

Senator David Durenberger  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

11/12/84

Dear Senator,

In your letter of the 21st you defended applying an American viewpoint for Latin Americans in Latin America facing Latin American problems. You<sup>9</sup> that "is only natural" because of your pride in being a Minnesotan and an American and because your view of the world was "influenced by the values" instilled by your family and experiences. I have no argument with this - except if you expect it to be a basis for helping bring about a solution of the major problems of Central America.

I am a first generation American. If my parents had not emigrated here when they were young I'd not have been born free (and I think with a better appreciation of freedom than many have) and I'd probably not have survived Hitler.

What you tell me is proper if not ideal when you address the problems of Minnesotans and other Americans because you share their backgrounds and experiences. Your own life equips you for understanding the problems of all Americans. In general you experience and experienced what they do and have lived with, whether or not you shared, the problems many have. These experiences, however, have little in common with, say, those of the average Nicaraguan and do not serve as a basis for either understanding or helping solve Nicaraguan problems.

Nor are they a basis for earning the love and friendship of Nicaraguans and other peoples of the area.

It is in this sense that I said we have to think in their terms, see their problems, including their past, as they do, not as we do. When you say, "I differ in my assessment of American responsibility for the radicalization of that unfortunate country," you reflect, in my view, an attitude that ultimately will be self-defeating and will assure the long-time radicalization, if not further radicalization of that country. You also reflect an unwillingness for us to face our past for without us there would not have been that frightful Somoza dictatorship. If we are to cleanse ourselves we must acknowledge our errors and if we are to assert a good influence among those who have suffered from what we did in the past this is important if not in fact absolutely essential. Without some such demonstration why should they today believe or trust us and our motives?

Most if not all peoples want to lead their own lives their own ways and for most this represents an evolution, as in England. But for some it begins with a revolution, as we did when we were left with no real alternative. Our revolution was far and away the most radical the world had ever seen, yet we evolved into anything but a radical nation.

The more we try to impose our way on others, the more they will resist it and go another way. It is only if we do not try to make them over into our image that there is any possibility of their electing to go our way. It is not possible to buy other peoples, as the history of the world makes clear enough, and when we expect this or seek to force it we defeat our own ostensible purposes.

The Mexican government, which does not particularly like the present form of the Nicaraguan government, understands and reflects this clearly and acts in accord with its understanding. It is a good model for us and we should be wise enough to learn from it and act accordingly.

What you describe as the record of the Sandanistas is what most Americans, including me, would rebel over. It is abhorrent to us, given our lives and experiences. But it exists not in this country but in the country which is seeking to emerge from

that terrible, murderous dictatorship ( which with our support also robbed it blind) in a world in which it had every reason to fear and prepare to defend against both external intervention and counterrevolution from the Samoza remnants. And utterly impoverished by it.

I do not and I cannot tell you what would have evolved once the fear of both external intervention and internal opposition from the followers and beneficiaries of the dictatorship ended. I believe there would have been a period of growth in our direction for several reasons. First, it would have been economically wise and fruitful and second, they would have seen and appreciated the advantages of our way. But do I have to tell you what did happen, or that resisted both external pressures and military opposition.

Have you tried to reconcile our attitudes toward Tito's and subsequent Yugoslavia, for example, and toward Latin American countries? Politically their present systems are not dissimilar.

I would like very much for all those countries to have and enjoy our freedoms, but I do not believe we can impose this upon them and I am certain that we cannot by using as our foil the remnants of a hated and justly hated dictatorship.

To accomplish worthwhile purposes, for them and for ourselves, we must, I say based on my knowledge and experience of the past, think as they do and understand as they do, the thought you disagree with in your letter of the 21st.

Yesterday's Washington Post held an illustration of this in its sports section. It was Sunday's, and I not longer have it and cannot enclose it. The Post had carried an article on Bolivia and the Olympics and the Bolivian cultural attache denounced the Post with vigor, as out of context of Bolivian life and as ridiculing a relatively poor country. Yet I am sure the Post did not have any such thing in mind at all. It did not examine Bolivia and the Olympics in terms of what Bolivians regard as the reality of their lives and capabilities.

Some years ago I succeeded in making a similar point and while our government benefitted from it and appreciated it very much, the bureaucrats, set in their ways, just forgot it and perpetuated the same errors. I saw young people from the poorer countries being brought here and provided with fine agricultural educations they would not be able to use for years, in their personal interest of those of their nations. What immediate good did it do to train those youths to run computerized or mechanized feed mills, with all sorts of trace elements mixed in, if they returned to lands that had no feed mills and little food of any kind? Their immediate needs were those of ours of the past, basic, elemental needs, from which they could grow once they began to address virtual starvation. So I conceived and implemented what AP promptly dubbed "Geese for Peace," and that an American farmer would share what he had with the poor of other lands captured the international imagination. It made page-one news all around the world. (Geese can make their own living, as you may know, and still reproduce and provide some food for people.) I did this with three poor countries, with the Heifer Project providing some of the transportation in two instances. Except for getting its first good publicity break, the Peace Corps had no involvement and didn't spend a penny.

When with the third country the State Department saw some good propaganda possibilities it failed miserably in the area in which we should be most skilled. It could not even get the pictures it wanted and came to make. In the end the third country and I did its job for it. And although we then were at loggerheads with this third country, it arranged for, knowingly, what State then used effectively throughout Africa.

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In politics and international relationship we get love and friendship by earning it, not by demanding it.

And we are judged by what we do, not by what we say.

We can demand and insist on having our way but as modern history shows only too well, it never works and it is always costly to us.

How many Americans do you think would have rallied around the Tories after our revolution succeeded?

Ought we not understand this today?

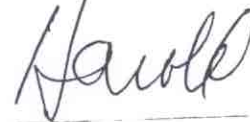
Yet what else have we tried in Nicaragua?

In time we can overcome our past with so many poorer nations, but only if we are genuinely unselfish and let them lead their own lives however that may turn out to be. I am confident that the history of the world shows that people do respond favorably to unselfish help ~~favorably~~ and with appreciation and that it also shows that all peoples resist domination in any form.

The way we are going we are going to drive every poor nation to the left, and I do not want that and I am sure you do not.

I repeat that while we today cannot feel things as they do, we can try to think and see as they do and try to understand their pasts and their culture because if we do not in the end we defeat ourselves.

Sincerely,



Harold Weisberg  
7627 Old Receiver Rd.  
Frederick, MD 21701

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## United States Senate

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May 21, 1984

Harold Weisberg  
7627 Old Receiver Road  
Frederick, Maryland 21701

Dear Harry:

Just a brief note to thank you for your continuing correspondence on Central America.


I'm glad that we're in general agreement on our hopes for the future of Central America. As I've said previously, the United States must support efforts to encourage economic reforms and to democratize the Central American political process.

On one count, however, I think that your criticism of me is unjustified. You state that I look at Central America from a North American viewpoint, and not that of a Central American. I think that that is only natural, as I am proud to be both a Minnesotan and an American. As a result, my view of the world has been influenced by the values which my family instilled in me and by the experiences which I have had.

I understand your views on U.S. policies towards Nicaragua, but I differ in my assessment of American responsibility for the radicalization of that unfortunate country. I think that it's important to remember that the United States was the single largest donor of foreign aid to the Sandinista government during the 1979 to 1981 period, as our government contributed over \$125 million to Nicaragua. Despite this assistance, the Sandinistas tightened their control on most facets of life in Nicaragua, reduced individual freedoms, militarized Nicaraguan society, strengthened political and military ties with the Soviet Union and Cuba, and began to encourage destabilization activities in neighboring countries. I don't believe that a return to the assistance policies of 1979-81 would have the desired effect of moderating the Sandinistas' behavior.

Thanks again for your views, Harry. Please stay in touch.

Sincerely,

  
Dave Durenberger  
United States Senator

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