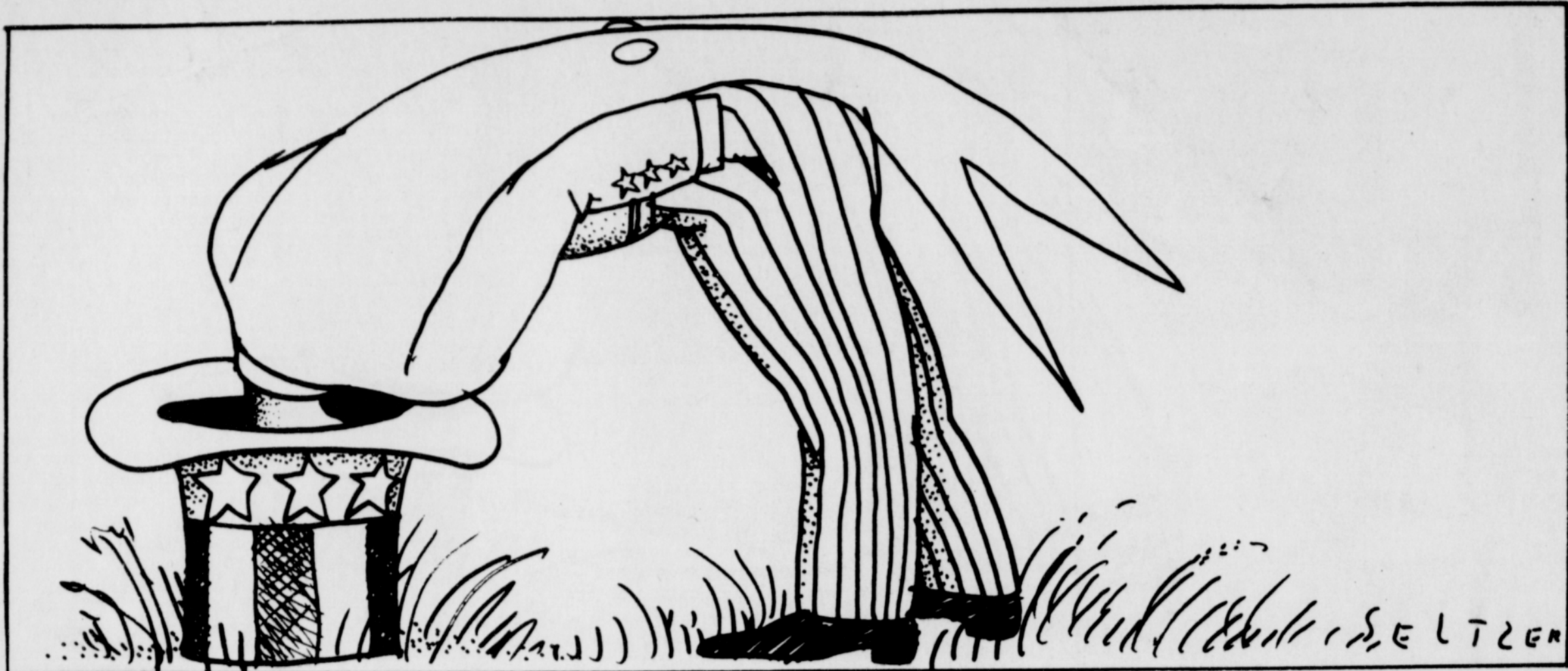




ISADORE SELTZER

NICARAGUA

FROM PAGE 15

reservoir just beneath the now empty Somoza mansion. I sit transfixed watching a ten year old girl in a white dress do the most immaculate Samba I have ever seen a human perform. But the mood of the group is subdued as our Educators' Tour spends its last night in Nicaragua. Enrique is also quiet, perhaps because the total cost of the dinner has gone beyond his budgetary estimates. I get the feeling that Enrique has extended himself so much that he may actually be losing money on the whole tour. But then again, Enrique has a way of extricating himself from disaster and turning setback into advantage.

With a Ph.D. in business administration from Occidental College in Pasadena and a Ph.D. in political science from the University of Moscow in the Soviet Union, Enrique is all the contradiction he appears to be. In fact, I sit in the cabaret figuring that if I can fully comprehend the person that is Enrique Ruiz then I can possibly understand the entire Nicaraguan Revolution! Our tour leaders planned our trip believing we were to be handled by the official Nicaraguan tourism bureau. It turned out, however, that the contract had been passed to Enrique's private company. This turned out to be to our advantage since Enrique's contacts in the country were unsurpassed. But the ironies compounded. Enrique provided us a firsthand look at the inner workings of the Sandinista Revolution through the auspices of a private corporation. And although his contacts in the government won us privileged meetings and tours, Enrique himself is not a Sandinista. He belongs to the Nicaraguan Socialist Party. But he studied political science in Moscow where his idealized hero was ... Josef Stalin! "The Revolution has made many mistakes," Enrique offered after several glasses of rum at the cabaret at our last supper. "For example, Tomas Borges was too lenient with Somoza's national guard in Managua. They cried and promised they would reform, so he let them go. In Matagalpa and Esteli the people made sure there was no soft-heartedness toward the national guard." The liberated national guardsmen, of course, were the focal point for the eventual consolidation of the contra.

On Sunday morning our entrepreneurial-socialist-Stalinist-nationalist tour guide escorts us to the airport and embraces us goodbye. We then wait another six and a half hours before our Air-Nica jetliner wings us away to Mexico City. At the airport families

of departing passengers patiently wait in the hot sun outside the glass walls of the passenger lounge. The children press their hands against the glass so the hands of their loved ones appear to touch. Are these businessmen going on a two-day stint to Mexico City or refugees leaving their families to establish a new life in a distant land? Like so much in Nicaragua, the truth is enigmatic.

I am sad to leave this exotic land, so ripe with potential but so immersed in complexity and shadowed layers of reality. As we spot some more Soviet helicopters on the ground just before our ascent to the north, I realize that I have still not put together a coherent picture of this Revolution which mixes both the example of Castro and Sandino. Perhaps Nicaragua is truly the midpoint between the great revolutions of Mexico and Cuba. Perhaps Nicaragua, arguably the most American oriented culture in Latin America, will show once and for all that a small nation can defy the will of the United States without becoming militaristic and totalitarian. It is hard to see the outline of coming developments, to transcend awesome barriers of language, culture, nation, and revolution. But one thing remains clear as the Pacific coast of Nicaragua re-

cedes into the haze: Nicaragua's problems are indigenous to Nicaragua. Why can't we let them find their own way? Is the United States really afraid of an army of fourteen year olds who request their mothers' company at basecamp? And if the Russians and Cubans win friends by donating trucks, petroleum, sugar mills and even helicopters for defense, why can't the United States do the same? Certainly the contra war is counterproductive, to say the very least. If one is to believe even the most conservative of Nicaragua's critics, the war is not only a slap at intense national pride, it is also the best unifying force the Sandinistas have. In this sense, I conclude as our plane moves off the coast of El Salvador, Ronald Reagan may be the greatest Sandinista of them all.

Long live Sandino!
Long live Nicaragua Libre!

David Horowitz is an associate professor of cultural history at Portland State University and a professional jazz pianist. He also writes books and articles on popular music and labor history.

AN AMERICAN HERO

THE FOLLOWING STATEMENT BY JOHN LINDER OPENED A PRESS CONFERENCE IN PORTLAND ON APRIL 28, THE DAY HIS BROTHER BEN WAS KILLED BY CONTRAS IN NICARAGUA. THE PRESS CONFERENCE WAS CALLED BY THE PORTLAND CENTRAL AMERICA SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE, THE PORTLAND-CORINTO SISTER CITY PROJECT, AND THE COUNCIL FOR HUMAN RIGHTS IN LATIN AMERICA.

My name is John Linder. I am thirty-two years old. My brother Ben Linder was my only brother. The United States government killed my brother. The contras killed my brother, and Reagan says he is a contra. The Congress provided money and arms to the contras. The contras are armed, financed and trained by the U.S. government. They have their international headquarters in Washington, D.C. The United States government determines who their leaders are. U.S. planes fly reconnaissance missions for them. The bullets that were used to kill my brother undoubtedly came from the United States. So my brother was a victim of United States government policy.

We are moved; we are moved because he was a young person — the example of the best kind of young people who are willing to give their lives because they know that the life of another human being, be they a Nicaraguan or a Salvadoran or a South African, is no different than our lives. We are moved because we know him. Maybe if we all knew every Nicaraguan who has been killed, maybe if all ten thousand Nicaraguans who have been killed by the United States war against Nicaragua were as visible to us, as real people to us, as my brother is to me, maybe then we would mobilize enough power to stop this war.

His death was not an accident. His death was policy. It is contra policy to destroy the social programs that are benefitting the people of Nicaragua. Contra leader Enrique Bermudez says we will destroy cooperative farms because they are nothing but a Sandinista tool. I have seen childcare centers destroyed by the contras when I visited my brother in Nicaragua. My brother was a victim of a conscious policy. The CIA, as we know, told the contras to do this — they denied those policies.

These policies are not supported by U.S. people. That is why they have to be carried out in secret basements by the likes of Oliver North, who Ronald Reagan would call an American hero. Well, I would call my brother an American hero. And I will say that he will not have died in vain. Because his attitude, an attitude that the Nicaraguan people have a right to be free, that this country which has stood up and done everything in its power to create a better life for its people, has a right to live in peace — that no White House has a right to tell the Nicaraguans how to live. He was willing to give his life for that. And while he was killed, his message is going to be picked up; it is going to be picked up not just by thousand, but by millions of people throughout this country and throughout the world.

— JOHN LINDER

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