

Editor
Outlook
Washington Post
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Frederick, Md. 21701
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Dear Editor,

Whether or not its imminent publication elsewhere eased it into the Post, we are all indebted to you for today's Outlook piece on Reagan's Pro-Contra Propaganda Machine. I write to inform you and if you will be kind enough, the authors, of an aspect almost entirely ignored that I think is significant.

On the Friday before the Nandaime demonstration, in which Embassy personnel did take part, Ambassador Melton, apparently secure in the belief that no reporter was ~~present~~ present, told a non-Congressional delegation and others that ~~"we're~~ ^{"We're} ~~purpose~~ here is to overthrow their government." Others included some of his staff, two from State and the managing editor of our local papers. He lacks experience in and knowledge of foreign affairs and was along, he wrote, to write about Mrs. Byron, our Representative. He edits the only dailies in the county in which she lives and he did a fine piece for her re-election.

In World War II I was a Latin Americanist in intelligence and I'm sure there has not been any change, such an official statement changes everything. The whole world knows it is the Reagan intent to overthrow the Nicaraguan government but, as Honduras can lie and say it is not involved in helping the Contras, as long as there is official denial and no official admission, the fiction is recognized. It is entirely the opposite with an official acknowledgement. Melton was the highest U.S. official in Nicaragua.

There is also a prima facie case that he contrived his own expulsion. This is recounted in the local story that wasn't picked up anywhere. When going to the well-advertised demonstration (page-one banner headline and story in La Prensa, for example), the embassy staff, the State people and Mrs. Byron all argued that it was wrong and impossible, Mrs. Byron being quoted as predicting everything except the expulsions. Melton said "going would be fine" and provided three automatically-identified vehicles to take them there. There were immediate incidents involving these identified embassy vehicles. Interesting to me is the fact that the local story does not even suggest that the violence was started by the government forces.

This group left Washington on a Friday and returned early Sunday afternoon. Whether or not ~~is~~ it true of other such groups, this group was flown in a military plane, the other costs being borne by The National Forum Foundation. According to an embassy ~~is~~ information officer, there were 50 such groups the previous year. These were White House delegations of Members, not official Congressional delegations there on Congressional business. This information officer said they all see the same people in their weekend warrior junkets- opposition businessmen, the cardinal and ~~La~~ ^{La} Prensa. So, had there been a legitimate Congressional function, there was enormous redundancy. But it is explicit, this and the other innumerable duplications were by and for the White House.

There is more but this give you an idea of the significance of this unreported additional Reagan propaganda machine, clearly geared to propaganda and legislative votes and, now inevitably, to re-election campaigns. With tax money.

I've sent out all the copies of the local papers I could get and only two Members responded in any way -with irrelevant form letters. I don't want to appear to be blind-siding you, I spoke to the Post's ~~foreign~~ foreign desk the day the story appear^{ed} and to John Goshko, whose next-day reporting was limited to the exact opposite on the Melton expulsion. He didn't want a copy of the story. I sent it to Ben Bradlee, and he didn't like what I wrote him.

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Looking back on 75 years I regard what your authors report as a great subversion. But from what you carried not as great as it really is.

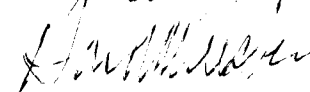
Inherent in this is the fact that both the press and the Congress allowed themselves to be manipulated, and not from lack of awareness.

Slowly but steadily as I see it our institutions are being misused to make a de facto change in our system, to preserve the democratic form to hide the fact of an increasing authoritarianism.

Copying the articles I refer to requires taping xeroxed pieces together because my primitive machine will not copy a newspaper page and the jumps on the first story are onto two additional pages. However, if you or they want copies, please let me know and I'll send them.

Again thank for an important article.

Sincerely,



Harold Weisberg