

Bolivia: Portent of the Coup

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If General Torres consolidates his seizure of power in Bolivia that country will probably resume its leftward march at an accelerated tempo and give impetus to other military-led nationalist-leftist movements in South America. The evident success of General Torres against the right-wing military group that ousted President Ovando earlier this week may even foreshadow the end of the familiar, old-fashioned army regimes in that part of the world.

General Torres is not known as a Marxist; in fact, he planned the operation that wiped out the guerrilla band led by Che Guevara in 1967. Since then, however, he has become increasingly sympathetic to radical reform and a backer of leftist ministers in General Ovando's cabinet. That is why he was dismissed in July as chief of the armed forces when General Ovando was curbing the left wing.

An indication of how far left General Torres is prepared to go will be the duties, if any, that he assigns to two other Cabinet members dismissed earlier this year: Marcelo Quiroga, who directed the abrupt nationalization of Gulf Oil properties a year ago, and Alberto Bailey, former Minister of Information. Another sign will be whether the Torres regime honors the agreement for compensating Gulf, announced by General Ovando last month.

In any event, the evident success of General Torres's left-wing counter-coup against the military conservatives will enhance the prestige of General Velasco's nationalist-leftist regime in neighboring Peru, which General Ovando had tried to emulate. It will encourage groups of young, reform-minded officers in Argentina and Brazil. It will be good news to the left-wing coalition about to take power constitutionally under Salvador Allende in Chile.

This leftward thrust in South America, propelled in part by a powerful anti-Yankee sentiment, is certain to cause problems for the United States. They are not problems that can be solved or eased by intervention of any kind—direct or indirect, overt or covert, military or economic. Here will be a period in which the northern Big Brother, in his own long-run interest, must absorb unfair blows, resist the urge to retaliate, and maintain whatever ties are possible and such assistance as seems practical when it is requested.