

Agony of the Americas

By Graham Hovey

How hollow the rhetoric that ushered in the Alliance for Progress in 1961 sounds in the wake of Chile's tragedy.

"This Alliance," declared the statesmen at Punta del Este, "is established on the basic principle that free men working through the institution of representative democracy can best satisfy man's aspirations. . . ."

First on their list of Alliance goals: "To improve and strengthen democratic institutions through application of the principle of self-determination by the people."

And now, twelve years later? Well, now we have a military junta ruling Chile with an iron fist after delivering the coup de grace to South America's most durable democracy.

And over the Andes, in the country where the Alliance was born, the armed forces of Uruguay (nobody knew they existed in 1961) govern by decree through a puppet President after helping to collapse the purest democracy in the Americas.

And across the Rio de la Plata estuary, the "application of the principle of self-determination by the people" seems certain on Sunday to restore the trappings of power—the substance having been returned months ago—to Juan Domingo Perón, the ancient, ersatz Mussolini who led Argentina from prosperity to bankruptcy before the Army booted him out eighteen years ago.

And up north, in the giant country whose elected President in 1958 paved the way for the Alliance for Progress with his inspired Operation Pan America idea, Brazil's army presides over a spectacular, if highly uneven, economic development, barely giving lip service to democracy and stamping hard on dissent. One of those stamped on is that ex-President, Juscelino Kubitschek.

One could go on, *ad nauseam*, but the point is clear: Twelve years after the launching with high hopes of an Alliance aimed first of all at underpinning freedom and democracy, there is much less freedom in the Americas. There is more oppression, more torture and terror, more censorship and rule by fiat.

Why have things gone so terribly wrong? Why have there been more coups since the beginning of the Alliance than in any comparable period in the modern history of the hemisphere? And most pertinently, in light of worldwide accusations of American complicity in the downfall of President Allende in Chile, is the United States primarily to blame for this situation?

The image of this country as ruthless, pervasive practitioner of neo-imperialism simply won't wash. If Washington had indeed turned the Monroe Doctrine into the Brezhnev variety there would be no Castro regime in Cuba and a Marxist Government would never have come to power in Chile (not even Lyndon Johnson's invasion of the Dominican Republic

in 1965 can be compared to the Soviet occupation of Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968).

Of course Washington would not help Dr. Allende clamp on Chile a draconian socialism fiercely opposed by a majority of Chileans. Nor would Washington influence international lending agencies to continue accepting Chile as a good credit risk once it became evident that Dr. Allende could not shore up the economy or curb inflation, and that his firebrands would not let him make good his pledge of fair compensation for expropriated enterprises.

But the ingredients for the Chilean tragedy were homegrown, not imported; here, as elsewhere, United States influence, for better or worse, was marginal. As Covey T. Oliver, a former Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America, has written: "We have the power, at one extreme, to remove almost any country from the map . . . but we could not, even if we wished, translate this into control over the country's routine actions."

The valid charge against the Nixon Administration on Latin America is more one of neglect than of imperialist exploitation. After the extravagant rhetoric and feverish activity of the Alliance for Progress heyday, the low-key approach charted by the President was widely welcomed. It soon became evident, however, that behind the lower profile was no hemisphere policy at all.

Mr. Nixon may have disclosed more of his thinking about the political crisis of the Americas than he intended in welcoming President Emílio G. Médici to Washington to 1971: "We know that as Brazil goes, so will go the rest of the Latin American continent."

Is that it, then? Is dramatic economic development achievable only under military rule in a climate of repression and censorship? Many American businessmen involved in Latin America devoutly believe so. Or, at the other end of the spectrum, is a redistribution of wealth, a better deal for the poorest Latins, possible only under a Marxist dictatorship? After the collapse of the Allende experiment, even many American liberals say so.

But can the American Government accept such theses? Even in disillusionment with the Alliance for Progress and recognizing that American influence will be only marginal, can Washington be comfortable with a nothing policy for a continent largely out of control but clearly lurching toward revolution?

Henry A. Kissinger said that his recent call on President Echeverría in Mexico City—his first diplomatic mission since President Nixon nominated him to be Secretary of State—"underlines the importance we shall attach to relations with Latin America." How fine it would be if he really meant it.

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