

## Nicaraguan High School Students Rebel against Ortega's Indoctrination Videos

By Confidencial

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Ministry of Education orders public schools to present propaganda videos from the Sandinista Youth about the massacre.



The walls, doors and murals at the Maestro Gabriel high school in Managua plastered with the face of Daniel Ortega in 2016. Photo: Carlos Herrera / Confidencial

**In a number of high schools, the students refused to view the propaganda, which exonerates the regime. "They're using the teachers as instruments," a specialist warns.**

HAVANA TIMES – Students in the public schools don't want to see the regime's audiovisual propaganda on the repression in Nicaragua. Each time the teachers attempt to present in classrooms the Sandinista Youth series called: "180 degrees: Keys to the Truth", which proposes to absolve the regime of all responsibility for the killings that took place starting with the student protests in April 2018, they upload live videos to their social networks rejecting this audiovisual narrative produced by the presidency and its youth organization.

“No one’s interested in seeing this,” insists a student from the *Maestro Gabriel* High School, where the regime attempted to present the propaganda chapter regarding the killing of an entire family in the Carlos Marx neighborhood of Managua.

The authorities of the Ministry of Education issued a directive to the principals of Nicaragua’s largest secondary schools [the Nicaraguan secondary school system includes students from 7<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> grades]. “The students have to watch the manipulated videos of the protests; it doesn’t matter if the curriculum plan is interrupted,” admits a teacher from one of the schools in the capital. Despite the imposition of this indoctrination, the students have refused to consume “the official version”. To the contrary, they’ve decided to document the abuse that the regime has imposed with increasing intensity on the schools.

“Last year, many of you, many kid from here, wanted to remove the president with your strikes,” says a teacher from a public school in Camoapa, Chontales. Immediately, a student answers her: “We must get him out. We’re going to get him out; this year, he’s going.” The teacher, worn out by the kids’ yells of protest, insists: “This is the only version of the Government.” Again, a student responds, “I’d rather be receiving my (regular) classes. We have to study.”

This same scene is repeated in the *Maestro Gabriel* school in Managua. In that public institution, an unidentified student decided to do a live transmission to denounce that they’d been deceived into going to an auditorium to watch the video “of the truth” of the fire that broke out in a house in Managua’s Carlos Marx neighborhood, a tragedy in which six members of the Pavon family burned to death.

“All of the students walked out. No one was interested in watching that. Take a look at Daniel’s failure. That family was burned down by them [the government]. There’s virtually no one here, the majority left, A huge failure – what they want is to brainwash us,” declares the high school student while the other teens support him. They, too, had opted to walk out of the auditorium.

Upset by the students’ reaction, the school’s assistant principal came out of the auditorium to tell the students that whoever didn’t stay to watch the video, would have to go home. The majority left. Inside the big room, only empty seats were left.

### **Teachers threatened with dismissal**

“The majority of the teachers don’t want to present those videos. They present altered realities, and we know that the truth is different. But if we don’t show them to the students, they can fire us. The kids aren’t dumb: the whole crisis has been well documented. But it’s unfortunate that a person that’s just beginning to develop their judgement should be contaminated with the falsehoods of these documentaries,” assured a teacher in a Managua secondary school, who spoke anonymously with *Confidencial*.

That same teacher explained that the staff feels like they have their hands tied, since if they don't obey the order that comes directly from the Ministry of Education, there are great possibilities that they could be fired.

"They have a saying that we can't kill the cow that gives us milk – something like that. But we're clear that we're doing this only under obligation. Some of us speak with the students and they understand; others just show it; others do it (willingly) because they're [Ortega] party militants," the teacher stated.

### **Altered reality**

Josefina Vijil, a researcher and educational specialist, declared that with the presentation of the government's videos in the secondary schools, the regime is trying to impose their own story of things; that is, an alternative reality which in the end is surreal because what they're saying with their videos is: "Don't believe your own eyes, but just believe me."

"What they're trying to do now in the educational system is a violation of all the principles, of the laws, of the Constitution, of the international convention of the rights of the child," Vijil affirmed.

The specialist believes the mission of education is to give people an opportunity to develop their potential so that they can take advantage of life's opportunities. Education, according to Vijil, isn't about telling a story, but about broadening students' skills so that they can forge their own.

"What the regime is doing isn't only a violation of all the laws, it's against the aims of education and it should be sanctioned. They're using the teachers, the schools, all the resources of education as instruments," Vijil continued. She trusted that the indoctrination in the schools will be ineffective, and that the Government won't succeed in their plans.

She affirmed that to date the regime has no credibility, since they're trying to tell people that what they saw during the protests doesn't exist, but that the only "real" thing is what they filmed. Vijil lamented that the authorities of the Ministry of Education should try to indoctrinate the children at an age in which they should be guarded and protected.

"They're violating the right of the minors to guidance and protection, and in that way they're violating the convention of the rights of the child," she explained.

### **Ortega posters in the schools**

In February 2016 *Confidencial* published, "Ortega's Cult at School". The report confirmed that the official propaganda has been implanted even in the elementary

and secondary school textbooks, even though the Electoral Law prohibits party propaganda in the educational centers.

*Confidencial* visited a number of schools in Managua: “Cervantes”, “Fernando Gordillo”, “Benjamin Zeledon”. They found posters from 2013 of Ortega and current Vice President Rosario Murillo.

“This is out of respect, because he’s your president, my president and their (the student’s) president. What we do is to elevate or display the image of our President and in that way show our loyalty to him,” was the justification of Juan Ramon Meza Mantilla, Physical Education teacher from the *Maestro Gabriels* school.

“The truth is that Daniel Ortega is the President of the Republic and obviously it’s a recognition of his authority as has been the custom with other presidents,” affirmed the Sandinista party deputy Jose Antonio Zepeda, general secretary of the official teachers’ union ANDEN, “I don’t see any propaganda, because he’s president of this country.”

“Zepeda continued: “In all parts of the world, the image of the president presides over all the public entities.”

Nonetheless, The former minister of education and current member of the Civic Alliance Carlos Tunnerman disagrees. He noted that in Nicaragua the party propaganda extends not only to the State entities, but to the public sphere as well.

“That’s what they call a personality cult, something that the original decrees of the Revolution wanted to eradicate,” Tunnerman affirmed.

### **The role of education isn’t to indoctrinate**

The teacher who spoke anonymously with *Confidencial* expressed that they, too, are subjected to “speeches” that aim to “make us feel differently about things”. During the monthly trainings that the delegates and different authorities of the Ministry of Education hold with the staff, they bring up political topics with the objective of laying scorn on “the coup promoters”.

“I imagine that all the government institutions must be the same. It bothers me because the schools should be exempt from this. They shouldn’t try to impose their views on the kids. What this does is to provoke the students’ rejection, and in some cases it causes their parents to transfer them to other schools,” the teacher asserted.

Researcher Josefina Vijil believes all Nicaraguans should make use of their resources and power to put the brakes on this indoctrination imposed by the presidency. The parents, she states, should protest about the direction of the educational center, write letters, collect signatures and denounce this every way they can.

Vijil notes that the official discourse hasn't resonated with the secondary students, since the reality that Nicaragua is experiencing is undeniable to most all Nicaraguans that are in the country and those outside it.

"The government version is completely ineffective in the face of the reality of your life. [The government's] big problem is their profound scorn for the people, for people's capacity to think. For the entire length of their regime, they've wanted – just like the Liberal party and other governments – to convert the citizens into their clients, and their rights into special favors, so that people will respond only to them. Ignorance is very functional for this type of regime, and that's why the quality of education in Nicaragua is so bad," she said.

Vijil assured that what we need as a country and as citizens is to demand a quality education that allows us not only to develop all our potential and take advantage of all the opportunities that lie in front of us, but also to be the subjects of our own destiny and to make our own decisions.

"The educational process should give you the instruments to think, process information and come to your own conclusions. We already know that there isn't just one truth in the world; the truth is relative. Each individual constructs their own form of thought, but they construct it based on the development of routines for processing thought. We citizens are autonomous and independent and don't need to be managed by anyone. We're independent and autonomous citizens, who make our own decisions," the specialist concluded.