

The Sandinista Revolution

The immediate cause of the revolution that removed Anastasio Somoza Debayle from power was the assassination of newspaper editor Pedro Joaquin Chamorro on January 10, 1978, as he was driving to work. This dramatic assassination was the final catalyst for a war that culminated in the complete overthrow of the Somoza system eighteen months later. The revolution was the result of a concerted effort by virtually all major groups and classes in the country.

The assassination of Chamorro enraged the Nicaraguan people. Immediately after the assassination, angry crowds surged through the streets of Managua burning Somoza-owned buildings and shouting anti-Somoza slogans. Later, when it became apparent that the official murder investigation was to be a cover-up, the chambers of commerce and industry led the country in an unprecedented general strike that lasted for more than two weeks, with 80 to 90 percent effectiveness. When it became clear that it was hurting the Nicaraguan people more than Somoza, however, the strike was called off.

The fact that the strike was over, however, did not mean that Somoza's troubles had ended. To the contrary, Nicaraguans of all classes had experienced the thrill and surge of pride that came with defying the dictator and were, therefore, in no mood to let things slip back to normal. For the next several months, acts against the regime came in various forms. There were daring and quite successful attacks by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) on National Guard headquarters in several cities, mass demonstrations, labor and student strikes and civil uprisings in urban areas.

The events of February in Monimbo—an Indian neighborhood in Masaya—were a preview of what was to happen in most Nicaraguan cities that September, when poorly armed civilians rose up against the dictatorship only to be brutally pounded into submission. Fighting in Monimbo broke out between the local inhabitants and the guard on February 10, the one-month anniversary of the Chamorro assassination, and again on February 21, the forty-fourth anniversary of Sandino's assassination. On the second occasion, the inhabitants set up barricades, hoisted banners declaring Monimbo to be a free territory, and held the guard back for almost a week with a pathetic assortment of weapons consisting of homemade bombs, 22-caliber rifles, pistols, machetes, axes, rocks, and clubs. Before it could declare Monimbo "secure" on February 28, the regime had to use a force of 600 heavily armed men backed by two tanks, three armored cars, five 50-caliber machine guns, two helicopter gunships, and two light planes. In the process, the neighborhood was devastated and many dozens, perhaps hundreds, of civilians were either killed outright or arrested and never seen again.

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**El Combatiente
Desconocido
(León)**

On August 25, the Broad Opposition Front (composed of most of Nicaragua's political parties and organizations) demanded Somoza's resignation and declared another nationwide strike, which paralyzed the country for almost a month. Simultaneously, Monimbo-style civil uprisings occurred in cities throughout the country, including Masaya, Matagalpa, Managua, Chinandega, Leon, Jinotepe, Diriamba, and Esteli. Once again, young people armed only with an assortment of pistols, hunting rifles, shotguns, and homemade bombs erected paving block barricades and fought the National Guard. Several towns, including Leon, held out for a week or more against terrible odds. The outcome, however, was inevitable. The National Guard fought with unusual ferocity and vengeance, leveling large sections of several cities and taking the lives of between 3,000 and 5,000 people.

It was now clear to the Nicaraguan people that neither general strikes nor poorly armed mass uprisings would drive Somoza from office. The dictator and his guard had demonstrated their willingness to slaughter and destroy in order to preserve their position. The next uprising would have to be led by a larger, well-trained, well-armed guerrilla force.



**Sandinista
Guerrillas**

In the first half of 1979 recruitment and training of young men and women—primarily students from urban areas—increased dramatically as the regular FSLN army expanded from several hundred to several thousand. Members of the opposition traveled throughout the world explaining the Sandinist cause and soliciting donations that were used to purchase modern light, Western-made weapons on the international arms market.

The final offensive was declared early in June 1979. Paving-block barricades were erected in poor neighborhoods throughout the country, and National Guard outposts were overcome one by one as the dictator's control of the country shrank. In mid-June a broad-based government-in-exile was announced by the FSLN. The government of the United States arranged for the departure of Somoza to Miami on July 17. A day later, the provisional government took the oath of office in a ceremony held in Leon and, on July 19, the FSLN entered Managua and accepted the surrender of most of what was left of the National Guard. Ecstatic crowds tore the statues of Anastasio Senior and Luis Somoza from their pedestals and dragged the broken pieces triumphantly through the streets. On July 20, the provisional government entered the capital and appeared in the main plaza to receive the acclaim of a jubilant and grateful people.

Source

Adapted from *Nicaragua: The Land of Sandino* by Thomas W. Walker. Westview Press. Boulder, Colorado. 1981
