

US Intervention in Nicaragua

Writings of Augusto Sandino

From *Manifesto to Nicaraguan Compatriots*, 14 July 1927

I am going to make a statement about the causes that led to the measure I took in the name of my country and my fellow citizens:

The American Alexander, who lives in Murra, department of Nueva Segovia, has been a gold smuggler for several years, producing great profits for himself and the luxurious life-style of a nabob, cheating the mine workers who live at the mercy of the dangers peculiar to that kind of work. The American Alexander pays his miners not with cash, but rather with vouchers, worth from one cent to five pesos, which are valid only in Charles Butters's commissary in exchange for merchandise at exorbitant prices that the workers must accept.

Charles Butters, American, who for a number of years has called himself the owner of the San Albino mine, who cheats my fellow countrymen out of their salaries, forcing them to work twelve hours a day, paying them with vouchers worth from one cent to five pesos, which are acceptable only in his commissary in exchange for merchandise at twice the normal price, thinks himself authorized by his nationality to commit such abuses, and thinks that they should not be stopped by those who have a duty to do so....

Moncada, the people know what justice is, and when it is denied to them they seize it! And since I am of the people and know what law and justice are, I have seized it myself in Butters's name, taking those assets that belong to my country in order to convert that longstanding debt into real value, paying it with that same gold which the enterprise produces.

With this done, the property will be returned to the swindling company, if it is able to prove to the people that it is in fact the legitimate owner.

The world would be an unbalanced place if it allowed the United States of America to rule alone over our canal, because this would mean placing us at the mercy of the Colossus of the North, forcing us into a dependent and tributary role to persons of bad faith who would be our masters without justifying such pretensions in any way.

Civilization requires that a Nicaraguan canal be built, but that it be done with capital from the whole world, and not exclusively from the United States. At least half of the cost of the construction should be financed with capital from Latin America, and the other half from other countries of the world that may want to hold stock in this enterprise, but the share of the United States should be limited to the three million dollars that they paid to the traitors Chamorro, Diaz, and Cuadra Pasos. And Nicaragua, my Fatherland, will then receive the taxes that by right and by law belong to it, and we will then have income enough to crisscross our whole territory with railroads and to educate our people in a true environment of effective democracy. Thus we will be respected and not looked upon with the bloody scorn we suffer today.

From *A Letter to the Rulers of Latin America*, 4 August 1928

In view of the fact that your fifteen countries would be those most affected if Nicaragua were allowed to become a colony of Uncle Sam, I am taking the liberty of sending you this letter, inspired not by hypocrisy or by false diplomatic courtesies, but by the rough frankness of a soldier.

Before the cold indifference of the Latin American governments, and left to its own resources, the Army in Defense of the National Sovereignty of Nicaragua has for fifteen months honorably and brilliantly faced the terrible blond breasts and the pack of traitorous Nicaraguan renegades who support the invaders in their sinister designs.

During this time, señores presidentes, you have not carried out your duty, because as the representatives that you are of free and sovereign peoples, you are obliged to protest diplomatically or, if necessary, with the weapon that the people have placed in your trust, against the nameless crimes that the White House government orders carried out in cold blood in our unhappy Nicaragua, without any right and with our country blameless except for its unwillingness to kiss the whip that lashes it, or the fist that strikes it.

Do the Latin American governments think perhaps the Yankees would be content with the conquest of Nicaragua alone? Have these governments perhaps forgotten that among twenty-one American republics six have already lost their sovereignty? Panama, Puerto Rico, Cuba, Haiti, Santo Domingo, and Nicaragua are the six unfortunate republics that have lost their independence and become colonies of Yankee imperialism. The governments of those six nations do not defend the collective interests of their compatriots, because they came to power, not as a result of the popular will, but imposed instead by imperialism, and so it happens that those who rise to the presidency backed by Wall Street magnates defend the interests of U.S. bankers. In those six unfortunate Spanish-American nations, all that remains to the people is the memory of their independence and the distant hope of reconquering their freedom through the formidable efforts of a few native sons, who fight tirelessly to rescue their country from the infamy into which the renegades have sunk them. The Yankee colonization advances swiftly over our nations without encountering a wall of bayonets in its path, and therefore when its turn comes each of our countries is overwhelmed by the conqueror with little effort on its part, because, until now, each has defended itself alone. If the governments of the principal nations of Latin America were led by a Simón Bolívar, a Benito Juárez, or a San Martín, our fate would be other than it is, because they would know that once Central America had been dominated by the blond pirates, Mexico, Colombia, Venezuela, etc., would follow.

What would become of Mexico if the Yankees succeeded in their dastardly designs to colonize Central America? The heroic people of Mexico could do nothing, despite their manly qualities, because they would be crushed beforehand in Uncle Sam's grip, and the help they might hope to receive from sister nations could not reach them because the Nicaraguan canal and the naval base on the Gulf of Fonseca would stand in the way. And so Mexico would be destined to struggle against Yankee imperialism isolated from the other nations of Latin America, using its own resources, which is exactly what is happening to us now.

The celebrated Carranza doctrine proclaims that Mexico, because of its geographic position, must be--and in fact is--the advantage guard of Hispanism in America. Then what might be the opinion of the present Mexican government with respect to the policy the Yankees are carrying out in Central America? Have the Ibero-American governments not seen that the Yankees are amused by the prudent policy adopted in situations like that of Nicaragua? It is true that, for the moment, Brazil, Venezuela, and Peru have no intervention problem, as their representatives declared this year at the Pan-American Conference in Havana during the discussion of the right to intervene, but if those governments were more conscious of their historic responsibility, they would not wait for the conquest to unleash its havoc on their own soil, but would come instead to the defense of a brother nation that struggles with a bravery and tenacity born of despair against a criminal enemy a hundred times larger and armed with every kind of modern weapon. At such a tragic and decisive moment in history, can governments that express themselves as Brazil, Venezuela, Peru, and Cuba did retain sufficient moral authority over their sister nations? Will they have a right to be heard?

Today it is with the peoples of Spanish America that I speak. When a government does not reflect the aspirations of its citizens, the latter, who gave it power, have the right to be represented by virile men with concepts of effective democracy, and not by useless satraps whose lack of moral valor and patriotism are a disgrace to a nation's pride.

We are ninety million Spanish Americans, and we should think only about our unity, recognizing that Yankee imperialism is the most brutal enemy that now threaten us and the only one that intends to put an end to our racial honor and our peoples' freedom through conquest.

Tyrants do not represent nations, and freedom is not won with flowers.

To form, then, a united front and to stop the conqueror's advance over our lands, we must begin by respecting ourselves in our own house, and not allow bloodthirsty despots like Juan Vicente Gómez and degenerates like Leguía, Machado, and others to make us look ridiculous before the world as they did in the pantomime in Havana.

The honorable men of Latin America should imitate Bolívar, Hidalgo, San Martín, and the Mexican lads who on September 13, 1847, fell at Chapultepec, pierced by Yankee bullets, dying in defense of their country and their race, rather than surrendering to a life of disgrace and shame into which Yankee imperialism would cause us to sink.

Patria y Libertad.

AUGUSTO C. SANDINO

Calvin Coolidge to Congress, 10 January 1927

Coolidge on Recent Events in Nicaragua

It is well known that in 1912 the United States intervened in Nicaragua with a large force and put down a revolution, and that from that time to 1925 a legation guard of American Marines was, with the consent of the Nicaragua government, kept in Managua to protect American lives and property. In 1923 representatives of the five Central American countries, namely, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Salvador, at the invitation of the United States, met in Washington and entered into a series of treaties.

These treaties dealt with limitation of armament, a Central American tribunal for arbitration, and the general subject of peace and amity. The treaty last referred to specifically provides in Article II that the governments of the contracting parties will not recognize any other government which may come into power in any of the five republics through a coup d'etat, or revolution, and disqualifies the leaders of such coup d'etat, or revolution, from assuming the presidency or vice-presidency.

The United States was not a party to this treaty, but it was made in Washington under the auspices of the secretary of state, and this government has felt a moral obligation to apply its principles in order to encourage the Central American states in their efforts to prevent revolution and disorder. The treaty, it may be noted in passing, was signed on behalf of Nicaragua by Emiliano Chamorro himself, who afterwards assumed the presidency in violation thereof and thereby contributed to the creation of the present difficulty.

In October 1924 an election was held in Nicaragua for president, vice-president, and members of the Congress. This resulted in the election of a coalition ticket embracing Conservatives and Liberals. Carlos Solorzano, a Conservative Republican, was elected president, and Juan B. Sacasa, a Liberal, was elected vice-president. This government was recognized by the other Central American countries and by the United States. It had been the intention of the United States to withdraw the Marines immediately after this election, and notice was given of the intention to withdraw them in January 1925. At the request of the president of Nicaragua, this time was extended to Sept. 1, 1925. Pursuant to this determination and notice, the Marines were withdrawn in August 1925.

Notwithstanding the refusal of this government and of the other Central American governments to recognize him, General Chamorro continued to exercise the functions of president until Oct. 30, 1926. In the meantime a revolution broke out in May on the east coast in the neighborhood of Bluefields and was speedily suppressed by the troops of General Chamorro. However, it again broke out with considerable more violence. The second attempt was attended with some success, and practically all of the east coast of Nicaragua fell into the hands of the revolutionists. Throughout these events, Sacasa was at no time in the country, having remained in Mexico and Guatemala during this period. . . .

The Nicaraguan constitution provides in Article 106 that in the absence of the president and vice-president the Congress shall designate one of its members to complete the unexpired term of president. As President Solorzano had resigned and was then residing in California, and as the vice-president, Doctor Sacasa, was in Guatemala, having been out of the country since November 1925, the action of

Congress in designating Señor Diaz was perfectly legal and in accordance with the constitution. Therefore, the United States government on Nov. 17 extended recognition to Señor Diaz. . . .

Immediately following the inauguration of President Diaz, and frequently since that date, he has appealed to the United States for support, has informed this government of the aid which Mexico is giving to the revolutionists, and has stated that he is unable solely because of the aid given by Mexico to the revolutionists to protect the lives and property of American citizens and other foreigners.

When negotiations leading up to the Corinto conference began, I immediately placed an embargo on the shipment of arms and ammunition to Nicaragua. The Department of State notified the other Central American states, to wit, Costa Rica, Honduras, Salvador, and Guatemala, and they assured the department that they would cooperate in this measure. So far as known, they have done so. The State Department also notified the Mexican government of this embargo and informally suggested to that government like action. The Mexican government did not adopt the suggestion to put on an embargo but informed the American ambassador at Mexico City that in the absence of manufacturing plants in Mexico for the making of arms and ammunition the matter had little practical importance.

As a matter of fact, I have the most conclusive evidence that arms and munitions in large quantities have been, on several occasions since August 1926, shipped to the revolutionists in Nicaragua. Boats carrying these munitions have been fitted out in Mexican ports, and some of the munitions bear evidence of having belonged to the Mexican government. It also appears that the ships were fitted out with the full knowledge of and, in some cases, with the encouragement of Mexican officials and were in one instance, at least, commanded by a Mexican naval reserve officer.

At the end of November, after spending some time in Mexico City, Doctor Sacasa went back to Nicaragua, landing at Puerto Cabezas, near Bragmans Bluff. He immediately placed himself at the head of the insurrection and declared himself president of Nicaragua. He has never been recognized by any of the Central American republics nor by any other government, with the exception of Mexico, which recognized him immediately. As arms and munitions in large quantities were reaching the revolutionists, I deemed it unfair to prevent the recognized government from purchasing arms abroad, and, accordingly, the secretary of state notified the Diaz government that licenses would be issued for the export of arms and munitions purchased in this country. It would be thoroughly inconsistent for this country not to support the government recognized by it while the revolutionists were receiving arms and munitions from abroad.

Coolidge mentions economic and strategic interests of the US in Nicaragua

For many years numerous Americans have been living in Nicaragua, developing its industries and carrying on business. At the present time there are large investments in lumbering, mining, coffee growing, banana culture, shipping, and also in general mercantile and other collateral business. All these people and these industries have been encouraged by the Nicaraguan government. That government has at all times owed them protection, but the United States has occasionally been obliged to send naval forces for their proper protection. In the present crisis such forces are requested by the Nicaraguan government, which protests to the United States its inability to protect these interests and states that any measures which the United States deems appropriate for their protection will be satisfactory to the Nicaraguan government.

In addition to these industries now in existence, the government of Nicaragua, by a treaty entered into on the 5th of August 1914, granted in perpetuity to the United States the exclusive proprietary rights necessary and convenient for the construction, operation, and maintenance of an oceanic canal. . . .

There is no question that if the revolution continues, American investments and business interests in Nicaragua will be very seriously affected, if not destroyed. The currency, which is now at par, will be inflated. American as well as foreign bondholders will undoubtedly look to the United States for the protection of their interests. It is true that the United States did not establish the financial plan by any treaty, but it nevertheless did aid through diplomatic channels and advise in the negotiation and establishment of this plan for the financial rehabilitation of Nicaragua.

Manifestly, the relation of this government to the Nicaraguan situation and its policy in the existing emergency are determined by the facts which I have described. The proprietary rights of the United States in the Nicaraguan canal route, with the necessary implications growing out of it affecting the Panama Canal, together with the obligations flowing from the investments of all classes of our citizens in Nicaragua, place us in a position of peculiar responsibility. I am sure it is not the desire of the United States to intervene in the internal affairs of Nicaragua or of any other Central American republic. Nevertheless, it must be said that we have a very definite and special interest in the maintenance of order and good government in Nicaragua at the present time, and that the stability, prosperity, and independence of all Central American countries can never be a matter of indifference to us.

The United States cannot, therefore, fall to view with deep concern any serious threat to stability and constitutional government in Nicaragua tending toward anarchy and jeopardizing American interests, especially if such state of affairs is contributed to or brought about by outside influences or by any foreign power. It has always been and remains the policy of the United States in such circumstances to take the steps that may be necessary for the preservation and protection of the lives, the property, and the interests of its citizens and of this government itself. In this respect I propose to follow the path of my predecessors.

Consequently, I have deemed it my duty to use the powers committed to me to ensure the adequate protection of all American interests in Nicaragua, whether they be endangered by internal strife or by outside interference in the affairs of that republic.