

A New Face For Counterrevolution



Movimento (Brazil)

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With the arrival of the Carter Administration in Washington, U.S. strategists have begun to project a new vision for Latin America: "viable democracy." Euphemisms aside,

"viable democracy" means limited democracy, a search for a way to institutionalize and stabilize the counterrevolution in Latin America. Since the early 1960's, the response of national and foreign capital to popular struggle has been blatant military dictatorship. And the United States, in its never-ending attempts to retain control over its sphere of influence, has become increasingly involved in the preparation of the repressive apparatus for direct control of power.

Now, U.S. strategists are proposing to reject the appli-

cation of counter-insurgency in its most extreme forms in favor of milder solutions: i.e., stable regimes that have some popular base of support, that respect essential democratic liberties as much as possible and that have some degree of institutional legitimacy.

The fact that U.S. ruling circles have begun to revise the policy applied in Latin America since the early 60's is due largely to the fact that they are being forced to revise *all* of U.S. foreign policy. Their policy of counterinsurgency, which was based on the militarization of the State and the massive repression of the civilian population, came to be regarded as too costly and inefficient. In addition to the resounding defeats suffered in Vietnam and Angola, the economic crisis has forced the United States to realize that it can no longer afford to support the costs of military dictatorships which are incapable of assuring stability. Two examples help to illustrate this situation.

The U.S. government and international credit agencies pump in almost \$2 million a day to prop up the Chilean military junta. Nevertheless, the junta finds it impossible to create a popular base of support beyond the small sector of the bourgeoisie that profits from its economic policies.* The junta can only be maintained by unrestrained repression. In supporting the junta, the United States not only drains its checkbook, but also pays an enormous political price in loss of international esteem.

Take also the case of Brazil. Between the military coup in 1964 and 1972, the Brazilian dictatorship received on the order of \$4 billion in foreign aid, according to U.S. Agency for International Development statistics. But during its 12 years of existence — a period characterized by unrelenting repression, some political and economic reforms, and an "economic miracle" of brief duration — the regime suffered defeat after defeat whenever it risked even limited electoral forays. These defeats have shown that not only is the regime incapable of winning popular support, but also that the government does not even command the sympathies of the middle sectors to which it has provided some benefits.

The failure of the U.S. strategy of counterinsurgency was the outcome of viewing popular insurgency as a specific political tactic, rather than the expression of class struggle, inevitable in all societies where classes exist. Nevertheless, a country can afford to commit such an error in foreign policy only under one condition: that the balance of power is so much in its favor that its position is not severely damaged by its mistakes. When this balance is altered, these mistakes must be corrected. This is what is forcing the United States to rethink its entire foreign policy now.

One important consideration to keep in mind in evaluating U.S. strategies is the evolution of the international economic crisis. On one hand, no formula for liberalization of U.S. policy in Latin America will be effective if the crisis continues to worsen. On the other hand, there will be no possibility of overcoming the crisis if Washington does not

relax its rigid anti-inflationary controls in order to speed up economic recovery and reduce unemployment.

However, given the seriousness of the economic crisis, it would be naive to expect miracles of Carter. Without displaying any unjustified pessimism, it can be said that there is no New Deal on the horizon (a program which had only limited success). Instead, what is in sight is a policy of "management of the crisis" which requires a plan for political management as well.

A NEW INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The political context in which the United States has based its foreign policy over the last decade has also changed. Washington now faces an international situation in which the forces representing the interests of the working class, in one way or another, carry much more weight.

One factor the United States must consider is the situation in Western Europe, particularly in the Mediterranean. There it is evident that it will not be possible to "manage the crisis" without the consent of the working class and — what seems more probable every day — without allowing representation in the government of workers' parties, especially the Communists. Carter must accept this reality, so tenaciously opposed by Ford and Kissinger, and he must also face the consequences: European governments in which workers participate and which will make it more difficult than ever to maintain a foreign policy of counter-insurgency.

Another consideration is that West Germany, one of the United States' principal partners in maintaining the capitalist order, does not endorse the strategy of counter-insurgency. Since 1974, then-Chancellor and leader of German Social Democracy, Willy Brandt, has been designing his own strategy for containing popular movements called "the alliance for peace and progress." Its application in Portugal, Greece, Spain and Italy has been relatively successful, and it was German Social Democracy that interceded to try to help the United States moderate its African policy after the Angolan defeat.* In Latin America, German Social Democracy's influence was further increased last year at the meeting of the Socialist International held in Caracas.**

* Important aspects of this strategy in Europe are political liberalization, support for social democratic alternatives, and a new opening for left and working class forces. West Germany has, for example, given financial aid to the Italian Christian Democrats, who govern with the consent of the Communist party, and together with other West European social democratic leaders Brandt pledged financial and moral support to the socialist party of Mario Soares in Portugal, as the "moderate" alternative to the more radical Communist Party. — NACLA

* Lack of popular support is one of the features that distinguishes the Latin American military State from European fascism. While similarities of course exist — both are manifestations of bourgeois counterrevolution — there are fundamental differences in their characteristics and origins. In Latin America, the development of capitalism has caused an intensification of both the class struggle and divisions within the bourgeoisie, and has led to the growing autonomy of the apparatus of repression based in the armed forces themselves.

** This meeting was attended by the leaders of the European Social Democratic parties as well as the Venezuelan host, Democratic Action; the Peruvian APRA party; the Radical Civic Union from Argentina; Mexico's ruling party, the PRI; the Bolivian MNR; the Turbay Ayala faction of the Colombian Liberal party; and the Chilean Radical party. Brandt synthesized the agreement at the meeting as being a commitment to safeguard Western democracy by steering a middle course between left and right extremes. — NACLA

THE SOVIET UNION

Third and most important of all, the United States must consider the reinforcement of the Soviet Union's position. Acting with sufficient skill to avoid a direct confrontation with the United States, the USSR has been able to take advantage of U.S. difficulties to widen its sphere of influence. Washington's failures in Asia and Africa strengthened the Soviets, and there are also indications that the USSR is continuing and even intensifying its recent offensive in Africa.

The turnabout in Chinese politics since the death of Mao Tse-Tung also seems to be benefitting Moscow, at least in the medium term. Moreover, with the end of the crisis in the world grain market and the increase in grain available to the Soviet Union and other countries, Washington has lost one of its major instruments of blackmail against the Russians.

A NEW STAGE OF COUNTERREVOLUTION

The implications of the new formula of "viable democracy" for left and progressive forces in Latin America must be examined in light of the previous stage of the counterrevolution. The doctrine of counterinsurgency assumes that the first phase of annihilating the enemy will be accomplished within a limited time period. Whether or not its objectives have been met, this phase must give way to a second, that of seeking popular support. Because of the factors mentioned above, time is running out for Washington.

In planning this first stage of the counterrevolution, the Pentagon and CIA as well as the Latin American military and bourgeoisie conceived the struggle as being against a well-defined enemy – a political movement they believed was created and maintained from the outside. They did not understand that they were dealing instead with an extensive popular movement not susceptible to extermination. Although Argentine President Videla expressed his conviction that "as many as necessary will die to restore peace in Argentina," it is not in his power to liquidate the working class and the masses of Argentina.

Although it never achieved the unattainable goal of total suppression of class struggle in Latin America, the campaign of terror did have important and persistent consequences. The most significant has been the radical transformation of the state apparatus through the transfer of power to the armed forces, and the establishment of a direct alliance between the military and the bourgeoisie without the involvement of political parties. The ideological expression of this alliance is the linking of the concepts of "national security" and "economic development."

THE NEW LATIN AMERICAN STATE

Whether or not elections or Congress exist, the modern Latin American State no longer resembles the old liberal model of Montesquieu. All of its power resides in the executive branch which is made up of three basic components: 1) the military community represented by the general staff of the armed forces; 2) the organs of intelligence and repression, whether called the National Information Service (SNI) in Brazil, or the Department of National Intelligence (DINA) in Chile; and 3) the fusion of the military community with the business technocracy that is seen in the National Security Council of Brazil.



It is on this foundation that Washington proposes to establish "viable" or limited democracies. Ultimately, while maintaining the repressive state apparatus, the government would permit the various bourgeois and middle sectors, and occasionally even "representatives" of the workers' movement, to express themselves in the marginal arenas where few decisions are made – in Congress, for example. The clearest example of this situation is Venezuela, a typical State that has passed through a period of repression and now disguises its police repression and militarism in a cloak of democracy.

The reasons why the liberalization of U.S. foreign policy has limited objectives are obvious. The fact that the "enemy" – that is, the popular masses – cannot be wiped out is sufficient to hinder any real liberalization. However, because of the new alignment of world forces and the setbacks suffered in its foreign policy, the United States cannot afford to loosen its control over Latin America. On the contrary, the United States is forced to strengthen its hold and entrench itself further in what has traditionally been its colonial backyard.

This does not mean that the left and popular forces cannot take advantage of the eventual liberalization, as limited as it may be. It does mean, however, that even if the Latin American military State loses its "fascist" attributes, it has not stopped being counterrevolutionary; to assume the opposite would be a political error, the result of equating fascism with counterrevolution today. Limited democracy will never be transformed into a full democracy because the forces making up the modern Latin American State will not allow it. Until these forces are broken up, "viable democracy" will never be anything other than a new mask for counterrevolution – good only for deluding those who let themselves be taken in by it.