is available on our website or on request from the office.

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