

5-1-1992

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Recommended Citation

Tyroler, Deborah. "Nicaragua: Joint Recontra-recompa Forces Launch Protest Actions." (1992). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/noticen/7372>

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Nicaragua: Joint Recontra-recompa Forces Launch Protest Actions

by Deborah Tyroler

Category/Department: General

Published: Friday, May 1, 1992

April 20: Reports from local media sources indicated that a joint group of recontras and recompas, known as "revueltos," occupied the towns of La Concordia and San Sebastian de Yali, Jinotega department. April 21: Sandinista Popular Army (EPS) spokespersons reported that 20 recontras ambushed and killed five peasants in La Patriota, 240 km. east of Managua. April 22: Customs inspector David Rivera told reporters that revueltos forced personnel at the El Espino border crossing to leave their posts. El Espino, Madriz department, is Nicaragua's principal overland crossing with Honduras. Rivera said the blockade prevented passage of about 40 trucks carrying cargo from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador, en route to Costa Rica and Panama. The recompa and recontra high commands issued a communique asserting that transportation blockades in Jinotega, Esteli and Matagalpa departments were a response to the government's failure to follow through on commitments made to demobilized combatants. The revueltos threatened to extend their protest to other parts of the country if their demands for land, housing and agricultural production credit were not met. A government delegation comprised of representatives from the Interior and Presidency Ministries traveled to Jinotega, capital of Jinotega department, to begin negotiations with revuelto leaders. April 23: Hundreds of revueltos blocked roads linking the principal towns in Jinotega, Esteli and Matagalpa departments. They also shut down the El Espino and Las Manos border posts on the Honduran border. Revueltos in Jinotega, capital of Jinotega department, demanded 2,000 ha. of farm land, 500 plots for building homes, and construction materials for 800 homes. Revuelto leader "Ajax" said that during meetings between revuelto leaders and Interior Minister Alfredo Mendieta, participants agreed to establish a land redistribution timetable. He indicated that, in light of the agreements, the protesters would begin to dismantle roadblocks. Interior Ministry spokesperson Frank Cesar denied reports that the cities of Ocotal and Jinotega had been "occupied" by revueltos. Mendieta told reporters that the Interior Ministry would not order use of force against protesters, but that the demonstrators would not be permitted to occupy public buildings or take over roads and highways. April 24: Esteli municipal government spokesperson Vilma Arvizu reported that a clash between police and revueltos in Esteli left one revuelto dead and four persons wounded. She said the incident occurred when police confronted a crowd of revueltos with tear gas and weapons fire in efforts to remove roadblocks obstructing traffic on the Pan American Highway outside Esteli. According to Arvizu, the revueltos returned fire with automatic weapons. An estimated 500 armed revueltos were participating in the Esteli protests. In a telephone interview with ACAN-EFE reporters, revuelto commander "Isidro" said 2,000 revueltos under the command of "Bigote" had surrounded Esteli. According to Isidro, about half were armed, and they were "prepared to destroy nearby bridges if the police send reinforcements." A group of revueltos was dislodged by police from a supermarket in Esteli, which witnesses reported was being looted. The revueltos then set up barricades in downtown Esteli, and proceeded to confiscate several private vehicles for use in "patrolling" the area. National Police chief Rene Vivas told reporters that a government commission comprised of Interior Ministry and security forces personnel had been dispatched to Esteli to determine who was responsible for the shooting incident.

In Matagalpa, capital of Matagalpa department, an estimated 500 revueltos set up roadblocks. April 25: All major streets in Esteli were blocked with makeshift barricades. Merchants closed their shops for fear of looting, and all schools were ordered closed. Esteli mayor Ulises Gonzalez expressed concern that the protests might extend to other cities. He complained about the government's inadequate attention to the problem. Gonzalez said President Violeta Barrios de Chamorro and the entire cabinet traveled to the Atlantic coast for celebrations of the administration's second anniversary. Former president and Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) general secretary Daniel Ortega traveled to Esteli to mediate in talks between revueltos and government authorities. Interior Minister Alfredo Mendieta left the government delegation on the Atlantic coast to fly to Esteli. A police officer was disarmed and beaten by revueltos in Esteli. In Esteli, police chief Vivas ordered all police units to remain inside stations and barracks in order to prevent further confrontations. Vivas spoke with revuelto representatives, and agreed to organize a commission to investigate the circumstances which resulted in the death of a revuelto on April 24. In Jinotega, revueltos set up roadblocks on major thoroughfares. Police monitored their activities, but did not intervene. April 26: Frank Cesar said Mendieta met with the revueltos Sunday morning, and the two sides reached an agreement. Under the accord, the government is to provide lots for housing construction in Esteli and land for crops to 750 demobilized recontras and recompas. In addition, he said the government would provide production loans for the current planting season; create a land distribution commission; and a special committee to investigate the death of the revuelto killed April 24. In exchange, said Cesar, the revueltos agreed to dismantle barricades and to turn their weapons over to the Special Disarmament Brigade (BED). Cesar added that arrested revueltos had been released the previous evening. April 27: Revueltos set up numerous barricades blocking access to the towns of Juigalpa, Boaco, Santo Tomas, Muelle de Los Bueyes, El Rama, La Gateada, La Libertad and Nueva Guinea, in Chontales, Boaco and Zelaya departments. The revueltos were led by commanders "Mack-45," "Rojito," "Chombo" and "Matizon." Sandinista Deputy Luis Enrique Figueroa told ACAN-EFE that the revuelto action was "just, because the government has not kept its promises." He noted that the revueltos were not armed. Figueroa called on authorities to "begin negotiations with the revuelto leaders to avoid incidents" similar to those in Esteli. An Interior Ministry spokesperson in Juigalpa, Chontales, said that anti-riot forces had been ordered confined to bases. In a communique, the Superior Private Enterprise Council (COSEP) denounced occupation of five farms in Chinandega department by revueltos. Three of farms were banana plantations belonging to COSEP president Ramiro Gurdian, and the other two are owned by businessperson Alan Arguello. April 28: Revuelto leader "Chombo" told reporters that if the government did not initiate negotiations by the afternoon, revueltos would occupy more towns and cities in central Nicaragua. A government spokesperson told ACAN-EFE that Interior Minister Mendieta had agreed to hold talks with revuelto protesters in central Nicaragua. Recompas occupied government buildings in Rivas, capital of Rivas department (southern Nicaragua), and demanded government compliance with earlier commitments made to demobilized recompas. Revueltos occupied at least 50 private and state-owned farms and ranches owned by members of COSEP and the National Farmers and Ranchers Union (UNAG). Revuelto leader "Tello" said that the agrarian conflict would spread if President Chamorro failed to implement a lasting solution to land tenure problems. April 29: Interior Ministry spokesperson Cesar said that talks between revuelto leaders from central Nicaragua and Interior Minister Mendieta had concluded. He said the government agreed to provide building materials to the revueltos within a week, and to immediately identify agricultural plots available for distribution. He said that in exchange, the revueltos had agreed to dismantle barricades. Presidency Ministry spokesperson Ernesto Robleto said talks would reconvene over the

next few days to work out further details concerning other revuelto demands. Army spokesperson Antonia Tiffer told reporters that an undisclosed number of soldiers and five tanks were deployed to El Guasaule, another border crossing with Honduras, to dislodge about 800 revuelto who had occupied farms and blocked roadways near the border. An army commander in the region told the Agence France- Presse that the deployment was part of a military training exercise and had nothing to do with revuelto actions. Daily newspaper Barricada reported that about 1,000 troops dispatched to the area had surrounded the revuelto. April 30: In statements to reporters, Interior Minister Alfredo Mendieta said EPS tanks sent to the north were not part of any military operation aimed at confronting revuelto activities in the region. He described the tank movements and revuelto land and highway occupations as a "coincidence." (Basic data from Inter Press Service, Prensa Latina (Cuba), 04/23/92; Chinese news service Xinhua, 04/27/92, 04/28/92; Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, Agence France-Press, 04/21-30/92)

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