

2003

LATIN AMERICAN REACTIONS TO THE GUATEMALAN CRISIS

The Castillo Armas revolution in Guatemala has been almost unanimously attributed by the rest of Latin America to the intervention of Washington acting through the governments of Honduras and Nicaragua. Some governments have voiced approval, but "anti-intervention" demonstrations and editorials have been widespread and in some cases violent. Many government officials have hinted that Washington either suffers from excessive anti-Communist zeal or is unduly influenced by the interests of the United Fruit Company.

During the early days of the crisis, many governments appeared stunned by Guatemala's by-passing of the Organization of American States in favor of working with the Soviet Union in the United Nations. Most of them expressed fear that the future of inter-American regional machinery was in grave danger, and 14 of them agreed to back a call for an OAS meeting based on Washington's draft resolution setting up measures to combat the Guatemalan threat. Only eight had previously agreed to accept the resolution.

After the initial shock of the UN appeal wore off, however, a number of governments took the attitude that it would be impossible to discuss charges against Guatemala without discussing Guatemala's own complaints. A 28 June Uruguayan proposal to alter the conference agenda to this effect was voted down in the OAS Council but received the support of Ecuador, Argentina, Chile, and Mexico. The last three of these countries have also rejected Washington's request that they refuse political asylum to Arbenz followers.

Most of the attacks on the United States have stemmed from the belief that Washington intervened in the affairs of another country. Many of the anti-interventionist demonstrations--which took on major proportions in Argentina, Mexico, Chile, Uruguay, Honduras and Panama--were touched off by pro-Communist student and labor groups but were joined by large numbers of non-Communists. In Argentina, the Senate passed a resolution reaffirming the principles of self-determination and political and economic independence as standards for the hemisphere. The major Argentine labor federation issued a declaration that "every nation has the right to solve its own problems without outside interference." The Chilean lower house refused permission for the foreign minister to attend the OAS meeting scheduled to discuss only Washington's case against the Arbenz regime.

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In Mexico, students laid a black-draped wreath at the door of the American embassy "in memory of the good neighbor policy." In Uruguay, and elsewhere, normally pro-American papers accused the United States of acting "hastily" and "without regard for juridical order."

In only six countries--Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Bolivia, Paraguay and Peru--has the press been relatively free from criticism of American "intervention." Except in these countries and possibly Colombia, that portion of the press which tended to ignore the issue of Washington's "intervention" and to explain the nature of international Communism has been all but drowned out. In Brazil, for example, where the government has been attempting to reconcile diplomatic differences between the United States and Latin America, almost the entire noncontrolled press and radio has expressed suspicion of American motives.

The Guatemalan crisis has also given rise to fears wider than those of American "intervention" and "dollar diplomacy." Ecuadoran president Velasco reportedly fears the Guatemalan crisis sets a precedent for Peruvian invasion of Ecuador and in a 2 July speech called for reaffirmation of the "juridical" principles which protect weak nations. In Costa Rica, there were reports that the Guatemalan insurgents would soon join Nicaraguans, Venezuelans and former Costa Rican dictator Calderon Guardia to overthrow the Figueres government. These reports were given added meaning when a Venezuelan plane dropped "obscene" anti-Figueres literature on the capital.

Meanwhile, another sort of criticism of the United States has been voiced by officials in the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. These officials have accused Washington of "poor timing" and of giving the insurgents too little aid to ensure success. The Panamanian foreign minister, on the other hand, said on 23 June he believed the United States' position was fully defensible but that it had been presented badly.

A number of governments have been disturbed by the intensity of popular reaction, and it is believed that the Argentine government has warned the press against further attacks. Bolivia is thought to have censored all press comment from the beginning.

The major points of irritation may be somewhat smoothed by the indefinite postponement of the OAS meeting on 2 July and by the filing of antitrust proceedings against the United Fruit Company on the same day; no specific reaction to these moves has yet been noted, however.

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