

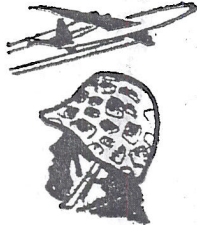
SFChronicle

SEP 9 1971

Royce Brier

# Sec. Laird on Latin Revolts

"LAIRD DENIES U.S. Stirs Latin Revolts," says the headline, and the denial may bear a measure of truth, but it needs examining. The Defense Secretary was testifying before the House Appropriations Committee last March. There may have been reason to keep it under wraps for a few weeks, but almost six months seems another example of the Washington secrecy obsession. But that's an aside.



Mr. Laird said: "I think it is important to bear in mind that the military is the only cohesive group in many countries in Latin America . . . We have clear preference for free processes, but we deal with governments as they are."

True enough, but it will hardly satisfy many critics who maintain the United States has for years been precipitate in recognizing Latin American dictators when one establishes his power in a coup.

Laird thinks it was a mistake that Congress limited the Pentagon on sale of arms to Latin America (now \$150 million in aid budgets), because British and French arms salesmen merely fill the vacuum.

★ ★ ★

**THIS MAY BE** beside the point, since the United States can hardly prevent small nations from acquiring European arms, either smuggled or legally purchased, only because it would prefer they buy our arms.

But this enters the domain of international ethics, and we have been arguing the ethics of our rela-

tions with Latin American disturbances for a century, and with the best of motives we have been burned many times, Cuba a sharp recent example.

★ ★ ★

**THE BURDEN OF** the question lies in the overt acts of the American military in Latin American upheavals, and the foregoing headline reflects the problem in a Laird denial.

He said: "No part of the U.S. training given Latin American officers is in any way related to the overthrow of Latin American governments . . ."

Academically plausible — a Pentagon lieutenant-general finding himself in charge of a technological training course for a Latin American colonel, doesn't prod the colonel to overthrow his own ungrateful government, though he may not be disinterested if the colonel does just that.

The real catch in our time is the Central Intelligence Agency. This octopus espionage system nowhere employs its tentacles more assiduously than in Latin American capitals. It is a known fact that in several Central American governments facing revolt, the CIA has often been a controlling factor. It takes sides. It may bungle, and may not get what it wants, but it just goes back to the drawing board.

The CIA is not in Mr. Laird's jurisdiction, but its advice and influence merge with Pentagon attitudes, and it can create situations which can back the Pentagon into a corner.

If congressmen had the wit to ask Mr. Laird about that, he might disclaim his jurisdiction, but should he answer it would be interesting, but don't think it would be released to the people very soon.

September 9, 1971