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U.S. Senator Henry M. Jackson of Washington

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LABOR AND U.S. CENTRAL AMERICAN POLICY

Address by Senator Henry M. Jackson

Edward F. Carlough Labor Law Conference
Hofstra University School of Law, Hempstead, New York

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I am delighted to be here with you today, and to see so many of my friends.

Labor leaders in general have avoided one-eyed approaches to international problems. They know that the world is a dangerous and cruel place, and they have championed an adequate defense for the United States and its friends and allies. But, labor leaders have also understood the major role economic assistance and the hope of economic opportunity has to play in United States policy towards the developing world.

It is not hard to see why.

Individuals like Edward F. Carlough -- known for their reliability and effectiveness -- were successful because they could look at the world through two lenses. Committed to the welfare of their membership, and possessing a deep concern for social justice, they never forgot to take a sober and objective appraisal of the realities confronting them. They had judgement; they knew when to

APR 29 1983

352

hold the line and when to compromise. They also had hope for the future. They held a deep belief that the world could become a better place, and this hope gave them strength to always be out in front.

The United States government has a lot to learn from such labor leaders about the conduct of foreign policy. In particular, it has a lot to learn about policy approaches toward the current crises in Central America.

Today, Central America poses for the United States one of her greatest foreign policy challenges. Again, American labor has been out in front - way out in front.

In El Salvador the American Labor movement has been one of the few beacons of light in what has seemed an interminable darkness.

Here is a country that has for centuries suffered under tyrannical governments and a small oligarchic class of land owners. It has almost no history of democratic institutions. Even agricultural cooperatives, which can teach people the rudiments of participatory democracy, are scarce. Until the recent effort at land reform, El Salvador was a semi-feudal state.

Into this almost intractable situation, where all the policy options seem impalatable, the AFL-CIO, through its American Institute for Free Labor Development, went forward and labored hard to bring about reform. Two of their members, Mike Hammer and Mark Pearlman, were murdered for their efforts. And yet, despite the setbacks, democracy building through the development

of free labor unions led to a remarkable accomplishment in early March of this year. Ten thousand campesinos demonstrated peacefully outside the National Assembly demanding an extension of the land reform program.

Obviously, El Salvador still faces very serious problems. There needs to be dramatic improvement in the judicial system and concrete progress in the resolution of the Hammer/Pearlman murders and the murders of the four American religious workers. There needs to be progress in unifying the central command over the armed forces and in the titling process of the land reform program. There needs to be a nourishing and extension of democratic political institutions. But the general approach to addressing El Salvador's long term problems has been charted by the AFL-CIO.

This kind of understanding and perspective needs to inform our policy, not just for El Salvador, but for the entire Central region. And the theme of my remarks today is just this: A sound policy for the Central American isthmus must be based on what the AFL-CIO has known all along -- military approaches alone are inadequate.

Clearly, some security assistance is required. The Sandinista government in Nicaragua has evolved into what is plainly a Marxist-Leninist regime: It is suppressing individual liberties and free labor unions; it has imposed press censorship; and it is fomenting revolution in neighboring countries. Nicaragua harbors 2,000

Cuban military advisors and has been deaf to all entreaties by her Central American neighbors, as well as by the United States, to negotiate a regional peace settlement.

However, security assistance ought not to be the main focus of national debate, and it ought not to be the foreign policy instrument we emphasize to the rest of the world.

Our security aid to Central America should be given and discussed in one way: it is a shield behind which endangered nations can protect themselves from external threats while they go about the business of building democratic institutions, holding free and fair elections, and working to rectify historical patterns of social injustice. Security assistance should be an adjunct to our Central American policy, not its foundation. We better face it: the shield will crumble unless we address the serious social and economic injustices in the region.

Let me suggest some of the premises on which a constructive regional policy should be grounded:

1. The social and economic crises facing Central America are real, and they arise in large part from long histories of poverty and lack of economic opportunity.

Mexico's foreign debt now runs to 90 billion dollars; her agricultural sector is in decline, forcing more and more people to the cities; unemployment hovers near 50%; and the middle class is becoming increasingly disen-
chanted.

2. In much of the region, democratic institutions are weak, if they exist at all.
3. Marxist-Leninist regimes will not offer the people of these countries a democratic future, or expanded economic opportunity. The course of events in Cuba and the evolution of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua clearly demonstrates that any such hope is unfounded.
4. The Soviet Union has, and will continue to exploit this situation, principally through her proxies in Cuba and Nicaragua.
5. The strategic stakes for the United States are high. The shipping lanes of the Caribbean, so vital to our commerce and to the resupply of our troops in Europe, must be kept open. The stability of the countries in the region, particularly Mexico, needs to be assured.

These premises clearly suggest that America's best minds need to address the problem of security and economic development of the Central American isthmus. Central America must be the focus of a large, long-term effort by the United States, and should take a top spot on America's foreign policy agenda.

What kind of effort does Central America merit?

It merits an effort of Marshall Plan proportions.

I do not make this comparison lightly. After World War II, the United States faced in Europe a serious challenge to her

security. We had rapidly demobilized our armed forces while the Soviet Union supported Communist insurgency campaigns in Greece and Turkey, and tried to wrestle control of European unions and European Social Democratic parties from their democratic majorities. General Marshall understood, as did American trade union leadership, that the long-term security of Western Europe, as well as the long-term security of the United States, could be assured only by a program of massive economic assistance. Devastated by the War, Europe needed the aid to bring democracy back on its feet.

The circumstances in Central America, while certainly not identical, have important similarities. The region, like Europe, is vital to our security. Like post-war Europe, Central America is being threatened by communist insurgency, and its stability can only be assured if the people there have hope for the future and see economic opportunities expanding for them. These are the necessary conditions if the region is to move toward more democratic governments.

Gaining consensus within this country for such a course of action will not be easy. The American people, conditioned by the United States' traditional neglect of Latin America, do not see our interests and security at stake in the region.

Similar problems faced those who wanted to embark on a program of European reconstruction after the war. George Marshall, after delivering his speech at Harvard University outlining his program for European recovery, made sure a committee was formed

to garner the support of the American people. The Marshall Committee, headed by Henry Stimson, and drawn from the leadership of all sectors of American society, including trade unions, was more responsible than any other actor for forging consensus in the country to get the Marshall Plan for European Recovery through Congress.

Serious consideration should now be given to convening a national bipartisan commission for Central America. Composed of respected leaders of government, business, labor, education and the Hispanic and religious communities in this country, the Commission's charge would be to chart a long-term course of hope for the peoples of Central America. It would function as the instrument to help the American people reach a workable consensus on a long-term, comprehensive policy for this region.

Such a plan will require sacrifice of the American people, but in the long run it could prove, as the Marshall Plan has proven, to be one of the best investments our country ever made.

In his remarks to the Joint Session of Congress this week, President Reagan came a long way in recognizing the dimensions of the challenge in Central America. He gave due emphasis to the necessity of addressing the social and economic injustices and the human rights conditions in order to achieve long-term stability and security in the region.

I believe it would be wise for the President to bring in organized labor to play a key role in the formulation and execution of our Central American foreign policy.

Labor has led the way. It was there during the struggle for Europe after World War II. It is working now in Central America. Labor's special contribution to American foreign policy has been its compassionate heart combined with its cool head. Its voice needs to be heard now.

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