

His Ibero-American visit may be President Reagan's last chance

by Cynthia Rush

President Ronald Reagan's Nov. 30-Dec. 3 trip to Brazil, Colombia and Costa Rica offers the President a unique opportunity to restore sanity to hemispheric relations. Were he to act on behalf of U.S. national interests, Reagan would offer these and other Ibero-American nations the credit and technology needed for their rapid development, and take back with him billions of dollars worth of orders for capital goods—orders that would employ American workers. By making available the means by which these nations can pull themselves out of economic crisis, the President would also be offering a solution to the \$250 billion unpayable Ibero-American debt.

Reagan's other option is to follow the suicidal course laid out by Henry Kissinger, and followed meticulously by Secretary of State George Shultz and Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs Thomas Enders. That policy has already placed U.S.-Ibero-American relations at their lowest point in history as a result of Washington's alliance with Great Britain during the Malvinas conflict, and now demands that the United States finish off the job by imposing coups, deeper austerity, and depopulation, which the International Monetary Fund thinks will make the continent's debt "collectable."

Drawing the lines

Shultz and Enders are doing everything possible to ensure that Reagan follows the second option. In recent weeks, with the aid of its assets in Ibero-America, the Kissinger-run State Department has succeeded in postponing or sabotaging almost every meeting called to discuss a common-market approach to Ibero-America's economic crisis, or joint renegotiation of its foreign debt. Such delays give the Kissinger faction added time in which to knock out the leaders of continental resistance against genocide. Nonetheless, certain wild cards in the situation could ruin their plans.

One of these is SELA, the Latin American Economic System, whose Secretary-General, Carlos Alzamora, a Peruvian, is one of the continent's most outspoken advocates of continental political unity to deal with the debt and other

problems. During the last weekend in October, Alzamora met with Mexican President-elect Miguel de la Madrid and discussed how to create permanent mechanisms for continental cooperation and a "security strategy that guarantees the development of Ibero-America.

In a Mexico City Press conference, Alzamora pointed to the "Ditchley Group" meeting of international bankers that took place in New York last month to coordinate policy toward the debtors of the developing sector. "I don't understand why we Latin Americans should be the only ones to believe that these types of agreements and consultations are a sin," he said. "We cling to the fiction of individual action in a game whose rules we did not only not establish, but which we have not made others respect."

Following the Alzamora-De la Madrid meeting, SELA issued a communiqué that De la Madrid had stated that when he takes power on Dec. 1, he will seek "accords at the highest political level" to strengthen Ibero-America vis-à-vis the great powers and to alleviate the economic crisis of the continent.

While Alzamora was in Mexico, the Bolivian Congress issued an appeal to the parliaments of Brazil, Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Venezuela to back its call for a La Paz summit to "form a united front of Latin American countries to renegotiate the foreign debt." The international economic crisis, the collapse of raw materials prices, and the ravages of monetarist policy make such a joint move necessary, the communiqué stated.

Whose agenda?

Other Ibero-American leaders who are fighting to defend the continent from the assault by Kissinger and the IMF have begun to tell Ronald Reagan what they think the agenda for his trip must be.

In a speech in Arauca on the Venezuelan border in late October, Colombian President Belisario Betancur announced that his nation's domestic and foreign policy will be based on a program for a "Second Botanical Expedition," a continuation of the grand project for scientific research and development of the New World begun two centuries ago by

the great ally of the American Revolution, Charles III, the Bourbon King of Spain. The expedition, made famous through the work and writings of German scientist and American System proponent Alexander von Humboldt, was the NASA of its day—a project at the frontiers of science.

“We will not be a satellite of any power,” Betancur said in his Arauca speech, and reiterated his intention to bring Colombia into the Non-Aligned Movement. He also called for the development of large, unpopulated portions of the country that have been virtually untouched since von Humboldt’s 1801 explorations. Defying efforts to engage Colombia and Venezuela in border conflicts, the Colombian head-of-state also appealed to the neighboring government to join with him in carrying out the tasks of development posed by a “Second Great Expedition.”

The Colombian President’s message was striking in that it countered the agenda that Thomas Enders and Shultz have defined for Reagan’s trip. That Agenda, as defined in a policy address by Enders on Oct. 28 at the Canadian Institute for International Affairs, asserts that:

- “disproportionate growth” in Ibero-America over the last decade has helped to bring about the current economic crisis, and led to rising international interest rates, and world recession;

- existing economic crisis can only be resolved through bilateral negotiations; no security pacts of the kind proposed by several of the continent’s leaders, can be tolerated;

- not enough people have died in Ibero-American wars in past decades, compared to the rest of the world. The continent’s “11 border disputes” must be a focus of U.S. attention, and nations must be forced to accept supranational “peacekeeping” mechanisms, arms buildup and “military cooperation”.

- if the nations of the continent need models for new political institutions, they can look to the war-torn and economically devastated nations of Central America where “democracy is on the upswing.”

With the lines thus drawn, the few weeks remaining before Reagan’s departure define the timetable for putting together a continental defense against the policies of genocide Enders and Shultz defend. Similarly Kissinger’s thugs in the State Department and in several Ibero-American countries are organizing to “take care of” those cases viewed as most troublesome, before Reagan leaves Washington.

Mexico is high on their list of priorities. José López Portillo’s nationalization of the banking system on Sept. 1, and refusal to buckle under to IMF demands for the dismantling of all industrial growth, have threatened to spark similar action among the continent’s other debtors. And Miguel de la Madrid’s meeting with Carlos Alzamora suggests that he will not retreat from these policies.

Plan for Mexico

The oligarchy’s gameplan is to push Mexico into a situation of such chaos that it will be forced to submit to the IMF

by the time De la Madrid takes office on Dec. 1, or soon thereafter. The international banks and the local allies of Henry Kissinger are using the crisis created by a cut-off in access to dollars and import capability over the past three months, as well as the internal sabotage of Mexico’s industrial plant, to organize a fascist movement to overthrow the country’s republican institutions if necessary. Spokesmen for this group have warned that if De la Madrid doesn’t capitulate, he will be the victim of an assassination or a coup.

Colombia is also targeted. In the three months he has been in office, Belisario Betancur has become an object of hatred for Kissinger and Shultz because of his leadership in promoting continental integration and his outspoken advocacy of an independent economic and foreign policy. Various State Department assets in Washington and Colombia have been activated to destabilize his regime, chief among them the oligarchic foreign minister, Rodrigo Lloreda Caicedo, who is promoting Enders’s policy of arms buildup and border conflict, and Defense Minister Gen. Fernando Landazábal Reyes, who is threatening Betancur with a coup. One of Shultz’s objectives in meeting with Betancur will be to try to restore the “Washington-Bogotá” axis, by persuading Colombia to become a gendarme for the United States in Central America.

The IMF is moving quickly to clean up problem cases like Argentina and Brazil within the next few weeks. An IMF mission just returned to Washington from Argentina with a preliminary agreement for a standby loan that will impose further austerity on a country already ravaged by six years of monetarism. Pressures on Brazil are evidenced by the way various oligarchs and bankers have descended on that country in recent weeks.

Brazil has just announced a drastic IMF-style austerity program which Planning Minister Delfim Netto hopes will avoid the problem of having to resort to the Fund officially. But international banks and creditors are expected to lower the boom on Brazil once the Nov. 15 elections are over, and Brazilian authorities have been quietly talking to the IMF in expectations of having to draw on its facility there.

The upshot

But there is a reality that Kissinger and the IMF ignore: rather than subduing Ibero-America, their promotion of genocide, coups and assassinations will result in actually forcing these debtors to declare a default or debt moratorium that could bring down the international banking system. Mexican Senator Manzanilla Schaffer, head of the Senate Foreign Policy Committee, made the point explicitly in a recent message. Mexico will not accept conditionalities that “are damaging to Mexico’s national interest,” he said, even if needed for new credits. If the IMF and bankers insist on such conditions “Mexico could choose the path of suspension of [debt] payments. . . . We want to pay but we will not be strangled.” And if Mexico is forced into such action, “it could put more than 50 international banks into a grave crisis.”