

## Nicaragua-Diary 16.-23. April 2018

### Wednesday, 18 April 2018

In the morning, a preliminary discussion took place at UPOLI, during which my opening lecture on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Martin Luther King scheduled for the following day, Thursday, 19 April 2018, was discussed. Other topics included the preparation for an international conference scheduled for 2019 in Managua, as well as the afternoon television interview in "Esta Noche / Esta Semana".

At the Martin Luther King Institute (MLK), the protests against the INSS reform are the dominant theme. Some former employees are directly affected. A colleague reports on the events of the past day. There were protests against the INSS reform in the evening against which the police were acting. Vehicles and other mobile devices were confiscated. New protests are planned for tonight.

In the afternoon, the colleague and her group organise their participation in the protest movement. The organisation and the agreement run exclusively on social networks. There is no central organisation. I follow this stage on the PC: there are general recommendations for behaviour:

- Only small groups of 4-6 people who know each other should be organised.
- The time and place of the meeting will be announced shortly before.
- The group members should arrive separately at the meeting point, all other actions will be discussed via social media.
- In a confrontation with the police, the group is to dissolve itself.
- In case of imminent arrest or attack by the police: lie on the ground and shout your name.

All actions are planned non-violently. When asked who the main organisers of the protests are, the colleague answers that she does not know. She suspects that the first protesters affected by the confiscations have initiated this new wave of self-organised protests.

I am driven back to the hotel, we leave the colleague at the Metrocentro, from there she goes to the meeting point of her group. We agree that she will pick me up at the hotel when the action is over.

At around 8 pm she comes accompanied by a second colleague. We go to a pub. They report that their group was disbanded by the police after initial peaceful protests.

I stay in the hotel in the evening and go to sleep early. At about 10 pm the reception wakes me up, because the head of the MLK is on the phone. He informs me that the INSS protests are escalating and that they are currently focusing on UCA, UNI and UNA universities. He has received the information that there may be a plan to occupy UPOLI the next day. In that case, my presentation would be cancelled. We agree that I will be picked up by a driver at 9 o'clock and that we will continue as planned and decide flexibly the next morning depending on the situation.

**Thursday, 19 April 2018**

The driver picks me up at 9 am at the hotel and drives me to UPOLI. When I arrive, I learn that my speech has been cancelled. The protests of last evening and last night have escalated, we follow the reports on the computer. We decide to cancel the television appearance planned for the afternoon. Shortly thereafter, an instruction is issued that all have to leave the university building.

We go to the main gate. In front of the main entrance, a group of about 20 students has gathered on the opposite side of the street. They hold up posters and chant. Everything is proceeding absolutely peacefully. The UPOLI security staff tells us that the university administration has ordered that UPOLI not be opened to the demonstrators in the event of a dispute. The reason is that the university building may only be accessible to university staff and students and one does not know whether strangers would also enter and destroy property if the buildings were opened.

I take the first pictures, then we pack our things and leave UPOLI through the back door. We drive to the front, park the car in a side street and join the demonstrators. First, we stay across the street (i.e. in front of the main gate), while the demonstrators stand in front of the store.



The number of protesters is growing slowly and the first media representatives are also there. I see the journalist from "El Nuevo Diario" who interviewed me on Tuesday. There are also TV channels that are doing individual interviews and photographers. A taxi stops and a wheelchair user, probably war-disabled, leaves the car and joins the protesters. Another man in his 60s stops his car, talks briefly to the demonstrators, then parks his car and joins the protesters.

Both are received with great applause. The first passing cars show their solidarity with the demonstrators, by honking or stretching their clenched fist out of the window, the demonstrators answer with loud applause. The first residents from the houses around UPOLI join the demonstrating students.

Two of the chants probably best express the situation and mood: " Señor, Señora, no sea indiferente, le están robando al pueblo en la cara de la gente!" and "No violencia, haz la diferencia!" The first saying formulates the idea that this protest should be a social and national protest: The students protest against a reform of the social security, which does not concern them directly yet, but affects the older generations. The second saying manifests the basic principle of the protests: no violence. The violence comes from the state and its organs, but the protesters do not agree, they are different. They make the non-violent difference.

A protester carries a sign saying "No soy de izquierda ni de derecha, Vengo desde abajo a tumbar al arriba" (I'm not right, I'm not left, I come from below to topple the top).



The most important elements of the protest movement are the independence from any political organisation and influence and the absolutely decentralised self-organisation of the demonstrators. The Movement is a "Movimiento de los autoconvocados", a "Movement of the Self-Convended".

The demonstrators are well connected with each other. Communication takes place exclusively via social media. The UPOLI students follow events elsewhere in the city and country and are well informed about the situation at the other universities. At the UCA and the UNA, the students are being attacked by the police and Turbas, and so-called antimotines are used: paramilitary anti-riot units armed with rubber bullets, pepper munitions, batons, teasers and sharp weapons.

The withdrawal of students from UCA and UNI is being witnessed in real time.

The number of demonstrators has now grown to about 100, still predominantly students. Again and again they block the road and the traffic for a short time before returning to the edge of the road. The passing cars mostly honk and greet from the window in solidarity. An FSLN bus is blocked, there are insults and some protesters hit the bus from the outside, but others immediately intervene, de-escalate and let the bus pass.

A journalist stands next to me and points out two things to me: next to us, a young man sits isolated on his bike and watches the scene from a distance. She calls him a government spy, who appeared on the previous day as well.



Across the street, on both sides of the demonstrators, young men with motorcycles and helmets gather to watch the situation. She suspects that these are already "turbas": party-led groups of young men who infiltrate the protest movement and provoke violent actions or attack.





The "Turbas" were formed mainly to attack the demonstrators at a certain stage of development of the protests directly from their motorcycles. The system is simple: the motorcycles are manned by two people, with the passenger using poles, baseball bats and other weapons to hit the demonstrators while driving.

The suspected "Turbas" are also noticed by other protesters. The students are aware of the dangerous nature of Turbas, as they have witnessed their operations in the past few days. There is restlessness when suddenly three tyres are lit on the street. Immediately students are on hand, extinguish the fires and remove the tyres, so that the traffic can continue.



A student screams that UPOLI will not let the students in if the Turbas are attacking and that they need to protect themselves. She points to the man in the wheelchair, who is in the middle of the demonstration and talking to some masked people. A colleague intervenes and tries to reassure the demonstrators: the goal is non-violent protest, one must pursue this goal further and not let oneself be provoked. For the moment she succeeds, the unrest subsides.





The independent news channel "100% Noticias" is on site with a broadcast van. Its broadcasts are turned off by the government during the course of the day and fall victim to censorship. 100% Noticias will continue to broadcast on Facebook and YouTube.



New posters with other inscriptions appear, the demonstrators call other chants and the first Nicaraguan flags are unfurled. The contents are more political: corruption as well as censorship and dictatorship are mentioned, some posters demand that Daniel Ortega abdicate, the same applies to his wife Rosario Murillo. "Daniel y Somoza son la misma cosa!" (Daniel and Somoza are the same!) Security forces are not in sight yet, just traffic police. The number of masked people is increasing, but many of the students demonstrating peacefully were masked right from the start. The number of suspected Turbas is also growing: more and more young men are gathering on both sides with motorcycles, some with helmets, some without, some masked.



At some point there are reports of injured students at the other universities. A photo of a student at the UNA, who was hit by a rubber bullet in the eye is being circulated. You can only see a red lump of meat on one side of the face and the undamaged eye on the other side. There is further unrest, but no panic. One of the phenomena of the protest is the determination of the demonstrators to defend their cause. A poster says: "Nos tienen miedo porque no tenemos miedo" (They are afraid of us because we are not afraid).



Another phenomenon is solidarity, which is gradually including all sections of the population and all classes. One of the first posters manifested the student solidarity: "Somos UNA, somos UCA, somos UNAN Leon, somos UPOLI!" and thus expresses the motivations for the UPOLI protests this morning: the UPOLI students were expressing their solidarity with the students of the two major student protest centers in Managua, the UCA and the UNA, which were targets of the security forces' attacks and with the UNAN students in Leon for refusing to join a Sandinista-organised bus transport for pro-government activities against the protests in Managua. In the early afternoon, the circle of protesters has widened: professors have joined in, civilians of all ages are standing next to the students, and the residents of the surrounding houses loudly support the demonstrators outside their homes.





The alleged Turbas on the righthand side as seen from the main gate of UPOLI switch to the other side of the road and start breaking and crushing stones from the pavement.

At the same time, it can be seen how they are obviously given directions for locations and actions. The demonstrators observe this, but do not intervene. The strangers are kept in sight, but not attacked.





Then nothing happens for a long while. Around 4 pm we leave UPOLI and I drive back to the hotel. A big FSLN demonstration in which I want to participate is planned in the vicinity for the evening. I walk down the main street to the intersection at the Hilton, where the road has been closed to the Government Supporters' Assembly.







There are surprisingly few participants. I estimate the total to be a maximum of two to three thousand. There are apparently only Sandinistas, dressed in white, with printed and already prepared posters with the inscription: "No a la violencia, queremos la paz!" (No to violence, we want peace). Given the events of the past 24 hours and the fact that violence has so far emanated exclusively from the government, this is a rather cynical adaptation of the motto of the peaceful protest movement: the perpetrators are hijacking the slogans of their victims.





The FSLN has tried to raise this pro-government event as a kind of folk festival. This gives the whole thing a somewhat surreal taste: on the central stage a band plays Latin American dance music and invites the participants to dance again and again, but nobody dances. The music is repeatedly interrupted by speakers praising the merits of the INSS reforms, including the incumbent family minister.



All (state and state-controlled) TV channels are present and broadcasting the event.





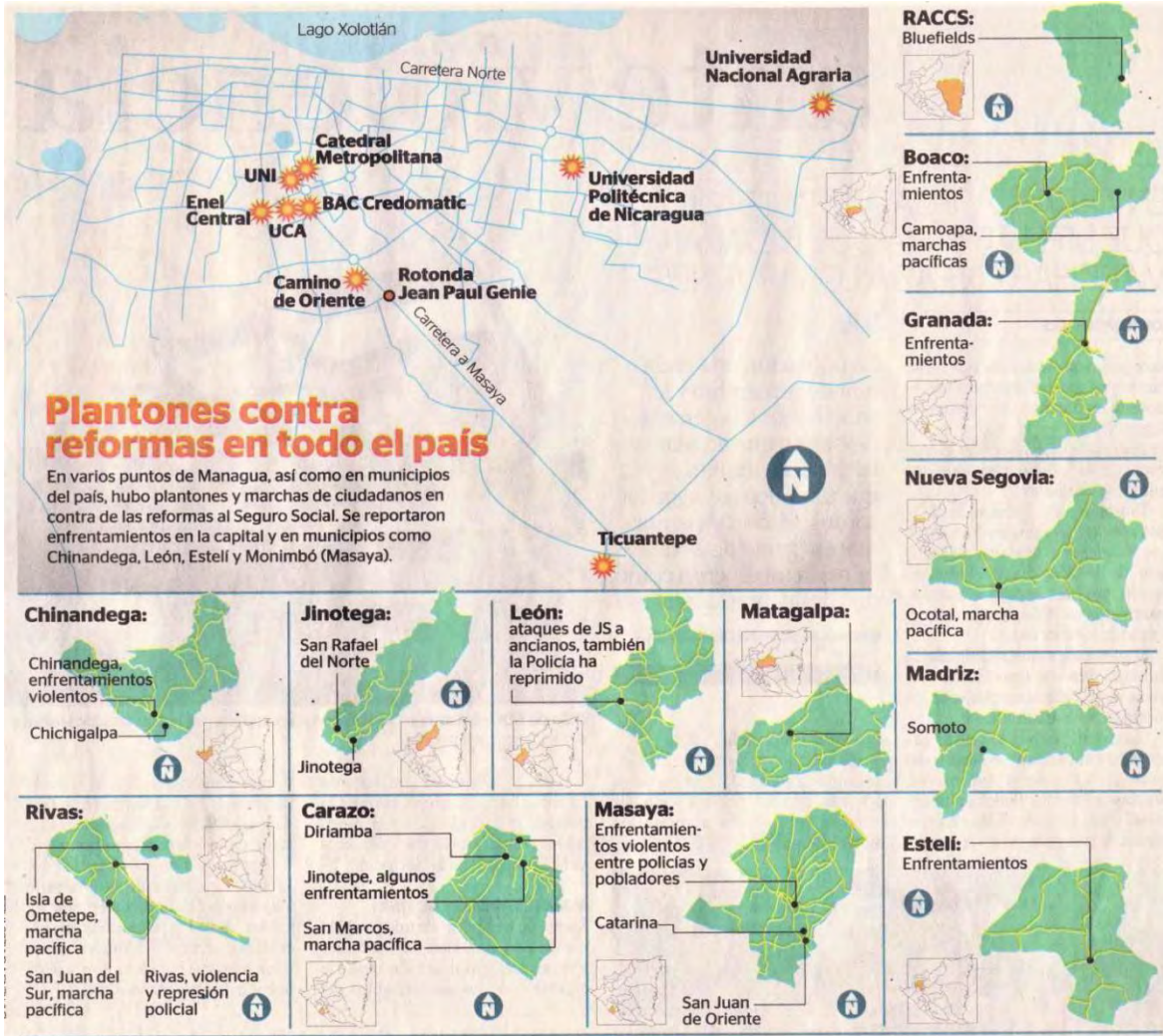
After about an hour, the gathering begins to slowly dissolve by itself. More and more people are leaving the place. When I go back to the hotel, the group is about half its initial size.



In the hotel I try to inform myself. The only way to gain access to independent reporting is via the website of "100% Noticias" who have a live stream.

Friday, 20 April 2018

During the night there were fierce clashes and fights. The protest movement has spread nationwide. Astonishingly, the centres of fiercest conflict are the traditional strongholds of the Sandinistas fighting the Somoza dictatorship: Masaya and Morimbo.



Source: La Prensa

In the morning we learn that there were three people killed during the night, one of them at UPOLI. The second death is a policeman, the third a civilian in Tipitapa. The circumstances of the student's death at the UPOLI are not clear, there are initially different rumours circulating. Later it turns out that he was hit by a rubber bullet that tore open his neck. A video clip shows how the surrounding people try to take care of him, a UPOLI lecturer is there. Here it is also clear that panic arises. The protesters at UPOLI have their first victim to lament and it is suddenly clear that this could happen to any of the participants.

The interesting consequence is that this escalation increases the determination of the protest movement and more and more people join the movement.



I am picked up from the hotel. Already on the main street in front of the casino, the streets are lined with small groups of workers and employees who have taken to the streets from the surrounding office buildings to show their solidarity with the movement.



In the lower half of the street facing the Hilton, smaller groups of the Policia Nacional have gathered to watch the scene. The square in front of the Hilton is the meeting place of the government loyalists, but their number is less than 100 people.





We drive past the Hilton towards the city centre. At UCA and UNI, groups of students are busy positioning themselves and supplying themselves with water and food.



We see the first students with "morteros", mortars welded together from metal tubes to fire explosive substances.





On the open side of UNI, which is not protected by buildings, rows of police officers have been formed. The storming of UNI seems to be imminent.



The Managua Cathedral shows a similar picture: the archbishop opened the cathedral in support of the protest movement. Water and food are collected on the grounds and we learn later that a medical station has been set up in the cathedral. Here it is no longer the students doing the organisation, the



cathedral is a rallying point of non-student civil protest that is connected with the student movement.



We go around the block again. Astonishingly, there is not much to see from the battles of the night: the barricades have been cleared, there are hardly any stones left in the street, the traffic is running smoothly, but in some places the paving stones have been removed. The city offers a paradoxical picture: traffic and everyday life are running as normal, but are interrupted again and again by small gatherings of protesting people. In some central neighbourhoods, there are obvious preparations for

violent clashes, while other neighbourhoods seem totally untouched.



On the second lap, four Policia Nacional motorcycles pass us by. Policemen on the passenger seat are armed with regular rifles. They turn towards the front of UNI to join the police units already posted there. It is obvious that the situation will escalate. When we see that there are barricades on the Avenida UCA-UNI and the fighting is about to start, we decide to go to UPOLI immediately.



Along the way, we meet up with protesting groups again and again who are holding up their posters of protest to motorists.





We stop at a crossroads and I see a young man with rasta hair carrying a wooden club wrapped in barbed wire in his left hand. He crosses the street and sits on the pillion of a motorcycle waiting there. He is a "Turba". The difficult thing is that the Turbas are often indistinguishable from the protesting youth and can easily infiltrate the protest movement. At a later stage, protesters at UPOLI will begin marking their members with bands to protect themselves against infiltration. The weapon of the "Turba" is meant to injure and spread panic: swung out from the passenger seat of the motorcycle into the crowd of protesters it causes severe injuries.





UPOLI is already barricaded. The road from which we are coming is controlled by traffic police, but they let us through as we explain that we belong to UPOLI. We park the car in a side street. Our colleague is already here. The main barricades are on the open side facing the main street, which separates the closed residential area where UPOLI is located from the next sector. We approach the barricade and see that the antimotines have already positioned themselves on the main road.





The scene is no longer comparable to that of the previous day. There was one dead in the night, and everyone knows that the fighting is about to start in earnest and there is a risk that more deaths will follow. The entire residential district is involved in the organisation of the resistance. There is a fairly clear division of tasks between militants (primarily male students, but also some female students) and supporters (female students who are not armed, civilian supporters from outside, and residents of the neighbourhood).



Source: Anonymous



The Turbas are driven back, it is now the students' own motorcycles, which organise the reinforcement from the positions further back to the first barricade and drive back and forth. All the side streets are barricaded. When there are indications that the Turbas might break through via a side road, tyres are set on fire.



Private vehicles and taxis bring food and water. Most provisions are being brought inside UPOLI - the students and faculty members have taken over the university and are in the process of positioning themselves for the battles. It is the civilian population that supplies the students. I also see a nun bringing water and food to UPOLI.





Some houses have opened their gates and security bars and are stacking up food. Students at the Faculty of Medicine distribute vinegar-soaked facial masks and have set up a mobile medical station in front of UPOLI. Everywhere are vats of water to wipe the tear gas out of the eyes. Occasionally morteros are fired, but still no Molotov cocktails.

More private vehicles arrive and bring tyres and cans of petrol.



Everywhere are depots with paving stones. Many children are present and help with the transport of provisions. Some people distribute slingshots. There are three levels of barricades along the road in front of UPOLI: the first about 300 meters from the antimotines, the second about 200 meters behind the first one. In between, there is a group of militants, which I estimate at about 100-150. The barricades behind are smaller and have more of a function as roadblocks to act as obstacles in case of retreat. The antimotines start firing tear gas and the "autoconvocados" react with slingshots, morteros,



Molotov cocktails and stones.



As the antimotines advance for the first time, there is a hint of panic: many run back hastily seeking protection. However, when it is clear that the militants are beating back the anti-motines and these retreat to the starting line, calm is quickly restored. The clashes repeat regularly thereafter, the fire crackers explode more often and louder, but there is no breakthrough.



There is no media presence any longer. The only reports sent out to independent channels are through social networks. On the other hand, the people gathered are well informed about what is happening in other places in Managua and other parts of the country. It is sometimes difficult to verify messages or to identify them as false. There are images of armoured vehicles circulating in the streets, which are recognised as counterfeits - they were apparently taken on a previous occasion in Managua and are now being used to manipulate.

The clashes between the antimotines and the protest movement at UPOLI have taken on a ritualistic character, de facto barely anything moves at this time. A group of young girls are standing by the sidewalk, holding up a placard reading: "Daniel Ortega - a Nicaragua no la podras violar! Que se rinda tu madre!"



In the early afternoon we leave UPOLI. On the way back to the hotel we pass armed units of the Policia Nacional, on the Avenida near the hotel small groups of protesters watch the situation. Stones are ready, but they wait, they carry flags and protest peacefully. Antimotines appear and position themselves. As they advance, the protesters get to safety, and we retire to the inside of the hotel. There is no confrontation.

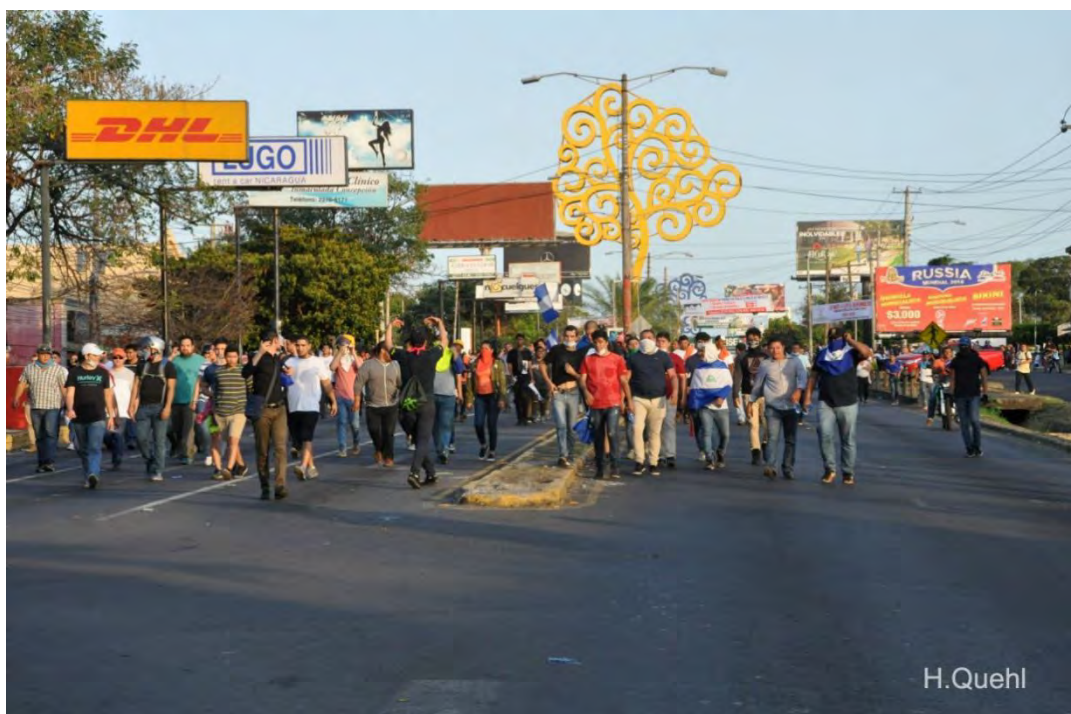




The manager of the hotel stayed behind in the hotel as she cannot return to her neighbourhood. Only the two of us remain, there are no other guests there. After about half an hour we hear noise from outside, but this time no shots. There are chants and clanging pots and frying pans.



I take my camera and go out on to the street. In front of me, a long procession of the protest movement with flags, whistles, and percussion is moving towards the city centre. The end of the procession cannot be seen. It is a large crowd of people protesting peacefully. I meet acquaintances from UPOLI, who are in the middle of it and have joined the march with their group. There are no antimotines or police to be seen. There are no armed protesters. I estimate the number of the protesters to be between 1500 and 2000 people.





When the march has passed the casino, I go back to the hotel to follow the general situation. In the meantime it is clear which channels provide useful information: they are "100% Noticias", the websites of El Nuevo Diario and La Prensa, as well as Canal 10 on television.



Source: La Prensa

On state television, Rosario Murillo, the wife of Daniel Ortega and Vice-President of Nicaragua, is the only one to have spoken in the past few days. There are no live broadcasts, only phone calls, in which she makes the same statements over and over again: violence comes from the "Grupos vandálicos" and criminal elements that want to sabotage the peace of the "Nicaraguan family". The Nicaraguan people stand united behind the government and will not tolerate these attacks because it wants peace.



**La pareja presidencial, Rosario Murillo y Daniel Ortega.** Él no ha dado la cara en medio de la crisis provocada por las reformas al INSS.

Source: *La Prensa*

These performances are also surreal, not only to me, but also to everyone I talk to. People see the injured in the reality of everyday life, and there is now enough evidence that government forces are targeting demonstrators with live ammunition.



Empty shell cases, source: Anonymous





*Rescue of an injured person, source: anonymous*

The fact that the communication is only via telephone and Daniel Ortega has never once spoken up is a reason for further rumours. The news has been circulating for a long time already that Ortega is in Cuba because of his illness. Now the news is spreading that Rosario is already out of the country as well.



*Source: Anonymous*

There is an official statement from the Nicaraguan business association COSEP, which is broadcast on television. COSEP calls for the dialogue to resume.



Source: *El Nuevo Diario*

Similar statements are being expressed from the circles of the Catholic church.



Source: *El Nuevo Diario*



The rumours also say that nationwide protest marches are forming to connect with the movement in Managua. The leader of the indigenous anti-canal movement, Francisca Ramirez, is said to be leading a protest march towards Managua.



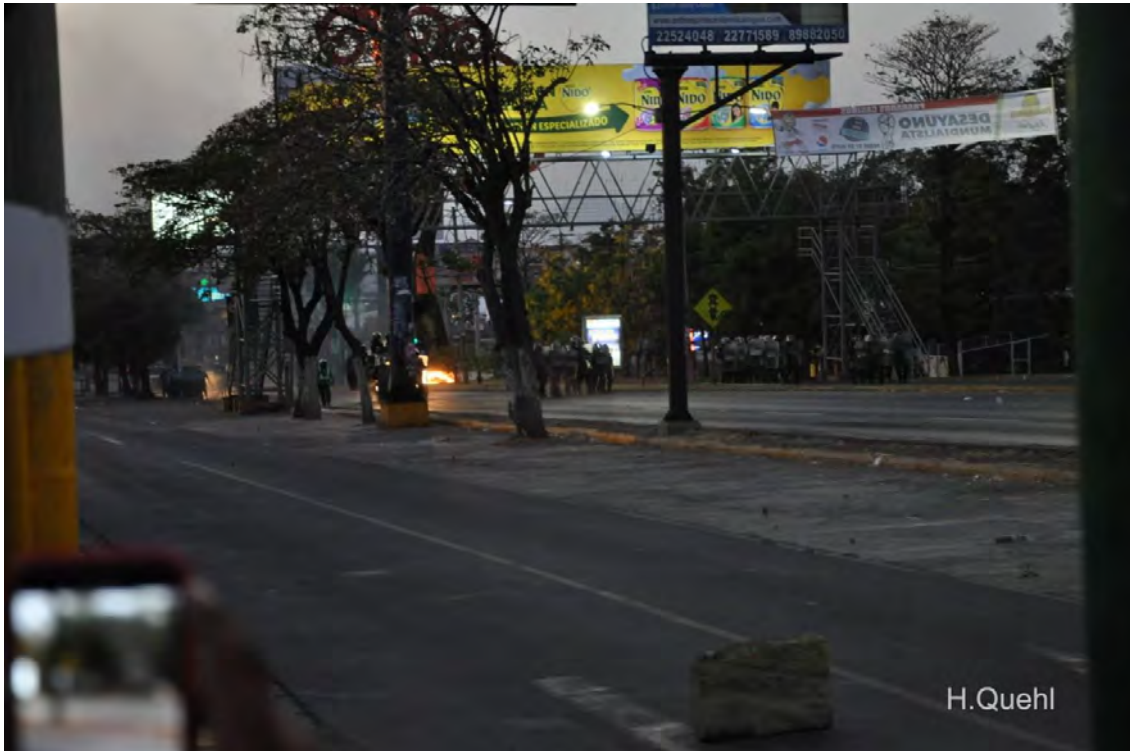
**La dirigente campesina, Francisca Ramirez,** denuncia que grupos de choque orteguistas intentaron agredirla en Nueva Guinea.

Source: *La Prensa*

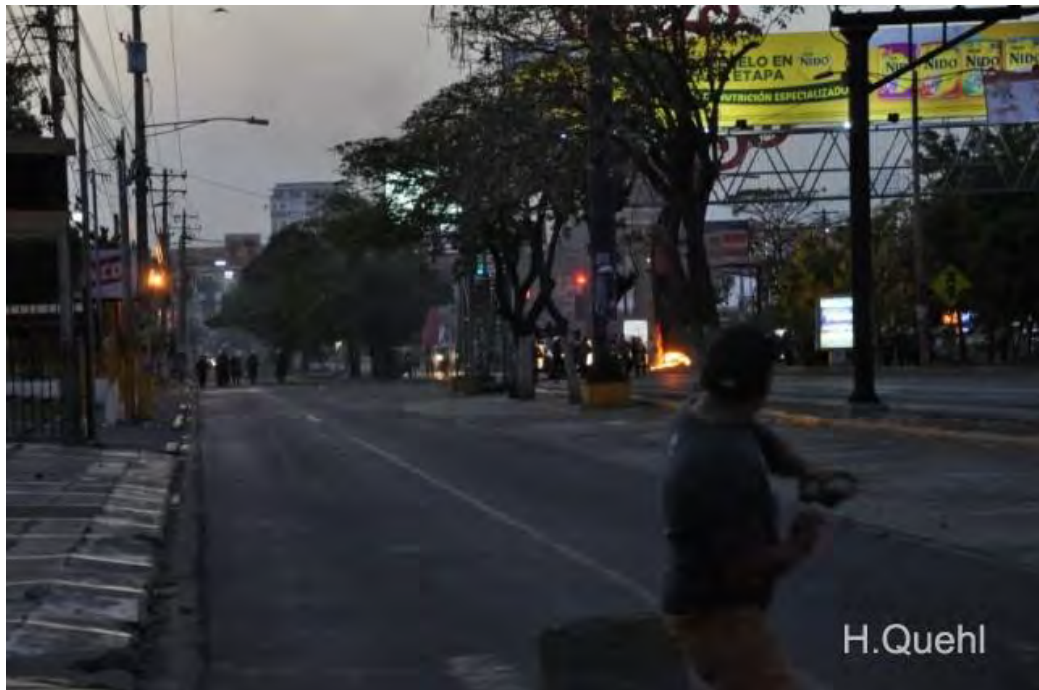
It is also noted that the military has not yet intervened.

There is Daniel Ortega's long awaited appearance, accompanied by Rosario Murillo, the Chief of the Armed Forces next to him, and the Chief of Police on the other. Ortega talks for an hour and a half. He devotes one hour to relating a chronology of the fight against Somoza and the development of the Sandinistas up to Ortega's election victory in 2008. The remaining half hour deals with the unlawfulness of the protests, the condemnation of violence on the part of the demonstrators and the confirmation of the course of the government to date. The Chief of the Armed Forces reiterates that if necessary, the army will ensure that peace in the country will be maintained. The only real news: Ortega says he is ready to begin dialogue on the INSS reform. No word about press censorship, civilian casualties and deaths. The speech is a disappointment - all had hoped for some sign of coming around. Nevertheless, it is now clear that Ortega and Murillo are in Nicaragua and not out of the country.

The head of the MLK comes back to the hotel in the evening. UPOLI is under the control of the protest movement, there was no attempt to storm it. From outside we hear shots, I grab the camera and we move cautiously to the main street. In the Avenida there are confrontations between antimotines and the protest movement. The demonstrators have sawed into and set fire to one of the "Arboles de vida" - so-called "trees of life" made of metal and a symbol of the power of Vice-President Rosario Murillo. The fight is now directed against the symbols of the Ortega-Murillo dynasty. The metal tree burns, the antimotines move forward.



The access road from the Avenida to the hotel is already blocked with stones, in front of it a provisional barricade is built, stones are prepared as projectiles. When the antimotines come within range, the demonstrators hurl stones - they are not armed. The antimotines first use rubber bullets.







Then they shoot with live ammunition and move forward. The demonstrators break up and flee, we disappear back to the safe hotel. I climb onto the roof, but you cannot see much from there. Since the situation is unclear, we decide that my colleague should immediately try to drive home, because it is not certain that the roads will remain open.



At the hotel, we try to follow the developments on several channels at the same time: my PC with access to "100% Noticias", the TV channels and their connections to the social networks. We can see the violence escalating. The protest movement seems to have lost the fight at UCA and UNI and the demonstrators have fled to the grounds of the cathedral.



There is an appeal by the Archbishop to end the violence and to respect the church grounds. Nonetheless, Turbas and units of the Policia Nacional are trying to invade the cathedral grounds.





We can follow live how panic arises and the crowds that were in front of the cathedral in the church-protected territory storm into the cathedral. A chaos of screaming and turmoil, it's a miracle that the fugitives don't trample anybody to death.

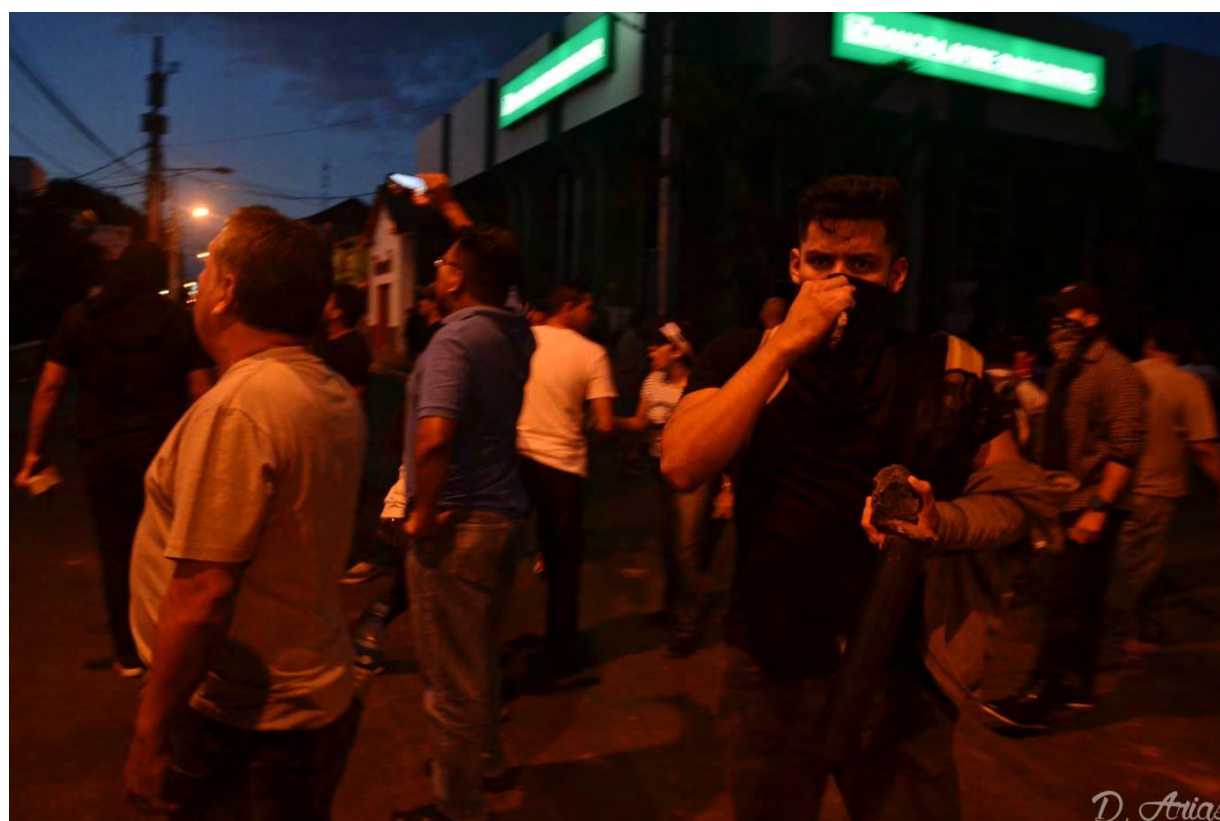


UPOLI becomes the centre of resistance. The reason for this is that UPOLI is located in a residential area that protects its entrances, while UNI, UCA and other universities are on open ground and thus easily accessible to government forces. UNI and UCA can be stormed, with a storm on UPOLI the whole district would have to be stormed. "100% Noticias" transmits primarily from the area around UPOLI.



There is also news from other parts of the country. From Leon we hear news that the accommodation provided by the population for the striking students has been burnt down. Masaya is practically in a state of emergency, as are other neighbourhoods in and around Managua - such as Ticualtepe, where a UPOLI colleague lives and where there has also been a death in the meantime. The antimotines have occupied the entire place.

Without warning, the electricity is turned off in the cathedral at night and the entire building is in the dark. The panic is huge, the sparse videos provide only a rough idea of what is going on there. Through one network, an audio message reaches us from a young woman who announces in tears that she is trapped in the cathedral and anyone who tries to come out is immediately shot. She appeals to inform the foreign embassies and to ask for help. We consult for a while about how to deal with it - it can also be a fake. We decide not to react. First, because no embassy will do anything about it, second, because the news of arbitrary executions is not verifiable, and thirdly, because a reaction will have no direct impact on the event.



I go to bed after midnight.



**Saturday, 21 April 2018**

From 7 o'clock we follow the development on the different channels. In the morning, videos circulated which were taken in the cathedral, of how Turbas and members of the Policia Nacional entered the church grounds and took all the available provisions to cut off the water and food supply to those seeking protection in the cathedral. The night before, the head of police had assured that at no time did police units invade or would enter the cathedral grounds. The pictures prove the opposite.

Another press conference with Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo is announced for the morning. He is meeting with business representatives of the Free Trade Area - an unbelievable process: foreign business people invited by Ortega and Murillo sit at the table and express their concern, with the help of an interpreter, that the riots could negatively affect their economic activities in Nicaragua. And Ortega confirms that he understands their concerns well and will strive to ensure economic security for business and especially the free trade area. Not even COSEP sat at the table.

The responses of the social groups are different from those of the day before. Both COSEP and the churches declare that in the light of the victims and restrictions on the freedom of the press, a return to dialogue can only take place if these issues are discussed alongside the INSS reform and all social groups are involved. Statements of the various Protestant churches and representatives of the Catholic church follow.

For the protest movement dialogue with the Ortega dynasty is no longer conceivable.



In view of the dead, wounded and missing, the dynasty's resignation is no longer negotiable. Up to this time there are estimates of about 30 dead, approx. 90 registered injured and more than 100 disappeared.



During the night there was another death at UPOLI, as well as other deaths in other parts of Managua and other places in Nicaragua.





Source: Anonymous

I am picked up at the hotel. We're trying to get to UPOLI, but the whole city is filled with barricades. In contrast to the previous day, the damages of the nightly conflicts have not been removed. You can only move through the city in a zigzag course, there are barricades in the inner-city area everywhere on the main roads and in some places there are obvious confrontations of the protest movement with government units. It is unclear which roads are passable and which are not. We decide to go home and work there. The MLK wants to issue a communiqué and send it. Since the UPOLI is not accessible, my PC is the only one available for the institute. The morning passes with various telephone consultations with MLK staff, phrasing and sending of the communiqué.

We make a second attempt in the afternoon to get to UPOLI. We pass many places where barricades and tyres are burning.



In some streets there are fights. We arrive at a roundabout, where there is no possibility of going further, because the arterial road is completely barricaded. I see an evangelical church that is obviously celebrating a wedding. The wedding guests stand in the smoke of the burning tyres and watch the events, then they go back into the church. A small group separates from the circle of militants and goes past the church to a neighbouring building that belongs to the FSLN. The building is attacked with stones and afterwards the demonstrators try to burn down the house. Again the fight against a symbol: besides the "Arboles de Vida", are these buildings of the Sandinista and occasionally also the flag of the FSLN.







Meanwhile, the second exit road from the roundabout is also no longer passable. We park and try to get to the barricade, but the situation is confusing.



More and more barriers are being built, there are fires in several places. An ambulance comes and is guided through the roadblocks by the demonstrators.





Two protesters warn me to take care of my camera. The fights are coming closer. Young women are dragging stones to build up the barricade in the back rows. The residents of the surrounding houses observe the events, sometimes they also help.



We leave the place and drive back. On the way to the hotel, we pass through a neighbourhood that has been spared from the unrest. No damage, but apparent peace, although shots and detonations accompany us.

When I arrive at the hotel I try to get my bearings, my colleague drives back. In the meantime, Canal 10 has also been discontinued and censored; now only the state media are functioning on television and radio. All reliable information runs exclusively through social media.

In Bluefields, a journalist was shot during a running reportage, his cameraman filmed the shooting, the recording will keep the state media busy over the next two hours and will be played permanently. The assassins were allegedly demonstrators who had supposedly entrenched themselves in the city administration. The next day, the information online is corrected: it seems that he was killed by a police bullet.

The night brings no more news. UPOLI remains the great bastion of student protests. The civilian protests have increased in general nationwide and reached a new dimension.

**Sunday, 22 April 2018**

My colleague arrives at the hotel in the morning and reports that a group of students is ready to give me an interview and to report on their experiences during the previous protest days. We decide to drive to the airport to confirm my flight for the night and to observe the situation. If possible we will try to drive to Masaya.

People assume that the conflict will intensify and, above all, last a long time. One parameter for this is panic buying. People are hoarding gasoline and food supplies. There are long queues in front of the petrol stations and we fill up as well at the next opportunity.



The situation in the city itself remains confusing. There are more barricades than the day before. In some places we turn back or take a different path, as clashes and struggles are obviously continuing.





We pass the FSLN party building which was attacked yesterday: it is still standing, only a few parts of the facade were damaged by the fire. In various parts of the city "Arboles de vida" are destroyed. At some corners new, larger barricades and barriers are created. Some roads are no longer passable, because the road surface has been torn open and covered with stones.



What we also see is looting. We pass by a supermarket, in front of which police forces are standing and in front of them a larger crowd. Then we arrive unprepared in the midst of turmoil when we pass a second supermarket, which is being looted.



The gates have been broken open, no guards can be seen, people are transporting goods in bags, in shopping trolleys, with bicycles, and sometimes even in taxis. We see a horse cart, laden with looted goods. But we also see that people are resisting the looting: a young man carrying off looted goods by bicycle is attacked with stones and flees. What is clear, however, is that only supermarkets, no small private businesses are being looted.





H. Quehl



H. Quehl

What we also see: looting, where police units are standing only a few meters away without intervening.

We also see civilians armed with iron bars protecting supermarkets against looters.



As we pass a roundabout downtown, three fully loaded pickups race past us in a row laden with looted goods, while the police let the raiders pass undisturbed.





It seems likely that at least part of the well-organised looting is being carried out by Turbas, similar to the confiscation of provisions from the protest movement in the universities and the cathedral. Photos of plundering policemen and paramilitaries are meanwhile being circulated online.

The direction is clear and appears as such immediately in the government media: the protest movement is being criminalised, the looting is put on their account. According to my observations, exactly the opposite is the case: what I have seen as "real" looting were impoverished sections of the population, who probably could not afford shopping in a supermarket under normal circumstances. I have only seen looting of supermarket chains, no small private businesses. Protest movement and looters were always separate from each other in the places I have passed. The police and state police protected a supermarket in only one place and in all other places the security forces were either absent or merely watching without intervening. Supermarkets, on the other hand, were protected by the surrounding civilian population, who formed chains and armed with truncheons and pipes were preventing looting in order to "prevent the government from accusing the students!".



We struggle through the barricades in zigzag lines into a quarter on the outskirts of town and pick up another colleague at home. She is a local and should be able to guide us to the airport, as we suspect that the access roads are blocked. We leave the paved roads and go through slums to a neighbourhood of corrugated iron shacks. We are not the only vehicles trying to maneuver past the roadblocks: on a single-track mud track with open sewers on the sides, traffic from both directions mounts up. We almost get stuck in the trash when we have to let a truck pass. We move on and I stop taking pictures and put the camera under the seat. A man, whom we ask for directions, also wants to go to the airport road and gets in. With his help we reach the access road.

We pass a series of singing evangelists who are stand at the roadside holding up Bibles. No looting, but there are long lines in front of all the shops we see. The airport is secured by the military, the access is free. At the airport, I am told that all flights are taking off and landing normally, but the counter of my airline is not manned and no one picks up the phone. We decide that I will leave the hotel and stay overnight at the airport as I have to check in at 4am.

We continue to Masaya, but the city is closed and we cannot get through.



We drive to the volcano crater and take a short break, then buy food in the neighbouring village and return to Managua.

Near the airport, we again take side roads to get into the city. Just around a street corner we land in front of a barricade.





A man waves to us that we should drive to the right next to the barricade into a small street. We see that here, too, a shopping area is being protected, this time by a large number of residents who have erected barricades on both sides and are holding up posters: "No al saqueo - Queremos la paz!" We stop, I take pictures and we talk to the people.





They have organised themselves, there are also followers of the Sandinistas. But everyone makes it clear that they are against the government and support the protest movement. Again, the protection of the market is done to prevent the looting being blamed on students.

We decide not to drive to UPOLI but home. We already have other colleagues there. They report about last night's march, which was again violently disrupted by the security forces at the Hilton. The situation inside UPOLI is dramatic: the students and lecturers have entrenched themselves and even set up a makeshift clinic on one of the upper floors to take care of the injured.



*Improvised clinic with treatment room and medication, source: anonymous*

A colleague reported on the events at the UPOLI last night: the solidarity of the residents is enormous. They have made their kitchens available to cook for the protesters who are holding out at



UPOLI. In another private house Molotov cocktails were prepared to support the protest movement. The clashes were again more intense than before. About 40 are estimated dead at this time. At 4 pm the student group arrives. We gather in the courtyard and conduct a group interview.



Some were present from the first day, one even in the previous week in the protests against the fires in Indio Maíz. No one was previously politically active or engaged in similar protests. Everyone joined in with the clear will to be part of the peaceful protest - and all were totally unprepared by the magnitude of the government's violence. Some were injured, all suffered fears of death and believed in several situations that they would die. The interview is highly emotional, the young people let everything out, what is on their minds. One young man is suffering a nervous breakdown. But everyone says they will continue.

The interview lasts almost two hours. It gets dark outside, we get beer and continue to talk in the courtyard. The discussion relaxes on whether or how they should go to UPOLI and support the occupants in the impending storming. It is abundantly clear that they are all exhausted and tired, but feel obliged to go back to the front. My colleague talks calmly to the young people. We all agree that UPOLI is likely to be lost and it is better to abandon the building, regain fresh strength and then continue the fight with a new strategy. It makes no sense to produce unnecessary victims.

Suddenly we hear chants and pot beating outside. We go out into the street and see a motorcade with a crowd of about 50-60 people, who are waving flags and marching toward the city centre.



For a moment I have the impression and the hope that the protest has taken a positive turn. But the shots and explosions increase during the night, they seem to be spread all over the city.

We are following the social media. Through one network, we get a live stream from inside UPOLI with a call for help. The antimotines have tried to storm the campus, a student was mortally wounded by a shot in the stomach. We see medical students trying to stop the bleeding and take care of the injured student. The university is besieged, there is no possibility to reach an ambulance. At this point, the combined strength of social networks unfolds: the beleaguered students actually manage to use their communication media to guide a pick-up to an unguarded location and to transport the injured person with a stretcher to the loading area and let them drive out. The strength and organisational talent of the besieged students are indescribable.

The online news is becoming increasingly confusing. There are very few videos, which show what is actually happening. News from UPOLI is getting worse, but apparently the antimotines have not managed to take UPOLI. In the midst of this chaos, I have to leave shortly after midnight. We save all our data on different devices and storage media and I leave the PC there. Shots and explosions have increased again. Six of us drive to the airport together. Surprisingly, the ride runs smoothly, there is not even a roadblock or control right up to the terminal.

We say goodbye to each other, discuss the emergency plan and then the others drive back. I sleep at the airport for 2-3 hours. Then the flight takes off as planned.