

Koonce, Ryan

Tomás Borge was born August 13, 1930 in Matagalpa, Nicaragua. He studied law in Leon during 1954, became a communist in 1955, and was jailed in September 1956 after the assassination of Somoza Garcia. In July 1961, he founded the FSLN with Fonseca Amador and Silvio Mayorga in Tegucigalpa; he is currently the only surviving founder. Borge traveled widely from the movement's founding until the 1979 revolution, moving from Honduras to Cuba, Peru, Costa Rica, Lebanon, Mexico, and Panama. He returned to Nicaragua in the mid-1970s. He was captured and tortured by the government in 1976. In June 1979, National Guardsmen killed Borge's first wife and in July he was made Minister of Interior. He assumed command of Nicaragua's Atlantic coast (and the Miskito nation) in April 1985. In May he became governor of the occupied territories. During 1988 negotiations began between the FSLN government and Miskito groups concerning the continued argument over the autonomy question.

An Open Letter to *La Prensa* and the People of Nicaragua

December 12, 1988

Fellow Nicaraguans:

Throughout the previous year, my handling of the negotiations with our Miskito citizens has been criticized. I would hope the Nicaraguan people would like to hear from their chief representative in these negotiations, himself, and come to the correct conclusion of how our glorious work has been tainted by bourgeois contamination. The FSLN, the servant of the Nicaraguan people and all oppressed workers and peasants, has proven exceedingly tolerant with the MISURASTA and MISURA movements, and their misunderstanding of their role in the Sandinista state and the great Proletariat populations of this planet.

Many have criticized my handling of the Miskito question and the seemingly contradictory stances I have taken concerning autonomy for the Miskito people since the "audacious" plan for their self-government was put forth in 1985.¹ When I was made responsible for defending our Atlantic coast from counter-revolutionaries, I felt the best way to accomplish this was to convince the Miskitos of their solidarity with all other Nicaraguans in the greater Marxist cause of scientific socialism. I announced then that the constitution should not speak of blacks, whites, or Indians (differentiations created by bourgeois imperialists to divide us against ourselves). I said that "there are only Nicaraguans." "The only thing that differentiates us is the attitude we assume toward the nation."² What I misunderstood then was that these people had yet to reach the full understanding of the economic and cultural stratifications that characterized the world, it was too soon to fully incorporate them within the rest of socialist Nicaragua without a period of education to inform them of their oneness with all the peasants and workers of Nicaragua.

I would also like to remind the Nicaraguan people that I was made head of the Sandinista Autonomy Commission in 1984 and that I have always striven to put the welfare of the Miskitos, despite their own shortsightedness, at the highest priority of this state.³ Some have accused me of

¹ Penny Lernoux, "Nicaragua's Miskitos, Part I: Strangers in a Familiar Land," *The Nation* (September 14, 1985), 204.

² Charles R. Hale, *Resistance and Contradiction: Miskitu Indians and the Nicaraguan State, 1894-1987* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 110-111.

³ Bernard Nietschmann, *The Unknown War: The Miskito Nation, Nicaragua, and the United States* (New York: Freedom House, 1989), 71.

mistreating the Miskito during the time I was responsible for the Atlantic coast. This is utter falsity, spread by counter-revolutionaries and American stooges. When I began our literacy program, it was originally based solely on Spanish because one of the reasons the Miskito have been marginalized from the rest of the Nicaraguan people is because they are unable to understand us, or their place within our nation.⁴ During our guerilla struggle against Somoza we could not communicate with the very people we were fighting to liberate, I have personally seen the danger the reliance on indigenous languages, such as Miskito, can have on sustaining this revolution.⁵ And the relocation of the Miskitos away from their traditional villages has also fallen under a needlessly dark light, mostly thanks to CIA propaganda. The relocation would have been an improvement for the Miskitos, if they had been ready to accept it; there was better land and they would have had full access to schools and health care provided by the Sandinista government. It was only because of their “backwardness” and superstitions that compelled them to wish to remain in their previous villages and live in their improper homes. I believe we in the government were very gracious to attempt to better the lives of the Miskitos at our own cost.⁶ Both the relocation and the return of the Miskitos to their former lands was done very peaceably; there are no “divine mobs,”⁷ the Interior Ministry has acted with the greatest respect for human rights, the values to which I have committed the FSLN to since its very formation and still do to this day.

The current negotiations with the Miskito will lead us to the final unification of these people with the whole of Nicaragua. As early as 1985, I personally offered ceasefires to MISURAST and MISURA.⁸ The 5,000-man Ministry of Interior Special Forces army has been in the lands of the Miskito fighting counter-revolutionaries and CIA-backed interventionists who will undermine all the gains we have made along our Atlantic coast. And it is now that we are again running up against the problem with autonomy. The Miskito are being used by foreign puppet-masters. They are being manipulated into fighting and killing their fellow Nicaraguans for the bourgeois-introduced belief that they are a separate nation, of the “Fourth World,” as they see it. Scientific socialism teaches us of these tricks used by imperialistic capitalist nations to twist the uneducated for their designs. I have traveled throughout America and seen this, learned from Fidel and Ché. With the late Carlos Fonseca Amador I discovered the truths of Marx and Lenin in Samuel Meza’s bookstore.⁹ In Peru, the poet Esteban Pavletich taught me of Sandino and non-Stalinist communism.¹⁰ I know the methods of our enemies. The more “autonomy” is introduced to the Miskito, the more they are separated from all Nicaraguans for the profit and fattening of our oppressors. I supported the law of July 1985 because it would reverse the errors we made concerning how we first dealt with the Miskito, but as I feared, this has gone too far. We [the FSLN] cannot forget the debt we owe to our founders and to Sandino: the wipe the imperialists off Nicaraguan soil and establish the socialist state that will benefit all Nicaraguans—all the people of Nicaragua. In my handling of the Miskito since 1985 I have been labeled a “William Walker,” a foreign invader imposing my will on a sovereign people.¹¹ This is the greatest slander against me and there is not a shred of proof in it. How dare the Yankees accuse me of being as corrupt as they? Any educated socialist would realize that there is no Miskito ethnicity. The British and American imperialists, who dreamed of owning the wealth of our Atlantic provinces,

⁴ Penny Lenoux, “Nicaragua’s Miskitos, Part I: The Indians and the Commandantes,” *The Nation* (September 28, 1985), 277.

⁵ Harry E. Vanden and Gary Prevost, *Democracy and Socialism in Sandinista Nicaragua* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), 37.

⁶ Lenoux, “The Indians and the Commandantes,” 278.

⁷ Nietschmann, *The Unknown War*, 81.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁹ Vanden, *Democracy and Socialism in Sandinista Nicaragua*, 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Nietschmann, *The Unknown War*, 78.

created it to marginalize the Miskito from the rest of Nicaragua and exploit their labor.¹² I myself may have Miskito blood within me, I am currently having my people check this out, and as such I feel a special kinship with our people of the coast.¹³ What only remains to reintroduce them into Nicaraguan culture is to present the ideas of Marxism to them, and with the understanding that comes from them, they shall surely realize the error of their backward ways and renounce the violence they are instigating at the behest of the bourgeoisie tyrants in Washington. How, through socialism, the FSLN has come to truly understand the Miskito plight is readily apparent if anyone takes the time to examine the history of capitalist exploitation in Nicaragua and with other peoples around the globe. We realize . . .

[letter continues for 100+ pages of Marxist-Leninist-Fidelist gibberish]

Viva Sandino! Long live the Revolution!

Tomás Borge

Minister of Interior
