

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نباشد تن من مباد بدین بوم و بر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبانهای اروپایی

By a guest author
11.11.2021

A Sandinista's view of Nicaragua's colonial history



Left to right: Jose Leon Aviles, Executive Secretariat for Development of the Caribbean Coast and Johnny Hodgson, Managua, Oct. 6.
WW PHOTO: Monica Moorehead

The following is part of a presentation given by Johnny Hodgson, Sandinista National Liberation Front's Political Secretary for the Autonomous Region of the South Caribbean

(RACCS), on Oct. 6 in Managua, Nicaragua, to a U.S. delegation comprised of Coleen Littlejohn, Sara Flounders, Monica Moorehead, Joav Elinevsky and Stan Smith. The transcript is slightly edited.

My idea is to tell you who we are, the people of the Caribbean coast, where we are right now and where we're trying to get. We have six different peoples, six different ethnic groups on the Caribbean coast – Miskitu, Mayangna, Rama, Garifuna, Creole, Mestizo. Originally, we had eight different groups of people living on the Caribbean coast when the Europeans first came. In 1502 we had Europeans and Africans coming to what we call the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua today. The Europeans came because they wanted to. The Africans came against their will.

Nicaragua historically has been a divided country, divided by the colonial powers. What we know as the Pacific Coast today was a Spanish colony. What we call the Caribbean coast today was a British protectorate. So due to these circumstances, the presence of the Europeans, they were curious to have an alliance between the British and the Natives, an alliance to fight against the Spanish. The Spanish were on the Pacific coast, the British on the Caribbean coast. The British made an alliance with the Natives to fight against the Spanish.

So from the very first days of colonial time on the Caribbean coast in Nicaragua, we had the Spanish teaching the Indigenous people from the Pacific coast to fight against the Indigenous from the Caribbean coast, telling them they are your enemies. And the same thing, the British on the Caribbean coast telling our Indigenous people that their enemies are the Indigenous from the Pacific. So we had this historical division and as a result of that alliance between the British and the Natives, this territory known then as the Miskitu shore and today as the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, became a British protectorate, that's the legal status that it had. It established a monarchic government so we began to crown kings in 1635.

Divided by colonization

This kingdom went on doing business and commercial exchange with the Europeans until 1783. In 1783, in France, they signed a treaty to try to put a stop to the war between the British and the Spanish. They called it the Paris Treaty. To try to put a stop to the war,

they shared territories. So in that sharing, they decided to put our territory in the hands of the Spanish and Belize in the hands of the British. The Miskitu shore was supposed to become part of the Spanish crown.

But the British there on the Caribbean coast said, “No, we don’t want anything to do with that document that was signed there. We are happy here. We are doing good here. We have everything we need here. We have all we need to repair our ships. When we throw our nets, we catch so much fish that the nets are tearing. We have enough honey to sweeten our drinks.” They even mentioned, “We have all we need to satisfy our sexual appetite.” Yes, they mentioned that! So they say we’re not going anywhere. But the Spanish have a document saying that they are the owners of that territory, and they’re claiming it. So in 1786, they had what they call the London Convention, where they ratified the Treaty of Paris, saying that this territory belongs to Spain. But they didn’t only ratify it. They put the timetable establishing that if the British didn’t get out of the Miskitu shore before the 10th of April of 1787, they will become subjects of the Spanish crown. They will have to obey their enemies. But even with that, the British waited until the last minute to move out. So practically they had to come and move them all out. They had to come from England to move all these British and take them to Belize.

And in rushing to get out before the deadline, a lot of the Black enslaved people were able to stay behind. And those enslaved people who stayed behind mixed with the Indigenous people and began calling themselves Creoles from 1787 until today. So we had Indigenous people and now we have a new set of people called Creole, a mixture of African and Indigenous.

Then 10 years after that, in 1797, the Garifunas were kicked out of Saint Vincent and came and settled here in Central America, in Roatán and, after that, to the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua. So we had the Indigenous and the African descendants living on the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua, trying to make headway. But in 1894, we pressed formally, officially, to be part of Nicaragua. But it wasn’t a deal. It wasn’t an agreement. It was by force of arms that the Caribbean coast, the Miskitu shore, became part of Nicaragua.

‘We were invisible’

When we became part of Nicaragua, it was a tough time. We called it the ‘Time of Imposition’ because Nicaragua began to impose authority, to impose new laws, etc. It was a real rough thing, a horrible thing for the people of the Caribbean coast that historically exercised a different level of self-government. Even though it was a British protectorate we exercised a different level of self-government, we had our own kings, our own laws, et cetera. So the territory was incorporated into Nicaragua, but not the people. Nicaragua said, ‘That territory is mine. Those resources are mine, they’re Nicaraguan.’ But the people? We were never recognized as Nicaraguan. The Nicaraguan Constitution established a mono-ethnic country, a country with one language. The official language of Nicaragua is Spanish. So we were living there, but we were invisible. We weren’t in the Constitution. We were excluded from everything economically and socially.

I came to Managua to study in 1972. In the 1970s, it was very difficult for someone to come from the Caribbean coast to study here. We didn’t have any university on the Caribbean coast so you had to come to Managua. So that year that I came, two of us were able to come to study at the agricultural university. And when we got a break, we used to speak Creole. Some of the guys would come and say, ‘Hey, you can’t be talking that thing here.’ And I used to fight back and say, ‘No, I am a Nicaraguan, I have rights and I can speak my own language.’

‘I read the Constitution from A to Z’

And one day one of the guys came to me and he gave me a copy of the Nicaraguan Constitution. And they told me to show him in the Constitution where it says that I am a Nicaraguan, that Black people are Nicaraguan, that Miskitu are Nicaraguan and where it says I have a right to speak ‘that thing.’

And if I could, then he would give me a thousand córdobas. In 1972, 1,000 córdobas was plenty for a student, you know? So I made a list of what I was going to buy with 1,000 córdobas. Yeah, I was going to buy new sneakers, a new jersey, I had it made. I couldn’t figure out what I was going to do with 1,000 córdobas.

So I took the Constitution and I began to read it and I read it from A to Z. And I didn’t find not one word saying that I am Nicaraguan or that the language that I speak had any

value or anything like this. And I thought that maybe I had read it too fast, so I went over it again. I read it two times, and when I realized that I wasn't in the Constitution, I cried.

I was brought up to be tough. I was brought up in a school where they said, "Men don't cry," you know? But I cried because I couldn't believe that I had to come to the university to find out that I wasn't even in the Constitution. In Spanish, they have a phrase that translated into English that says, "There is no evil that can last a hundred years, and there is nobody that can't resist it." So that was 1972, and in 1979 we had the triumph of the revolution.

Next: Sandinista Revolution changed everything

Workers World 10.11.2021