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U.S.-Latin American Relations Deteriorating at Alarming Rate

(Editor's note: This is the first of a series of articles on U.S.-Latin American relations, written by William G. Gaudet who has had more than 30 years experience in Latin America as a newspaper columnist, magazine publisher, State Department attache and consultant on business, investment and travel in the Americas.)

By WILLIAM G. GAUDET

In the preoccupation of the United States with the undeclared war in Indochina, the student protests over the move into Cambodia, the growing problems of the Middle East, and the increasing emphasis on pollution, little attention is paid to the fact that with each passing day U.S.-Latin American relations are deteriorating at an alarming rate.

The assassination of a U.S. Ambassador in Guatemala gets a brief headline for a day and then promptly is forgotten. The kidnaping of a U.S. Ambassador in Brazil gets headlines for several days and then again is forgotten. The expropriation of United States owned corporations by leftist inclined military regimes in Peru and in Bolivia also get brief headlines and then are shunted aside.

THE FACT that hundreds of young college students journey to Canada in order to make their way to Cuba to help the Communist regime of Fidel Castro harvest the cane crop gets some attention and then again drops out of public view.

In a way the media—newspapers, radio, magazines and television—can be blamed for this situation. But inescapable is the fact that the media simply reflects what the media THINKS the public wants to read, hear, or see. And the Latin American situation as compared to Indochina, the Middle East, student uprisings

and pollution is not nearly sensational enough to capture the attention of the public, or at least that is what the media believes to be the case.

Sensation, however, does not necessarily mean importance. How important, for ex-

ample, is Indochina to the interests of the United States in relation to the interest in Latin America? Starting with the late President John Kennedy, emphasized further under the administration of Lyndon Johnson, and now carried on by the administration of President Nixon—the major international interest is to stop Communist infiltration of Asia. But what of Communist infiltration not only here in the United States, but also Communist infiltration in the countries of the Caribbean, Central and South America? A battle may be won against the Viet Cong in Vietnam, but in the meanwhile we have lost two battles within the Western Hemisphere.

MUCH WAS made of the declaration some eight years ago by the late John Kennedy when at Punta del Este, at a meeting of the presidents of the Western Hemisphere, he announced one of the most

ambitious U.S.-Latin American programs—Alliance for Progress. Today that Alliance for Progress slogan is a mere shadow of its former self. True, it is still in existence, but that is about all that can be said for it.

Blame can be placed on official Washington, but blame also must be placed on the average North American who, because he has read so little about Latin America, heard so little about Latin America, seen so little about Latin America, automatically assumes that everything within the Western Hemisphere is in great shape.

As a matter of actual fact, most North Americans feel that if World War III developed tomorrow, the United States could count on the whole-hearted support of every nation in this hemisphere. The cold fact is that this is very far from the

truth.

IT WAS difficult enough at the time of Pearl Harbor when relations were 10 times better than today. The United States has let the Latin American situation drift to the point that it would take some super-human diplomacy on our part to line up a half dozen countries wholeheartedly on our side. And the incredible part is that those countries which really would be behind us, are the ones which are receiving the least cooperation from the United States, and those that could not care less about us are getting the most help and attention.

In our great drive to stop the Communists in areas that are not of vital importance to us, we are letting our own backyard fall into utter decay. It is not a very reassuring picture.