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MINORITY REPORT.

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The whole misery and disgrace of current U.S. involvement with the "wrong side" in Central America began with the invasion of Guatemala (sometimes described as the coup in Guatemala) in 1954. This invasion/coup was brought off by the usual suspects—Vice President Richard Nixon, the C.I.A., the United Fruit Company and other practitioners of destabilization. Even today, the more polished conservatives have to repress a shudder at the recollections of 1954 and its aftermath.

But in *Bitter Fruit*, their exemplary account of the Guatemalan intervention, Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer also describe how solicitous the destabilizers were to the small but significant forces of liberalism and social democracy in the United States. They relate that Edward Bernays, chief lobbyist of the forces seeking to overthrow the elected government of Jacobo Arbenz,

had an especially close relationship with *The New Leader*, a vigorously anti-Communist liberal weekly. . . . Bernays persuaded the Fruit Company to sponsor public service advertisements on behalf of the Red Cross and U.S. Savings Bonds in the magazine at \$1,000 a page, far above the going rate. *The New Leader* . . . carried numerous articles, both before and after the coup, justifying intervention against Arbenz's regime on the grounds that a Soviet takeover was imminent.

A managing editor of *The New Leader* in the 1950s, Daniel James, wrote a book titled *Red Design for the Americas*, which provided a rationale for the destruction of Guatemalan democracy. United Fruit and the C.I.A. cooperated to insure that this luminous work had a wide distribution.

I thought continually of this episode as I attended the national convention of Social Democrats, U.S.A., held in Washington from June 14 to 16. This organization, which might better be known as Social Democrats, U.S.A.! U.S.A.! and which has the crust to claim descent from the party of Debs and Thomas, is little understood or studied but highly influential. Combining the worst of old left sectarian venom with the cheapest line in neoconservative platitudes, S.D., U.S.A. has provided the intellectual context for Jeane Kirkpatrick and some useful cover for other Humphrey-Jackson Democrats in transition. In transition to what? Well, their guru, Carl Gershman, held Kirkpatrick's fragrant coat at the United Nations for many years, served the Kissinger commission on Central America and now heads Reagan's National Endowment for Democracy. In other words, don't be fooled by the fact that the mode of address at S.D., U.S.A. meetings is still "comrade."

There's a lot not to be fooled by at these affairs. Alfonso Robelo had been invited as the star guest, to do for the *contras* what his 1954 predecessors did for Castillo Armas. He gave a bland speech, sounding for all the world as if the campaign against Nicaragua was being waged by members of the Young Social Democrats and the more highly evolved forces of the Socialist International. He lauded the Lew Lehrman coalition of anti-Soviet guerrillas (incidentally, I do not see how any of that bunch could have got into

Angola without being taken through occupied Namibia by the South Africans).

When I asked him about the "social democratic" leadership of Col. Enrique Bermúdez, he became ever so slightly less silky. To keep harping on about the Somoza National Guard, he said, was like saying that all the Wehrmacht were responsible for war crimes. This Bitburg reference, probably intended for a later speech at the convention of Young Americans for Fascism, may have just slipped out, but I didn't notice any of the Social Democrats objecting. They didn't even raise a murmur when Robelo claimed to have investigated all the former Guardsmen in the F.D.N. and found them blameless of atrocities under Somoza.

Your typical Social Democrat has a wisened-up, pitying manner. You are looking at someone, he seems to say, who has left illusions behind him. No flies can settle on this smirking countenance. Don't you know, the face seems to ask, that the world is a dangerous place? Haven't you read *The Gulag Archipelago*? Ever heard of the boat people? Don't you want America to be strong? Aren't you aware that you can't demonstrate for nuclear disarmament in the Soviet Union? At about this point, and to distract myself from the overmastering desire to slap the face, I imagine myself demonstrating for nuclear disarmament in the Soviet Union and being locked up by someone with precisely those features and that tone of voice.

But, in fact, for all their worldly wisdom, the S.D.s are extremely naïve. They are the useful idiots of the Reagan revolution. They were the last political formation in America to realize that the Vietnam War was not being fought by democratic forces or for democratic ends. Many of them still feel that with a bit more "political will" (favorite S.D. and neocon term) the trick might have been pulled off. They have a utopian and protective attitude toward Israel which in its myopia rivals that of any old party hack toward the Soviet Union. They think that Jean-François Revel is a new philosopher. They think that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is a social democrat, though some of them have suppressed worries about his attitude toward the Vlasovites. They think they "saw through" Carter and McGovern before anyone else did, but they modestly understate their role in Democrats for Nixon.

Intellectually contemptible though they may be, the Social Democrats shine like pearls among the Reaganite swine. Left to itself, the old conservative movement could not have come up with fluent twisters like Kirkpatrick, Elliott Abrams and Max Kampelman, nor mastered a standard of apologetics anywhere near that of *Commentary* or the Committee for the Free World. A certain vital patina has thus been provided to this government of Christian bigots and thwarted militarists by an ostensibly secular, internationalist political tendency. As with Guatemala or Vietnam, the S.D.s will be somewhere else while the actual slaughtering is done—probably accusing the journalists who report it of "blaming America first." But as with Guatemala and Vietnam, they show that every little bit helps.