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Deborah Tyroler

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Nicaragua: La Prensa Interviews With Calero & Cesar On Domestic Struggle Against Sandinistas

by Deborah Tyroler
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[Several civilian leaders of the Nicaraguan Resistance have returned to Nicaragua or have plans to do so with the aim of participating in the political struggle to oust the Sandinista National Liberation Front. Appearing below are excerpts from interviews with Adolfo Calero and Alfredo Cesar by La Prensa (published 06/07/89). Calero remains outside Nicaragua in self-imposed exile. Cesar returned to the country on June 11. (Basic data from 06/12/89 report by Regional Coordination for Economic and Social Research of Central America and the Caribbean-CRIES, Managua)]

La Prensa: It is said in the United States that pressure is being placed on Nicaraguan Resistance leaders to return to Nicaragua. Have you been subjected to any pressure of this kind? What is your position with respect to the return to Nicaragua? Calero: I haven't felt any pressure, nor am I going to accept any. Quite simply, I will return to Nicaragua when I am in agreement with the circumstances. These would be the following: that the opposition has already approved a national project, a platform of government, and has chosen candidates. My arrival before that like the arrival of any leader who opted for the armed struggle and saw it "frozen" would be a plain and simple invasion of the terrain of those who chose the political route for struggle. I think that instead of being a factor of unity and a contribution, my return would cause more division. La Prensa: And if this unity does not emerge, what is most likely to happen? Calero: Well, if unity does not occur, we'll continue to contribute from outside. This week, I attended the inauguration of [Salvadoran] President [Alfredo] Cristiani and I improved the relations that I already had with the leaders of that party [ARENA]. I also put forward to them my criteria about the problem of Sandinista lack of compliance [with the regional peace accords]. In short, I believe we have a lot of work to do from the outside. It must be remembered that the US did not lose the Vietnam War in Vietnam, but in Washington. And we Nicaraguans didn't lose the war in Nicaragua, but in Washington, where we have had big problems because of the indifference and even partiality with which the Sandinistas were viewed by many liberal elements in Congress. Some of those liberal elements are leaders of the Democratic Party, such as Mr. Coelho, Mr. Bonior, and Mr. Jim Wright. Two of them are gone now, but it's a pity their departure did not occur earlier. La Prensa: Do you really believe in a political solution in Nicaragua? Do you think that the Sandinistas can be defeated at the polls? Calero: I have accepted the idea that the political route has to be travelled to its end. I think that if the opposition unites and backs a single project and one candidate, and if the greatest possible number of Nicaraguans are allowed to participate without getting into ego trips, I would be willing to participate. It is also indispensable for the opposition to prepare its rank and file, prepare itself among constituencies, take a population census, and train activists. In El Salvador, a well-organized uphill struggle was recently waged that brought an opposition party to power despite all predictions to the contrary and the desires of many people. I believe in Nicaragua it's possible to win, now... La Prensa: But Adolfo, it is not the same to fight [former Salvadoran President Jose Napoleon] Duarte as it is to fight [Nicaraguan President Daniel] Ortega... Calero: Without a doubt. The struggle in El Salvador was in a democratic country, but in Nicaragua it is possible to win. The Sandinistas would have to commit a tremendous Noriega-style fraud which would be fatal for them. But anyway, even if the opposition wins, the Sandinistas have clearly
stated that they could hand over the government but not power. In other words, we know where we stand. Political struggle is preferable to armed struggle. However, I think it would be hard for a victory, even a political victory, to radically change the situation. La Prensa: But, Adolfo, we made the decision to support the armed struggle when we saw possibilities for civic struggle extinguished. We fervently believed that it was not possible to fight politically against the Sandinista regime. Do you think conditions have changed? In hindsight, were all those years that you supported the military option worthwhile? Calero: I think so. If the armed struggle had not taken place, there wouldn't have been any dialogue or pressure for the Sandinistas to adopt democratic reforms. And the Sandinistas would have already crossed borders and the situation in Central America would be chaotic. This is recognized by Central Americans. I am constantly running into people who thank us for our struggle and mention us as an example of patriotism and public-spiritedness, because there is also public spirit in the military struggle. Now, I wish there the military struggle had never developed, but it was unavoidable. It slowed down the Sandinistas and has shown them for what they are. I think that on the basis of this sacrifice of so many young Nicaraguans from both sides that some day we can arrive at democracy in Nicaragua. ALFREDO CESAR La Prensa: Do you think that the political conditions are there for a return of Resistance leaders to Nicaragua? Cesar: I do not think so, but it's necessary to return in order to force these conditions to be provided for the rest of the exiles and the rest of the leaders. La Prensa: And if not? I understand there are not many tools available to force the Sandinistas to provide such conditions. Cesar: The big problem I see is that it will not be shown that political conditions do not exist, so international pressure will not be applied in order that they be provided. In other words, it is necessary to go, to be there, and if the conditions are provided, to say so and if they are not, to denounce it so that pressure is applied. La Prensa: Speaking of pressure, it has been said that the US State Department is applying pressure on all of you to leave Miami. Have you been subjected to any pressure of this kind? Cesar: No, frankly, no. When the State Department communicated that policy to the directorate, I had already made the decision to leave, without having set a date. In that way, I was not subjected to any pressure. However, I do know about the new policy that has been transmitted to the other Resistance leaders who have not decided to return in a way which could be interpreted as applying pressure so that they take the decision to leave. La Prensa: And what do you think of the leaders that do not return? Cesar: I've said to my colleagues that each has to make his own decision. It has to do with each one helping out in a process which we all support, the political-electoral struggle that the domestic opposition will bring about. How can each one help out? If someone thinks he can help more from Miami, using his international connections to make known what is going on inside Nicaragua, I respect that. If someone thinks that he would better stay close to the troops, which are inactive but intact, and explain to them what is happening so that they are informed, I respect that. And I expect that they would respect my decision to return to be close to the political parties there. La Prensa: I understand you will join the Social Democratic Party, and that the party will attempt to join the Socialist International [SI] as an active member. What effect would such recognition have inside Nicaragua? Cesar: I think it would be the best contribution that the SI could make toward peace and democracy in Nicaragua. The SI supported the revolution that overthrew Somoza, but later the mask fell from the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas have not wanted to join the SI because they do not consider themselves Social Democrats. They have maintained observer status which allows them to attend meetings but does not commit them to abide by the resolutions adopted by the Socialist International. For 10 years the SI has had to put up with having supported a betrayed revolution and they do not know how to extricate themselves from this situation. The best contribution they could make at this time would be to support a truly social democratic party that is led by people who have
been supporting the original revolution, democracy, freedom, and nationalism. This support would allow the SI to show that the aspects which made them support the revolution against Somoza are still valid 10 years later, and at the same time, to show clearly to the world that they do not support a Marxist-Leninist party.

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