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Nicaragua: Ortega Warns Current Government Policies Will Lead To Greater Social Unrest

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At an Aug. 31 debate at the national university (UNAN), former president Daniel Ortega told an audience that further social unrest will follow unless the government abandons its free market economic policies. Attempts by the Chamorro government to move to a market economy, outlined in three decrees, led to two strikes in May and July and subsequent suspension of the decrees. According to Ortega, the decrees must be revoked. Ortega said that by firing public servants, moving to privatize state enterprises and return Sandinista-confiscated lands to previous owners, the government was "retaliating" against the Sandinistas. He argued that workers have the right to strike for political reasons. "If this government takes destabilizing actions government's action, to exercise their power, which they do not lose when they cast their vote," Ortega said. Presidency Minister Antonio Lacayo announced during the debate establishment of a \$10 million emergency fund to create short-term jobs for those displaced by economic reforms, an indication that the government views threats of continued unrest seriously. The strikes have already put much of the new government's economic program on hold. Lacayo rejected suggestions that the Sandinistas have intimidated the government into sharing power. He called for a constructive and cooperative attitude on all fronts to help rebuild Nicaragua and said everyone must "share the sacrifices needed to revive the economy." Ortega retorted that conditions for such cooperation do not exist, adding that 3,000 Sandinista sympathizers have been fired from government jobs and replaced with 2,000 people who support the new government. Lacayo disputed those figures failing to supply any others. Unemployment is estimated at more than 30 percent, about what it was under the Sandinistas, and is growing as the state tries to trim the public payroll. Inflation has been running at 80 percent a month since Mrs. Chamorro took office on April 25. The price of staples is out of reach for many Nicaraguans and foreign investment has been scared away by the Sandinista labor unrest. (Basic data from AP, 08/31/90)

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