

# VIEWPOINT

The Miami Herald  
Miami, Florida  
May 2, 1985

## A futile gesture

June 13, 1985 VILLAGE ADVERTISER

Scarcely a month after a triumphal 1985 first quarter, President Reagan is in a spring slump. His budget compromise is in trouble, his European tour is bedeviled by Nazi ghosts, and his Western allies are in a protectionist lather. But nowhere have the reversals been as pronounced as in Nicaragua.

It's easy to understand the president's eagerness to do something — anything — to demonstrate his displeasure with the Sandinista regime. Stung already by congressional rejection of his proposal to renew aid to the contras, Mr. Reagan since has been constrained to endure the spectacle of Daniel Ortega requesting hundreds of millions in new Soviet assistance. Though scheduled before the contra vote, Mr. Ortega's Moscow visit inevitably has exacerbated the administration's frustration. Thus it was bound to be only a matter of time before the president countered with new reprisals.

Yet in yesterday's action forbidding U.S.-Nicaraguan trade, suspending commercial airline flights between the two countries, and barring Nicaraguan-flag vessels from U.S. ports, Mr. Reagan only spites Uncle Sam's face by cutting off his nose. Grasping for meaningful sanctions, the administration has mustered only a gesture of maximum futility.

Like most economic sanctions, the ban on Nicaraguan trade is more symbolism than substance. If it exerts any effective pressure on the Sandinistas, it will arrive only by the most circuitous route. The more-immediate victims of any embargo would be Nicaraguans struggling private-sector growers and ranchers, whose bananas, beef and other products Mr. Reagan now shuns. Their most likely recourse will be to lean more heavily on those whose authority the administration seeks to weaken: the Sandinistas.

It's important, too, to distinguish between bilateral trade and unilateral aid. Trade is a mutually beneficial arrangement, not a favor that one country extends to another. The United States long has conducted a brisk commerce with dozens of regimes that it considers distasteful, cognizant that any disruption of those trade relationships would impose hardships on U.S. and foreign entrepreneurs alike. Obstacles to travel similarly impinge on American citizens' freedom of association.

No thoughtful American questions the need to maintain some kind of leverage in Nicaragua nor envious those charged with devising effective strategies to further that end. But petulant expressions of frustration, whatever psychic satisfaction they may bring, are no substitute for a coherent policy. As a lever, the proposed trade embargo is ineffectual. As a confession of American frustration, it is unworthy of a supposedly mature world power.

### *Village Advertiser commentary:*

Let us recall, after recent Memorial Day celebrations and as our government exerts economic leverage on Nicaragua, that we commemorated those who died to win World War II with the help of one of our allies, Russia, against our enemies, Germany, Italy, and Japan; that we commemorated those who gave their lives to win World War I with the help of one of our allies, Italy, against one of our enemies, Germany; that we commemorated the brave men who died in the Civil War when brother took up arms against brother; that we commemorated those who died in the American Revolution, in the War of 1812, in the Spanish-American War, in Korea, in Viet Nam.

As we contemplate the effect of our government's actions in Central America, not only the latest reprisals but in an apparent concerted effort to drive the Sandinista government into the waiting and welcoming arms of communist Russia, let us remember the aftermath of war and the aftermath of peace as waged after World War II.

It may have been the finest hour in our history for we "turned the other cheek" to offer former enemies open-handed generosity. We helped them rebuild devastated cities, shattered countrysides, and ruined economics. We traded freely. We... and they... flourished.

Would Central America turn to communist Russia were aid available from its northern neighbor? Halting communism in this hemisphere takes no more than the same beneficence this nation bestowed upon its former foes in the aftermath of World War II.