

Notes on Soviet Penetration in Latin America

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The International Setting

The current situation in Latin America cannot be analyzed outside the context of the wider world situation. Superpower rivalries between the United States and the USSR constitute both a key to the understanding of the international situation and a growing and dangerous source of war.

We are still living through an epoch which Lenin defined as the era of imperialism and proletarian revolutions. Imperialism is the

highest, last stage in the development of capitalism. The process of concentration and centralization of capital is the basis for the appearance of large monopolies which at certain stages have become transnational corporations. The imperialist bourgeoisie utilizes the state apparatus directly to suit its own ends and so as to insure domination over countries; the subordination of the state to the economic and political interests of the big bourgeoisie tends to produce a *state* monopoly bent upon increasing their rate of profit through the exploitation of natural resources and cheap labor in less developed countries.

The appearance of imperialism does not resolve the contradictions of pre-monopoly capitalism: it simply intensifies them even more. The imperialist system contains within itself the danger of war. As long as the system exists, i.e., as long as imperialist powers grow and develop, there will be confrontations among them for world domination. Imperialist rivalries were the fundamental cause of WWI, WWII, and it is in that context that the present world situation must be analyzed.

U.S. POSITION IN THE WORLD

The main result of WWII was the emergence of the United States as a hegemonic imperialist power in the international picture. In the last thirty years, however, there have occurred certain changes that have led to a new redivision of the world. The changes are basically as follows: on the one hand the U.S. has been weakened as a result of both its internal political and economic crises as well as a series of international events such as the defeats suffered in Southeast Asia and other parts of the world and the growth of struggles of national liberation in the third world; the appearance of conditions which favor the attempts by the bourgeoisies of dependent countries to obtain a renegotiation of the terms of dependence, i.e., a greater relative autonomy, should also be counted as a factor contributing to the weakening of the U.S. position.

On the other hand, the Soviet Union, the first socialist country in history, was transformed by the bureaucratic bourgeoisie headed by Khrushchev into a country where the laws of state monopoly capitalism reign supreme. After this restoration of capitalism, the USSR entered into competition with U.S. imperialism for world domination. In this struggle and confrontation, the U.S. is on the defensive whereas the Soviet Union is the more aggressive of the two superpowers.

United States imperialism is on the decline: the growth and development of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggles in Asia, Africa and Latin America has weakened its sources of economic

power and growth. In the Soviet Union on the contrary the high degree of concentration and militarization of the economy has allowed for the appearance of an aggressive imperialist policy which has already wrested away from the U.S. such countries as Angola, Ethiopia, India, Afghanistan, Libya, South Yemen, Cuba, Vietnam, Laos and others.

The United States will use whatever means it has available to try to regain ground in other areas; it will not cease to intervene in various countries by way of those bourgeois sectors subordinated to it, and it will try at all costs to maintain its position and to penetrate other areas; but its effective capacity to respond to the Soviet Union's advances is limited and its main tendency is one of retreat.

On the basis of its state monopoly capitalist economy, the Soviet Union exports capital and technology, gives out loans, has become the second largest arms seller in the world, practices political intervention through a variety of "aid" mechanisms, and maintains military bases and personnel stationed in the countries of the Warsaw Pact and many third world countries. Additionally, the Soviet state, in the process of imperialist expansion, has sought and obtained agreements of an economic and military nature with the bureaucratic bourgeoisies of third world countries (see below) in its search for control of key branches and sectors of the economies of those countries.

USSR TRIES TO REPLACE U.S.

At the same time, the Soviet Union's socialist past allows it to present itself as the friend of people in struggle against U.S. imperialism, and through the use of revisionist forces active in various countries and/or the corruption of national liberation movements, it seeks to replace U.S. imperialism wherever the latter suffers setbacks.

The USSR has not yet obtained economic superiority over the U.S. and Western Europe; thus, it relies principally upon its military might in its conflict with the U.S. for world domination. The USSR has increased tremendously its military preparations in recent years. In less than 20 years it has increased 15 times its strategic missile force: it now has 1,527 strategic nuclear missiles to the 1,054 of the U.S., a total nuclear capability of 8,421 megatons to 5,454 of the U.S.; it has *doubled* the size of its navy and increased the personnel of the armed forces by 1 million; in terms of tanks and armored vehicles it outnumbers the U.S. 79,000 to 31,000. Overall, the Soviets surpass the U.S. in conventional weapon strength and in several aspects of the nuclear arsenal.¹

It is obvious that the factors favoring the outbreak of a new world

war are developing at a rapid pace: Soviet social imperialism has become an aggressive military power of the first order with a global military force that outranks the U.S. forces. This superiority and the Soviet Union's objective necessity to try to redivide the world make the USSR the more aggressive of the two superpowers and the most dangerous source of a new world war.

The Struggle for Latin America

In recent years Latin America has become an area of contention between the two superpowers. The Soviet Union seeks to intervene politically and militarily to obtain domination over the area. The U.S. in turn is fighting back, and takes advantage of every opportunity to stage counterattacks. The September 1973 military coup in Chile was not only an attempt to stem the revolutionary tide of the Chilean people but also a reflection of superpower conflict in Latin America.

For a long time Latin America has been subjected to the domination of U.S. imperialism, a situation which still persists today in its economic, political, financial and technological aspects. Nevertheless, the epoch of nearly complete U.S. domination is gone; there is at the present time an upsurge in the struggles of national liberation in Latin America; also, the local bourgeoisies of various countries are attempting to take advantage of the contradictions between the superpowers to modify to their own benefit the conditions of dependence, i.e., by encouraging industrialization, agricultural modernization and state capitalism with the hope of increasing their autonomy.

Nationalizations of U.S. enterprises including oil, mines, banks and agricultural property have occurred throughout and regional organizations have been created which purport to curtail the freedom of U.S. investors.

Otherwise some countries of the hemisphere have worked at the diplomatic level to support the pronouncements of Asian and African countries against the arms race, hegemonism and neocolonialism. Two countries, Ecuador and Venezuela, are members of OPEC and several others belong to various organizations of countries that are producers of sugar, copper and other items. Several Latin American governments which in the past toed the directives of U.S. imperialism have acquired a large measure of independence in foreign policy; thus, almost all of the countries in the area have established diplomatic relations with the People's Repub-

lic of China and many of them fought for the PRC's admission to the UN. While the weakening of U.S. influence occurs but unevenly and in zigzags it is possible to establish at this time that U.S. imperialism no longer exercises sole domination over the area.

The Rise of Soviet Influence

After the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the USSR took up the Ricardian doctrine of comparative advantage, with the argument that the international division of labor is not the historical result of imperialist domination but an objective historical process. It is of course this same doctrine that U.S. imperialism utilized to justify the maintenance of Latin America as a region specialized in the production of raw materials for export which the United States would supply with industrial products. Much as the U.S. did earlier, the USSR justifies their use of the Ricardian thesis by making reference to such things as climactic diversity among countries, geographical characteristics, raw material endowments, and availability of energy resources. In 1965, the president of the Soviet Council of Ministers explicitly referred to Latin America as a region to be included within the Soviet picture of an international division of labor: the Soviet Union was to be an exporter of machinery and other industrial products to Latin America as well as an importer of agricultural products and minerals from that region.²

To the Soviets, Latin America appears as a new market for its products to be gradually controlled thus it has developed a program of financial loans camouflaged as "aid"; this program includes a lending program which often contains easier, more advantageous terms than those offered by the U.S., and a policy that allows for the maintenance of commercial deficits. For example, in 1974 the Soviet Union purchased from Brazil large stocks of coffee, shoes and other commodities which the latter could not seemingly get rid of in the world market. The long-term implications of this policy of deficits can be easily surmised; in the case cited, the Federal Commission of Trade Information (Brazil) warned that the Soviet Union sought ulterior objectives through such transactions.³

Soviet loans do not differ much from those of the World Bank or the Interamerican Development Bank. They are usually "tied" loans, i.e., the recipient country can utilize the moneys to acquire products only from the creditor country. In other words, the so-called "aid" is nothing but a credit to acquire Soviet-made products. Additionally,

the Soviet Union has often unilaterally changed the terms of contracts and it tends to provide technical assistance in such a way as to create a relation of dependence. In 1976, the Soviet Bank of Commerce loaned 19 million dollars to Brazil for the construction of a power plant. A short time later when Brazil wished to sell coffee in the Soviet market, the USSR let it be known that it was eager to purchase up to 75,000 tons of Brazilian coffee if Brazil would consent to an increased share of Soviet-built machinery for the power plant project already under construction.⁴

Peru and the Soviet Union signed an agreement on August 30, 1970, whereby Peru would purchase 30 million dollars worth of Soviet machinery for use in a fishing complex in Bayovar; the deal was a 10-year plan with a 3% annual interest. Later, the Soviet Union unilaterally declared that since the price of materials had risen, the Peruvian loan was now worth 54 million dollars; the amount was further increased in September of the same year.

MOSCOW LOANS TO ARGENTINA

In January 1974, Argentina and Moscow agreed to a credit of 600 million dollars for the purchase by Argentina of Russian equipment needed for hydroelectric projects, payable in 10 years at a 4.5% annual interest. The agreement specified the use of a large number of Soviet specialists and technical personnel in the construction of the projects; moreover, the repayment of this loan was to be done with Argentine agricultural products at prevailing world market prices. Thus, behind an apparently generous commercial treaty, the Soviet Union established trade relations based upon unequal exchange, set up a situation of technological dependence and made possible the introduction of a large number of Soviet experts in Argentina; the construction of the Aswan Dam in Egypt had shown long ago that it is through the "experts and advisers" method that the Soviets most rapidly forge links of political and economic domination.⁶

Further agreements have set up mixed Soviet-Argentine enterprises which establish direct relationships between Argentina and the COMECON organization. In 1977 the 1974 accords were ratified by the Videla military regime which promptly negotiated further commercial, financial and technological agreements with the Soviet Union.

By 1975 the Soviet Union had already become the number one customer of Argentina and 12% of Argentina's foreign trade was with the COMECON.⁷ Through various agreements, the Soviet Union has also managed to become the supplier of equipment and technical assistance for several dams such as the Paraná River dam, the binational dams of Corpus and Yaciretá (Argentina and

Paraguay) and Itaipú (Paraguay and Brazil); other Argentine state enterprises in the oil, coal and railroad sectors also received equipment and assistance from the Soviet Union.

The Uruguayan government obtained in 1976 a credit of 50 million dollars for the purchase of equipment for the Salto Grande hydroelectric plant, payable in raw materials only. The Soviet Union pressured the government of Uruguay furthermore to give technical direction of this project to a particular company with close ties to the Soviet Union.⁸

ROLE OF SOVIET 'EXPERTS'

The goal of the Soviets seems to be to impose foreign technology managed by a large number of Soviet experts in the basic branches of industry of these countries, a procedure which also serves to prop and reinforce key areas of the Soviet economy. The Soviet Union is currently the third buyer of Bolivian minerals (after the U.S. and England) and its *first* supplier of machinery; the latter is provided through various "tied" loans to the state-owned mining industry of Bolivia and assistance in the construction of a steel plant in Cochabamba; as indicated before, the conditions of the loans are similar to those imposed by U.S. imperialists with the purpose of establishing firm bonds of financial and technological dependence.⁹ This technological dependence at the level of the infrastructure becomes a facilitating mechanism through which great pressure can be exercised to negotiate new agreements; it also creates the need to train technical experts from these countries in the Soviet Union, to link a large number of national specialists to the Soviet technical intelligentsia, and thereby increase the scientific and material ability of the Soviet Union to penetrate the state apparatus.

The economic offensive of Soviet social imperialism is accompanied by an intense campaign of political and ideological penetration in the ranks of the army, the bourgeoisie, public administration, the press and the intellectuals. The Soviet Union presents itself as the natural ally of Latin American countries in their struggle against U.S. oppression; it utilizes the popular anti-U.S. sentiment in an attempt to eliminate U.S. influence; it supports the struggles of Latin American countries in the OAS—the struggles against TNC's, prejudicial U.S. Trade legislation, etc., while promoting the notion that Latin America would prosper under a COMECON-type of international division of labor.

The Soviet Union seeks to influence those governments which it deems ripe for political and economic penetration and it consequently takes advantage of nationalist aspirations of sectors of the dominant classes in various countries; thus, it has supported the

governments of General Velasco Alvarado in Peru, Banzer in Bolivia and the governments of Perón, Isabel Martínez, and General Videla in Argentina; these three cases appear to be an attempt to support the bureaucratic bourgeoisie to develop a system of state capitalism in the manner of the Soviet Union.

Within this strategy, pro-Soviet political parties play an important role; in many cases they enjoy some influence in the bureaucracy and follow a policy designed to place party members in the state apparatus. In Argentina, for example, a bourgeois financial group (Holding Pecerré) handles the finances of the Communist Party of Argentina; before Videla's ascent to power the CPA had a key representative in the Ministry of the Economy and it still maintains important influence in the government apparatus of the current fascist regime; this cooperation solves the "mystery" of the Communist Party's defense of the Videla regime as a democratic and progressive government.¹⁰ In Peru, Jorge del Prado, general secretary of the Communist Party, maintains that Soviet assistance is the *sine qua non* of Peruvian development. While in Bolivia numerous members of the pro-Moscow Communist Party occupy key posts in the state mining sector and are busily at work promoting Soviet economic penetration.¹¹

PENETRATION THROUGH ARMED FORCES

Yet another method of Soviet infiltration and influence is through arms sales and technical training to armed forces. In 1976 the Soviet Union sold more than 1 billion dollars in weapons to Latin America; in 1977 it became Latin America's main supplier of tanks and armored vehicles and in 1977 it surpassed the United States—400 million dollars to 156 million dollars in arms sales to the region. Among the most important transactions, we should mention the sale in the early 1970s of 250 Model T-54 tanks to Peru, the 1977 sale (also to Peru) of 200 T-55 tanks, 36 MIG jets and 31 helicopters; another sale, to Peru, of a squadron of 12 MIG-21 jets complete with Cuban instructors. These Soviet sales are usually accompanied with military assistance programs which include military advisers (either Soviet or Cuban) and the setting up of special training courses in Cuba or the USSR. Through this solicitous treatment of the Latin American military forces, the Soviet Union is gaining an important foothold for political influence¹²; and, as in the case of economic infrastructure, the maintenance of military equipment requires the constant supply of spare parts which involve another avenue for interference in national politics.

The Soviet Union attempts to stimulate and intensify old conflicts, such as border disputes, which exist among Latin Ameri-

can countries, to break up their unity and convince them of the need for weaponry. These conflicts, such as the one between Peru, Bolivia and Chile, are themselves the consequence of old economic conflicts between imperialist powers for control of the region.¹³ A more current dispute is that between Argentina and Chile over the Beagle Channel; a recent decision of the British Crown, not accepted by Argentina, recognizes Chilean sovereignty over the disputed area. There is consequently a danger of armed conflict; the official organ of the Soviet armed forces has openly declared its support of the Argentine army. While the U.S. does not wish for a war which could endanger its grip over Chile and a sector of the Argentine economy, the Soviet Union could benefit from breaking up U.S. maritime routes at the southern tip of South America.

The outbreak of a Chile-Argentina war would serve the Soviet Union in several ways: it would help their further penetration in Argentina, increase arms sales, allow for more "aid," etc. In propaganda terms the Soviets have developed a worldwide campaign about the brutal character of the Pinochet regime and the progressive character of Videla's government, thereby attempt to present the conflict as one between reactionaries and progressives. The resolution of the conflict by *peaceful* means is the only way to insure that the imperialist superpowers will not fish in troubled waters and that will correspond to the interests of the people of Argentina and Chile.¹⁴

The Soviets have disregarded Latin American concern over territorial waters and fishing rights; Peru and Chile were the first Latin American countries to establish sovereignty over 200 miles of ocean and later on the vast majority of the countries in the area followed suit. One of the arguments advanced by the Soviet Union to oppose the 200-mile claim is the notion that those countries which possess the technical and financial know-how should be entitled to the exploitation of those otherwise untapped resources; with this argument the Soviet Union has attempted to internationalize waters of Antarctica which rightfully belong to Argentina and Chile; in multiple occasions the navies of Peru, Ecuador, Argentina and Mexico have stopped Soviet ships fishing illegally within the 200-mile limit. In the case of Mexico it is estimated that every year 50% of the fishing resources of the Gulf of Mexico are appropriated by Cuban and Soviet ships; in the early months of 1978 there were more than half a dozen incidents involving Soviet ships fishing illegally in Mexican waters.¹⁵

Reflections on Cuba

Cuba has become a dramatic example of the Soviet policy of imperialist intervention in Latin America. The following are but a few examples of how the Soviets use Cuba as a base for naval and air operations. In September 1974 missile-carrying cruisers Kresta Type II participated in naval maneuvers in the Caribbean; in 1975 large-scale naval war games were staged in the same area; in 1978, Soviet military escalation in Latin America rose to new heights with the stationing in Cuba of more than 20 strategic bombers TU-956 capable of transporting nuclear weapons, and the establishment in the country of a flotilla of MIG-23s with a 1,200-mile range capability; in recent years the Soviet Union has established in Cuba air bases, naval bases (including the use of Cienfuegos as a nuclear submarine station), and telecommunications with military purposes; presently, the number of military advisers, technicians and Soviet troops stationed in Cuba is estimated at 150,000.¹⁶

The national liberation struggle of 1959 was a great leap forward by the Cuban people which brought to an end sixty years of domination by U.S. imperialism; twenty years after that glorious victory, however, Cuba has become a neocolony of the Soviet Union; this process began in 1960 with the Soviet agreement to purchase large quantities of sugar at the time of the cancellation of the U.S. sugar quota; within a few years several agreements had been signed by virtue of which Cuba was supposed to sell the largest portion of its sugar, nickel, tobacco and fruit to the Soviet Union in exchange for oil, grains and industrial products. These accords have not only perpetuated but even intensified Cuba's monoculture economy and have made it into a country totally dependent on the Soviet Union from the economic standpoint.

The production of sugar for export to the USSR has become the basis of the whole of the economic policy while agricultural diversification and industrial production was sacrificed. Today the quantitative dependence of the economy upon the export of sugar is more pronounced than twenty years ago; in 1957, for instance, revenues from sugar exports amounted to 80% of total export revenue; by 1974 the figure was over 86%. The Soviet Union's purchase price for Cuban sugar is six cents (of dollar) per pound, *but in rubles*, a currency which only serves for transactions with COMECON countries where Cuba must buy many items at prices often above world market prices.¹⁷

The cost to the Soviet Union of its domestic sugar (from sugar beets) is very high (U.S. \$.16); thus, it makes a fabulous business

purchasing Cuban sugar at \$0.06 and reselling it to COMECON countries at U.S. \$0.16. The monoculture economy of Cuba makes for a difficult economic situation in general; during the First Congress of the Cuban Communist Party in 1975 Fidel Castro acknowledged the scarcities in housing and basic consumption articles and stated that the situation had no short-term solution. In 1977 Soviet-Cuban trade amounted to \$4,400 million or 60% of the Cuban foreign trade; since 1972 Cuba has been a member of COMECON, and as such it has become integrated in the Soviet division of labor which includes an intimate connection between the 10th Soviet 5-year plan and the first Cuban 5-year plan.

It is not unusual for the Soviet machinery sent to Cuba to be of inferior quality and this causes the Cuban industrial apparatus to operate at a low level of efficiency; otherwise, the accumulated Cuban foreign debt to the USSR is close to \$7 billion, or about \$600 per capita. Cuba also owes 10 million tons of sugar that it has not delivered while its agricultural production, aside from sugar, has diminished by 20%.

DISCONTENT OF CUBAN WORKERS

The discontent among Cuban workers translates into a larger and larger absenteeism which contrasts with the enthusiasm of the early years; according to a report of the Cuban Ministry of Labor, the average rate of absenteeism was about 20% in 1970; the ministry has openly recognized the existence of widespread passive resistance and in 1973 it took recourse to various measures to punish tardiness, negligence and lack of respect for authorities.¹⁸

The Cuban armed forces total upward of 175,000, an enormous figure for a population under 10 million people; thus, the Cuban army is second in Latin America only to Brazil which has a population ten times larger; Mexico, with a population of 66 million has an army of 89,500.

Obviously the size of the Cuban armed forces exceed the limits of the economic and demographic conditions of the country; its maintenance therefore is provided by the Soviet Union which has made it into an appendage of the Soviet army. Soviet military specialists play a decisive role in the Cuban army which to a large extent has lost its national character; instructors, weaponry and even uniforms flow directly from the Soviet Union; military rank is identical to that of the Soviet army; Soviet pilots are in charge of many of the airplanes stationed in the island, and the waters around the island are replete with Soviet submarines and warships. Cuba today has an arsenal of 600 tanks, 195 jet fighter planes, more than 200 armored vehicles and upwards of 60 warships.¹⁹

More than 40,000 Cuban soldiers are stationed in the African continent, including more than 20,000 in Angola, about 10,000 or 12,000 in Ethiopia and the remainder scattered over 14 other African countries. Cuban troops have intervened in numerous African countries and there is much evidence that military operations are directed by Soviet generals. According to reports of various press agencies, Cuban troops have suffered around 1,500 casualties (1,000 dead in Angola and another 500 in Ogaden) and approximately 5,000 wounded. The Cuban people are not aware of these figures, but there is evidence of popular protests, as well as repressive measures designed to contain the development of an anti-war movement. The Cuban actions in Africa are in response to the Soviet strategy of imperialist expansion and it shows the gradual loss of independence and national sovereignty of the island.

Cuba has been presented by official Soviet propaganda as a paradigm of development, the "beacon of socialism in Latin America," the first free territory of America, etc. In reality it is neither free nor socialist and it is a showcase of the grave consequences that accrue from Soviet domination and the need to struggle against both superpowers.

FOOTNOTES:

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3. "Disputa Soviéto-Norteamericana en América Latina." *Pekin Informa*, No. 29, 1975, p. 13; "América Latina Avanza en la Lucha Antiimperialista y Antihegemonista," *Pekin Informa*, No. 2, 1978, p. 19.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Pierre Delaube, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
6. "Salto Grande y la Cuenca del Plata," *Boletín Uruguay*, Nos. 10-11, November-December, 1977, Quito, Ecuador, 1977, pp. 2-23. Editorial in numbers 205 and 206 of *No Transar*, Buenos Aires, 1978.
7. *Ibid.*
8. *Ibid.*
9. Editorial of *Liberación*, No. 105, La Paz, 1975. "Revisionismo, Caballo de Troya del Comibol," *Liberación*, No. 108, 1975. Editorial of *Liberación*, No. 120, 1976.

10. Interview with Eduardo Gutierrez, Vice President of the Federación Juvenil Comunista del P.C. de Argentina. *Cambio 16*, Madrid, December, 1976. "Los socialfascistas y Videla," *No Transar*, No. 206, 1978, p. 2.
11. Pierre Delaube, *op. cit.*, p. 76.
12. The Military Balance, 1976-1977 and 1978-1979. *En Lucha*, No. 208, Madrid, 1978, p. 15. SIPRI, *Armamentos o desarme*.
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14. Editorial of *No Transar*, No. 205.
15. *El Heraldo de México*, July 19, 1978. Declaraciones del Vicealmirante Carlos Cervera y del Secretario de Marina Ricardo Chazaro.
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19. The Military Balance, 1976-1977. Mei Ping, *op. cit.*
20. *L'Humanite Rouge*, No. 14, 15, 29 and 32, 1978. Paris; *En Lucha*, No. 208, 1978, p. 15; *Pekin Informa*, No. 9, 1978, p. 29.