

The City Hotel  
Córdoba, Córdoba  
June 30, 1942

Dear Mr. Rogers:

If it were the practice to title these letters, this one might well be called "Sequel to a Bull Session."

The three students who attended the Bull Session which was held in Dr. Taylor's room at the Hotel Bristol are residents of the City of Córdoba. With one exception they have lived in the province since their birth. The exception has lived in Córdoba 14 years. Psychologically, I think it can be said, he is typically Cordobese. I make this explanation and others to follow because of the reactions which the Bull Session provoked in University circles and because those reactions, in a way, are more interesting and revealing than the speculations on war, the estimates of the role of the United States and Argentina in the Three Americas and the other subjects which the students treated on that occasion. It is the nature of the Argentine, within the circle in which he moves, to have an intense interest in all that goes on. Waiters in restaurants and bell hops in hotels ask questions of a personal nature and expect a polite and complete answer. Argentines consider such questioning a matter of course. People in general have no reluctance to ask personal questions. It does not seem to molest them if others are concerned with their comings and goings. The day after the Bull Session--which was not heralded as a transcendently-important event--many students of the School of Economic Sciences were making talk of the North American custom and some of them had drawn some curious conclusions as to why the subject of war was treated at such exhausting length. Apparently the students who attended the session had told their friends every detail about the affair. So it was that students came to me from the various sectors of thought, one might say, to ask me questions and to proffer their own views. There were three sectors of thought, from each of which I have chosen the example which explains them the best.

Señor S--- was disturbed. Perhaps he thought that gossip had reached my ears and that I misunderstood him. From the outset he tried to make me feel at home. He had done me a dozen kindnesses. He took me to football games and taught me to root for his favorite team, the Belgranos. It gives me shame to think of the epithets which we showered on the umpire when unlikely decisions were made to the disadvantage of the Belgranos. We were good friends. Never once did we discuss the state of the world or the affairs of the nation. Once I heard the students gossiping over their coffee at Cafe L'Aiglon speak of the fascist leanings of Señor S---. Señor S--- was disturbed. I think he imagined that I was not as friendly as I once was. One evening I invited him to dine with me. He explained his personal philosophy. When he was a student in the secondary school, he studied the history of the Republic and read of its heroes, Moreno, San Martín, Belgrano, Sarmiento and the rest. Everything he was taught about them was good. He read, too, of men like Rosas who were tyrants and opportunists. He was taught to admire democracy and the great principles of the constitution. There came a day when he read more than simple, patriotic textbooks. Professors and well-educated men who knew a great deal about history spoke of the flaws in the characters of the great men and asserted that their motives were not always of the best. At the same time evidence was presented that even the worst tyrants had some admirable qualities. Something, somewhere didn't make sense. To sum it all up, Señor S--- says he could not understand a society which preached democracy, criticized caudillos and yet allowed caudilloism to flourish in so many places. Where was the democracy which was taught in the schools? Is democracy a system which allows a few to exercise liberties over society as a whole? Señor S--- reads El Pampero, the axis propaganda

sheet. He says there are some truths among the machanas, the lies, in El Pampero. He believes that democratic talk is a "blind" of domestic and foreign vested interests. He is inclined to believe that the greatest hindrance to Argentina's future is foreign capital. When El Pampero states that foreign interests are plundering the country and are permitted to do so because they have made the proper connections, Señor S--- is inclined to believe the charge. Foreign interests to Señor S--- mean Yankee and British enterprises, especially the latter. He says that the realistic Argentine slogan should not be Argentina Libre (Free Argentina). It should be Argentina Libra (libra standing for the British pound). He has some interesting political charges and explanations which are quite beyond the imagination of a North American to conceive. Señor S---, like many others, will agree in discussion that Argentina can do more to insure its future by striving for greatness than anyone else. He says the psychology of the people is against a quick, formidable transformation like that which made the United States an important world power. But I wonder, really, if he actually considers that part of the picture very seriously? Señor S--- is an honest, hard-working individual. He is a fine chap to have along on a Sunday excursion into the Córdoba sierras. By Argentine standards he is extremely ambitious. He is Argentine born; his parents are Italian immigrants. He has many relatives in Italy and has a natural sympathy toward that country. He is not, I think, irrevocably a fascist. By no means is he a militant fascist. In many ways his mind is open enough. But he holds certain basic assumptions which would be hard to shake. Señor S--- was disturbed about one thing. He was afraid that I would not like him if I discovered his fascist sentiments. Thinking that I had learned of them, he wanted to explain his point of view. What kind of fascism is that! I like Señor S--- a great deal. I think you would, too.

We were taking our late afternoon paseo in the Calle San Martín when my Santa Fe friends brought up the subject, chiding me in a gentle way. It was a pity, they said, that Dr. Taylor should have had to hear the criticism which the Cordobeses made of the United States at the session. I, of all people, should have seen to it that a more favorable opinion of the United States was presented to him by inviting Santafecinos. Santafecinos knew which way was up when it came to the international situation. Wasn't it true--and didn't I know it?--that Santafecinos almost to the man wanted to see the States win the war? Santafecinos weren't afraid of Yankee Imperialism or frightened by what Joseph Stalin might do in Europe if the United Nations came out on top. Didn't I know that Santa Fe province was something special, that it had a lot of nice little farms, Iowa-like, and merchants who had contacts with the outside world and who weren't running around believing the propaganda which the fascists peddled. We've told you before on this same Calle San Martín and we're going to tell you again on this same Calle San Martín that the Cordobeses think the vice-rey is sitting in the Cabildo just a block down the street. You should know by now that if you haven't got two last names you can never get into society here. In Córdoba the word is not liberalism; it's repression. Poor old Córdoba! Hidden away in a depression at the foot of the sierras, buried in the history of the past, its inhabitants understanding little that goes on in the world. Santa Fe knows. Santa Fe knows, for without freedom on the oceans there are no boats on the Río Paraná and little commerce and life in the cities and towns of the province.

Saturday afternoon one of the young men who attended the session--he who was not born in the province--told me something of his life and why he favored his government's neutrality policy. His hope and prayer is that peace may be maintained between Argentina and the other nations of the world--even though it be a peace that is a continuous nightmare. His reasons are his life's story. He was born in Italy. In 1928 as a youth of nine he and his parents left Italy because they saw a future of insecurity and war. His father was hit by a dum-dum bullet in the last war and was partly disabled. An uncle, who accompanied them to Argentina, was also wounded in that war and served as a prisoner in a miserable Vienna prison.

No one welcomed peace in 1918, this youth said, more than the Italian people. No one wants it now more than they do. He said that he continued to write to many of his boyhood friends in Italy after he came to America and that he maintained correspondence with some of them until the war started. Many of them entered the air service. Direct news from Italy since the war has revealed nothing of the lot of his boyhood friends--only the news that there have been many, many casualties. The wounds which his father and his uncle suffered in the last war caused their untimely deaths two and three years ago. For these reasons this young Argentine wants his adopted country to be neutral--to the last ditch if necessary.

There you have three sectors of thought. There is the fascist sympathizer, the democratic-minded Santafecinos and the isolationist who sees only tragedy in war. It is clear that that which I have written gives only a glimpse of how the issue of war is treated by the Argentine mind. I add a few generalizations which may explain a bit more. Almost all Argentines I know have a strong sense of nationalism. Most of them have a feeling of sympathy for Spain, Italy and France. Many of them--especially those who have little direct contact with the outside world--are greatly influenced in their general philosophy by the traditions and culture of a feudal, patriarchal society. The practical liberals who want Democracy to win the world struggle and to progress in the Argentine suggest that only the test of time and events will prove whether or not the United States believes in its heart of hearts what its great leader of the moment certainly believes. Even they are not sure whether or not, in the sweep of history, the Good Neighbor Policy may prove to be a passing fad.

The dreary weather of last week has changed completely. It is now like late spring. Yesterday, being a holiday, we took advantage of the weather to go to Cruz del Eje, 150 kilometers north of Córdoba. It was stimulating for us students to get into the hills, to see new vistas and to hike about the rocky country. We were criollos for a day. Dinner was cooked over the open fire. It consisted of empanadas, a kind of meat pie, and four courses of meat, including that of the goat. Saturday, the Fourth Day of July, the two-weeks' vacation period begins. My plans are to travel north through Catamarca to Tucumán, thence to Salta, east to Resistencia in the Chaco and south to Santa Fe. Macario, one of the students, may accompany me as far as Tucumán. The Santafecino students have made me promise to spend a day or two in their city. I shall probably visit five provinces and one territory. I wonder what I shall see. The north is the region of the Abandoned Peoples. I asked one young lady who had been in the north what it was like, if the people were not desperately poor. She told me they are not poor. Sometimes a family of more than a dozen lives in a one-room choza, or hut, of cane stalks. "And they are not poor?" I repeated. "They are not poor," she said.

Sincerely,

*Francis Herron*