

'Venezuela Out of Line — Point Brazil at Her'

The following are excerpts from an article which appeared in the Washington Star Jan. 9 by Eliot Janeway entitled "Oil Gouge on Brazil Imperils Venezuela":

When does an idea take hold in America? When *The New York Times* discovers the realities of the idea and reports them as a possibility.

It has just done this very thing in Latin America. A long dispatch from Rio De Janeiro filed by Jonathan Kandell, remarkable for its journalistic clarity and comprehensiveness, has flushed out the biggest open secret on the South Atlantic Gold Coast. Brazil is hurting, and the backlash from her agony is threatening Venezuela with reprisals.

While Venezuela is the unmentioned villain of the *Times* piece, OPEC figures prominently in it. Kandell's reportage describes the costly effects of the oil price gouge on Brazil, and rightly names OPEC as the culprit. But it fails to single out Venezuela as the bad neighbor directly responsible for Brazil's malaise.

If Latin America's sorry substitute for an economy were all that were involved in the bitter grudge, Brazil now has reason to bear against Venezuela, the virus now incubating there would be no worse than a bad cold. But economic dislocation is the least of Latin America's endemic problems....

The spectacle of a weak bad neighbor inflicting intolerable damage upon a restless budding giant is a first in Latin America. Not even the idiotic history of aggression in the Balkans, or of warlordism in Asia, reveals a parallel to Venezuela's vampire-like bleeding of Brazil's overcommitted resources.

American opinion is remarkably insensitive to the tinderbox in Latin America, despite the systematic eruption of the disaster that had been brewing these many years in Mexico....

Ever since Venezuela assumed the role of the rogue elephant and led the rampage of the world's oil producers against its consumers, the conscience of the civilized world has bled for the Third World. It has indeed been pillaged. One of the characteristics of the world's various oil patches is that they support more millionaires than average people....

The school of neo-Machiavellian righteousness has gone further. Identifying America as the malefactor of great wealth, ideologues of the Left have welcomed OPEC as the long-awaited instrument for the redistribution of wealth. In the grand manner of Lenin, who remarked that you can't cook omelets without breaking eggs, it has shrugged off the actual distress and the threat of depression brought on by OPEC's dedication to the politics of piracy....

The judgment of these ideologues has been as impractical as their righteousness was misplaced. OPEC has not served as the answer to the shortcomings of our industrial system, but it has wrecked and looted the Third World.

Hence the spotlight on Brazil. Kandell's profile encapsulates all that need be known about this unruly adolescent of the Amazon. Napoleon's famous dictum—"An army can do anything with bayonets but sit on them"—has a less familiar corollary. Brazil can do anything with her rich arsenal of resources but sit on them for the simple reason that, as Kandell says, a full 40 per cent of her present earnings from them are needed to service her foreign debt. The fact that her debt is the largest in the developing world is enough to qualify Brazil as its sorest trouble spot, certainly as far as America's embarrassed banks are concerned.

But Brazil is suffering from indigestion for another reason. Not only do her internal stresses make it impossible for her to sit on her resources, but they deliver her political processes over to the military. Her foreign debts make it impossible for her economy to go anywhere with these resources unless the military outfit in charge decides to travel. When it does, it will use the modern highway which leads to Venezuela.

Overrunning Venezuela would be easier work for Brazil than swarming over Alsace Lorraine was for Bismarck, Hindenburg and Hitler. And Venezuela is asking for it....

The fact that Venezuela is no Saudi Arabia as to either the quality or the quantity of her resources will not spare her from the backlash of an antagonistic neighbor—especially since the *New York Times* has reported that the Brazilian establishment is lamenting the death sentence OPEC has decreed on its recent promise to travel the growth road....

"Any time Venezuela gets out of line," I used to joke, "all we need to do is point Brazil at her." This was a laughing matter before Brazil started to hurt. Now that she herself is in a rage, it's no longer funny.

Secretary of State Vance will be training his cool and practiced eye on this trouble spot in the nick of time. He knows at first hand how overripe OPEC is for the plucking, especially now that the Shah has been softened up by the Saudis' dramatic change of stance. But the Middle Eastern storm center has been a threat to prosperity, not to peace.

The real irritant is Venezuela in our own backyard. If not for the timely changing of the guard in Washington, Kissinger might very well have been given an opportunity to protect her from the military consequences of her own greed.