

LATIN AMERICA, THE EXPERIENCE OF

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"America, America, God shed His grace on thee . . ." North America, that is, and most particularly the United States. We have appropriated to ourselves the term American; the others are Latin Americans, or South Americans, or Brazilians or Canadians. None of us, learning that song in school or camp, were encouraged to think south of our southern border. And for most people in the United States so it has remained, allowing for our intermittent concerns with, for example, Guatemala, Cuba and Peru. Latin America has been left to the experts, the academics and government officials. And even for most of these people the experience of Latin America has been largely the way in which *they* experience Latin America.

There is much to be said about the relations between Latin America and the United States and a lot of it has been said many times. In this context it must be noted that President Nixon is something of a traditionalist for he has followed without significant deviation a pattern, almost a ritual, that is now decades old. He chose as his summer emissary a man who had a long and intimate knowledge of Latin American affairs, Governor Nelson Rockefeller. He received — here a slight deviation — he received in early June from the Foreign Minister of Chile, Gabriel Valdés, a 6,000-word report prepared by Latin American representatives at a recent meeting in Viña del Mar, Chile. And then, without waiting for Rockefeller's report or without any apparent reaction to the Viña del Mar memorandum, he sent to Congress a foreign aid program that limped along in the worn path of its predecessors.

It is the scenario as before — with a significant difference. Latin American unease and dissatisfaction with United States policies toward Latin American countries is not new, as the President can testify from personal experience, but it is growing sharper. There is a long history of revolutionary rhetoric but it is becoming more heated and more substantial. There have been many studies documenting what has been described as U.S. "economic domination," but Americans are becoming more sensitive to the charge. We have for a number of years sold goodly amounts of U.S. armaments — obsolete in our terms — to Latin American countries, but they are showing less interest in buying them from us.

It would be foolish for the United States, acting either officially or unofficially, publicly or privately, to promise to Latin American countries what is impossible for the United States to deliver. But it would be foolish for the United States not to do what is desirable and possible, and it can hardly be said that we are straining at the limits of that situation.

What is needed is widespread and long lasting American concern, not easy to attain, but possibly encouraged by the reactions to Rockefeller's trip; strong executive leadership, which is yet to be demonstrated by the Nixon Administration; and some economic approaches that go beyond any we have yet tried, and such approaches seem not totally lacking.

Calling for new ideas, new economic approaches is, of course, easy; getting them is not. Representative John E. Moss, Democrat of California, seems to have done the latter. In a program which is to be discussed by the House Foreign Affairs Committee this summer, and which has already gained much bipartisan support, Mr. Moss proposes a self-starter plan for social and economic progress. The plan, which suggests that the U.S. authorize a \$100 million fund to guarantee 25 per cent of loans which Latin American banks would make to low income groups, has several attractions. *First*, it promises to generate large amounts of money at low cost to the U.S. *Second*, the monies generated would go only to poor people, who have, in Latin America, a very high record of repayment. *Third*, the money used would finance such items as wells, fertilizer, health centers, access roads, vocational training, etc., items chosen by the community. *Fourth*, the program, according to Mr. Moss, is "not a charitable operation. It is a business proposition."

The plan of Representative Moss will and should undergo further scrutiny and, even if accepted, must await the judgment of trial. But it is imaginative and original, and it shows that the call for new ideas is not simply the cry of malcontents forever unhappy either with the human condition or their own government.

J.F.

MOONSHOT

On the safe return of the astronauts who landed on the moon: "This is the greatest week in the history of the world since the Creation . . ."

Well, not exactly, President Nixon. It is not only Christians who would point out that, among other historical events, the week of Jesus' trial and death should be in the running.

On the successful moonshot: "A circus to distract people's minds from the real problems which

are here on the ground." Well, not exactly, Eldridge Cleaver. Since the goal of a moon landing was set, the project which culminated in Apollo 11 has involved 400,000 people and 20,000 industrial laboratories and has cost \$24 billion. It has attracted the attention, largely admiring, of peoples around the earth. But it cannot be dismissed, therefore, simply as a circus. The moon landing is an impressive human achievement with far-reaching implications.

A middle position then, between the hyperbole of the President and the put down of Cleaver? Well, not exactly. Given the extremes, Cleaver leans in the right direction. But the assured triumph of the moonshot emphasizes a familiar lesson. When the U.S. sets out seriously to do what is technically possible it has a good chance of succeeding. Is there some way to adapt this lesson to the "real problems which are here on the ground"? Acknowledging that the analogy might be less than perfect, James Reston of the *New York Times* suggested that 1976 is an appropriate time limit to set for the expunging of what are now national disgraces: our present race relations and the war in Vietnam. His point and his cautionary note are both good.

But instead of saying something as general as "improving race relations," or "devise more effective foreign policies," it would be better to set specific goals. They are not hard to find. We are, as a nation, short of satisfactory living units and our population is growing faster than the increase in houses and apartments. It is possible to calculate what we will need by 1976 if most of our nation is to be properly housed. It would be difficult but not impossible to establish as a goal the construction of adequate housing. That would, of course, involve much planning, the allocation of public resources, the determination of our chief executives, the support of Congress, and at least the passive agreement of the American people that to provide adequate housing for American citizens is a laudable enterprise.

FORTHCOMING . . .

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