

“PROMOVIENDO EL DIÁLOGO NICARAGÜENSE-ESTADOUNIDENSE”

PRESENTACIÓN A MIEMBROS DE LA
EMBAJADA DE ESTADOS UNIDOS EN MANAGUA
A BIRD-VIEW OF THE HISTORY OF NICARAGUA

ENRIQUE BOLAÑOS GEYER
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Throughout our constitutional history, reelection has been an important issue causing uprisings and wars especially by the ever-illuminated leaders (*caudillos*) demanding “power or war” similar as the muggers that demand “your wallet or else...” This has been persistent ever since our birth as a nation.

Juan Argüello, Fruto Chamorro, Tomás Martínez, Roberto Sacasa, Zelaya, Emiliano Chamorro, Somoza I, Somoza II. It now seems it will also become an important issue for Ortega... and Alemán, of course! I may be missing others in the list.

Reelection has been disguised in many ways. Perhaps most of them have been camouflaged through Constitutional National Assemblies that enact new constitutions that in effect each one creates a new republic (a new nation), thus every time it's a new ball game and everything starts all over again.

So, I will start my presentation by telling you some short stories I have chosen for this occasion. I'll be talking about my country and, if time permits, about something of mutual interest to Nicaragua and the United States, that you care to ask.

It won't be easy for me to make long stories short, especially in English, but I'll try to do my best. I'll be talking from Independence on.

Let's start with our first elected Governor.

In 1812 —nine years before independence— Manuel Antonio De la Cerda and Juan Argüello, as active rebels fighting for independence were caught by the Spaniards and sent to prison in Spain.

De la Cerda escaped and after a long trip returned to

Nicaragua until 1820, while Argüello was pardoned in 1817 and returned to Nicaragua before De la Cerda. Even though they were relatives, they were not fond of each other. While they were in prison, the family of another prisoner, Telésforo Argüello, sent him 500 pesos that got there after his death. Juan Argüello claimed his part, but De la Cerda managed to collect all of it. This caused animosity among both De la Cerda and Argüello.

Then on September 21, 1821 the five Central America Provinces proclaimed their independence from Spain without firing a shot, not even having street riots — just by signing the Act of Independence in Guatemala. In Nicaragua we knew about it eleven days later. The pony-express internet was slow in those days. We began calling ourselves the “Central American Union” and the provinces were called “states”.

We were free and independent, what could we do with that freedom? We had three possible courses of action: 1) to continue the five Provinces united and to strengthen that union; 2) to join the Mexican monarchy being established by the self-made emperor Iturbide; and 3) to split up and become each of the Provinces totally independent from Spain and any other country including our Central American brothers. Since the very start we began shedding blood in wars of “all against all” the advocates of each of those three alternatives, especially in Nicaragua. — ¡chaos!

For instance, in October 1821, the authorities of León (our capital) join Nicaragua to Mexico when Iturbide was just trying to become Emperor of Mexico.

This caused a certain Cleto Ordóñez to lead a revolt in Granada to overthrow the local authorities, offering the spoils to the ones who followed him. They vandalized Granada. Then he moved to León to do the same thing. Combined forces from the maltreated by Cleto in Granada and those maltreated in León, set up

a 114 day siege to León until Guatemala sent a pacifier (Justo Milla) to calm things down. But a couple of months later Pablo Méndez ousted Governor Salazar in León, self-appointing himself governor. Cleto returned to León and overthrew Méndez... There were authorities overthrown, back and forth (counter mutual overthrows). There was permanent anarchy!

Somehow the Central American Congress managed to enact in 1824 the Federal Constitution creating the Central America Federation by which the Provinces changed their names to States, similar as in the U.S., calling the States to draft their own State Constitutions and elect their own authorities.

In 1825 elections were held in Nicaragua and Manuel Antonio de la Cerda was elected our first Governor, called *Jefe de Estado*, and Juan Argüello as Lieutenant-governor (*Vicejefe*), because he was the first runner-up in the elections—those were the rules. They took office on April 22, 1825.

De la Cerda enacted some severe decrees to impose stronger controls on the population. For instance:

- Dances, picnics, music and songs, out of approved hours—against the law.
- To provide lodge to strangers—against the law.
- To travel on roads and towns without passport—against the law.
- Beggars who can earn a living—illegal.
- For men to hang around in street-corners, and in cross-roads where women travel to carry water—against the law.
- And so on...

The great discontent among the population (and Juan Argüello's trickeries) forced him to resign just seven months after he took office. The *vicejefe*, Juan Argüello, took over.

The following year the State of Nicaragua enacted its first State Constitution that called for new elections. Juan Argüello (¡of course he wanted to continue!) was the candidate for the Liberals and José Sacasa for the Conservatives. The recently elected Legislative Assembly appointed José Benito Pineda as Provisional Governor while the votes were tallied and a winner was confirmed, but Argüello didn't step down. Instead he captured Pineda, hired a hit-man to kill Pineda in

exchange of a military rank. The story goes that when the hit-man went to Argüello to collect the reward, Argüello gave him a letter to be delivered to Commander Pacheco at a nearby military base. The letter said "execute him at once". The hit man was illiterate, and he delivered himself his own death sentence.

The country was once more in turmoil. De la Cerda decided to return to the political arena and he organized another parallel government, challenged Argüello, and the end result was a cruel war between the Argüellistas and the Cerdistas (the so called Argüello-Cerda war, 1827-29), until Cerda was captured by Argüellistas, sentenced to death and shot in Rivas on November 29, 1828. Central America had to send Dionisio Herrera—a pacifier—to help achieve peace, even though it didn't last.

In 1838 Nicaragua was the first State to break away from the Central American Federation to become totally independent, ever since. Thus, we enacted the 1838 Constitution, accordingly, and the new name for the head of the Government changed from *Jefe de Estado* to *Director*.

Our first Director according to that Constitution was José Núñez, whom only few people ever heard of him, like the stories I am telling you today. Similar to John Hansen and the next six presidents prior to George Washington, who was the first President after the sanctioning of the Constitution in the U.S. In general, Nicaraguans believe that the first President—head of the government—was Fruto Chamorro, because in 1853 he changed the name from Director to President. Ever since total independence in April 1838, there were 33 heads of government before Chamorro. He was No. 34.

Anyhow, in 1853 Chamorro was elected Director and tried to write a new constitution (the unborn 1854 Constitution) that sparked another civil war. The *Liberales* from León hired William Walker to come help them fight the *Conservadores* from Granada. With only 58 mercenaries altogether, Walker came and took over the country causing the National War. Central American Armies came to help force Walker out in 1857.

To make this story short, I invite you to read it in guerranacional.enriquebolanos.org So I'll skip that episode...

THE THIRTY YEARS PERIOD

From the end of the National War to Zelaya: 36 years of peace (1857 – 1893)

At the end of the National War, we entered a peaceful 36 year period in which *conservadores* alternated the presidency every four years. No visible *caudillo* reached the presidency, even though the Chamorro family controlled the conservative party, and Granada became the Capital. However, there were some unsuccessful attempts of revolutions against the governments. General Tomás Martínez as President has been acclaimed as a great President healing the wounds and restoring peace, faith and hope after the National War. Then he forced one reelection beyond the Constitution he himself enacted, mutilating his honor in history. However, the country prospered in peace during the 30-year period until President Carazo died in office and Roberto Sacasa finished his term and re-elected himself. A new revolution and another counter revolution brought the liberals back to power under general José Santos Zelaya and we entered a new instable 43-year period.

INSTABILITY

From Zelaya to Somoza: 43 years of instability (1893 – 1936)

Zelaya years

Zelaya, the new *caudillo*, stayed in power for almost 17 years and he used to say that “*El liberalismo no tiene ni reconoce fronteras*” (Liberalism does not have nor recognizes boundaries).

This attitude attracted liberal refugees from Latin American countries whom he aided providing arms, money and sometimes troops to carry liberal revolutions in their own countries. He also carried successful military actions against other Central American countries to impose friendly liberal regimes.

(Except in Costa Rica and in Guatemala where he failed against Estrada Cabrera).

On the other hand, the expected increase of world trade that the Panama Canal would bring, drove the United States together with Mexico to summon the Central American Peace Talks in Washington to agree on the Permanent Central American Peace and Friendship Treaty (September 1907).

In the US, William Howard Taft became President (1909-1913), and established his “dollar diplomacy” foreseeing the opening of the Panama Canal to favor American financial and economic interests all over the world. In regards its neighbors south of the border, he substituted Roosevelt’s “stick” for the “dollar” hoping his neighbors could benefit from the resultant economic development.

In Nicaragua, two American mercenaries (Cannon and Groce) fighting for the *Conservadores* to overthrow Zelaya in 1909, were captured, sentenced, found guilty and shot. The Secretary of State, Mr. Philander C. Knox, sent the famous “*Nota Knox*” to the Nicaraguan Ambassador in Washington declaring Zelaya an outlaw of civilization. Zelaya quits and leaves the country in December 1909

The second *República Conservadora*.

At the downfall of Zelaya, in the midst of mutual revolutions from both parties, Nicaragua restored its diplomatic relation with the United States. President Taft (1909-13) sent Thomas C. Dawson to assist the Nicaraguans in the overhauling of the nation's finances. The National Bank of Nicaragua was created in Philadelphia in 1912, in which U.S. bankers retained a controlling interest, the management of all customs, and some stock in the state-owned railway. There was a general feeling of outrage at the terms of the negotiations, and insurgencies sprung from the *liberales* against the *conservadores*. ¡Anarchy, again!

President Díaz requested the U.S. to send troops to ensure the safety of American citizens and their properties. Things got worse. U.S. Marines occupied Nicaragua from 1912 until the beginning of 1925, and some peace was achieved. In 1914 the Chamorro-Bryan Treaty was signed giving the U.S. leases over the territory needed for the proposed canal as well for the canal defenses.

In the US, Woodrow Wilson became President (1913-1921) and signed the Chamorro-Bryan Treaty (January 1914) in order to avoid some other country to compete with the Panama Canal.

Since the beginning of the Thirty-Years Period, the Chamorro family had dominated the conservative party, and Emiliano Chamorro (who made himself *the caudillo conservador* since he led revolts against Zelaya), was elected president after Díaz, to serve from 1917 to 1921.

In the meantime, after President Harding's death, Calvin Coolidge became President (1923-29), and his foreign policy was called "Pax Americana", based not on force but on mutual respect. In October 1925, the *caudillo* Emiliano Chamorro commanded a coup d'état that forced President Carlos Solórzano, (conservative) to resign while his vice-president Sacasa fled the country without ever resigning. Sacasa received military supplies in Mexico to return to Nicaragua to claim his presidency. President Coolidge, concerned about the Mexican involvement in Nicaragua, sent Admiral Dennis to Nicaragua to try to reconcile both parties, but he failed. Chamorro didn't get diplomatic recognition from the international community and one year after the coup, he resigned in October 1926.

At the same time Sacasa landed in Puerto Cabezas, proclaiming himself President of Nicaragua (December 1, 1926), and General Moncada marched the troops headed for Managua, in a war now known as the "Constitutionalist War".

President Coolidge sent Henry L. Stimson backed by 5,000 Marines to negotiate or impose peace in Nicaragua. (This is a good time to remember that ever since our Independence, we have been required to receive "pacifiers" to help us stop the constant and senseless, shed of brotherly blood, instigated by the illuminated *caudillos* in their greed for Power).

On May 4, 1927, General José María Moncada accepted Stimson's terms of surrender: 1-Ceasefire; 2-Surrender the rifles in exchange for \$10 each; 3-Put Adolfo Díaz to be provisional President to end Solórzano's term; 4-Create the National Guard with ties only to the President and no ties to political parties. The US will help in the creation of the National Guard; and 5-Election supervised by the U.S.

for the 1928 term. This Agreement is known as the "*Pacto del Espino Negro*" because it was signed under the shade of a *Espino Negro* tree, in Tipitapa.

Two days later, 5,000 soldiers from both armies surrendered, except for General Augusto César Sandino, who argued that the presidency should have been for Sacasa. Followed by most of his troops he set up his headquarters in Jinotega fighting the Marines, and later on fighting the National Guard that was being organized.

The ideology of Sandino was a mixture of Anarchism with Marxism, enhanced with the cryptic doctrine of Joaquín Trincado. Later in life Sandino came to believe that he was Saint Joseph himself, who in turn was the re-incarnation of Adam, and that his wife Blanca Aráuz was the Virgin Mary, who in turn was the re-incarnation of Eve.

Prior to the elections in 1927, Sandino sent a telegram to the Marine Commander in Jinotega, proposing his surrender if an American Military Governor takes over the Government until free elections are held in Nicaragua.

Elections were held and General José María Moncada (liberal) was elected for the 1928-1932 term, and sworn-in January 1, 1928. This brought back the Liberals to power, and marked a "time-out" for Conservatives, ever since.

Creación de la Guardia Nacional.

Much has been said about how the US imposed Somoza as Chief of the National Guard, so, let me tell you how the "Guardia" was created.

Three weeks before Adolfo Díaz completed his term, he signed the "Cuadra Pasos-Munro Agreement for the Creation of the National Guard" as agreed in the "Espino Negro Pact". President Moncada, as soon as he took office also signed the same Cuadra Pasos-Munro Agreement. Now both parties were committed to create the National Guard.

At the end of Moncada's term, in 1931, new elections supervised by the U.S. were held for the next 1932-1936 term. One day before the election (November 6, 1931), the candidates for president and vice-president of both rival parties (Juan Bautista Sacasa and Rodolfo Espinoza of the Conservative party, and Adolfo Díaz and Emiliano Chamorro, of the Liberal party) signed an Agreement before Ambassador Hanna, stating that the National Guard would be the only armed force in Nicaragua, and that President Moncada, before leaving office, must appoint the Chief Director to be a member from the party that wins the elections, and the second-in-command must be a member of the party that loses the election, and henceforth down the line to the last private. This Agreement must be ratified by the new President (whatever party wins the election).

January 1st. the winner Sacasa was sworn-in, and the following day General Somoza was also sworn-in as the first Chief Director of the National Guard. January 3 the Marines started to leave Nicaragua declaring: "Mission accomplished".

THE SOMOZA DYNASTY

42 years
(1937-1979)

I will just mention briefs outlines of the Somoza Dynasty to shorten the story.

Because of family ties with President Sacasa, Somoza could not be the next president. The "hands-off" policy by FDR, the weakness of Sacasa's Government, and Somoza's ambition, set the stage for Somoza to overthrow Sacasa, and put a puppet as president to fill-in the six month gap before being able to become president.

General Anastasio Somoza and his running mate, Francisco Navarro, won the 1936 elections for President and Vice-president by a wide margin. In 1938 he reformed the Constitution so he could re-elect himself.

In 1944 there were widespread protests against Somoza, and his ambition caused the split of his Liberal party. At the end he gave up his pretense to be the party's candidate, picking Dr. Leonardo Argüello, instead. The opposition candidate was a liberal-

conservative coalition led by Dr. Enoc Aguado (liberal).

In 1947 elections were held and Aguado won by a landslide, but Somoza's electoral system just switched the names of the candidates, making Argüello win by a landslide.

Somoza expected to easily control the 72-year old Argüello, and to be re-confirmed as Chief Director of the National Guard. But Argüello had other plans. Twenty six days after Argüello took office, Somoza commanded his second Coup d'état and Argüello left exiled to Mexico.

Somoza and Emiliano Chamorro made a pact among themselves to appoint Dr. Román Reyes, who died a few months later in office. The following day, the self-made Senator for life, Somoza, was sworn into office. Somoza was again sitting in the presidential chair until his death in 1956.

You all know the rest of the story: his son Luis followed after Tacho's death; then interim Liberal governments until his other son, Tachito, took over. Then the Sandinista revolution...

This brief recount of our history may help us find the answers that explain, or do not explain, why Nicaragua is the way it is, and why we are the way we are.

Let me talk a little bit about culture

In so far as Culture we are influenced by the güegüense, and many other things. We are a blend of different original tribes mixed with Spanish blood enhanced with Christianity.

Tradition has it that Güegüense is a theatrical play, anonymous, written in the XVI century. The name comes from Nahuatl "huehue", meaning "Old man", "wise-man". In general we take it as implying "trickery", a "wise tricky person". If someone says "Juan is very smart; did you see how he cheated Peter? That is the güegüense attitude imbedded in many of us, and I think it is something inherent also to other cultures, with different names. Our politicians think highly of their "güegüencism".

However, there are other characteristics inherent to Nicaraguans. We are kind, warm and show straight forward openness to visitors and guests: we make them feel welcome. We are also hard-working people. These are proven facts in the foreign countries where Nicaraguans are known as honest, reliable, and hard-working.

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