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Nicaragua: National Assembly Resolves Dispute Over Funding For Public Universities

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Aug. 18, the National Assembly voted 53 to 35 in favor of a resolution stating that university students had "correctly interpreted" legislation pertaining to government financing for public universities. The resolution which calls on President Violeta Chamorro's administration to provide an additional US\$7.6 million in funding to the country's six public universities- -ended a 53-day boycott of all university activities by students, professors and administrative personnel. Over 34,000 students enrolled in public universities had been in danger of losing the entire academic year as a result of the boycott. The university autonomy law, which stipulates that 6% of the government budget must be allocated to higher education, was at the heart of the controversy. Government officials argued that allocating US\$23.4 million to the universities covered obligations under the law. The Assembly vote backed the position adopted by the students that this amount was equal to 6% of tax revenue, not total revenue as suggested by the university autonomy law. A total of 17 deputies representing parties affiliated with the National Opposition Union (UNO) voted together with the 39 deputies from the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) in support of the students' demands. Rector of the Central American University (UCA), Jesuit priest Xabier Gorostiaga, who had supported student demands, told reporters the National Assembly vote should not be interpreted as a defeat for the government, but rather as "a victory for all Nicaraguans." (Sources: Agence France- Presse, Agencia Centroamericana de Noticias-Spanish news service EFE, 08/18/92)

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