

UNDER COVER

Unwelcome Visitors and Valued Guests

For the time being Mrs. Salvador Allende, Gabriel García Márquez, and various other voices on the Left will not be speaking to audiences in the United States. The Reagan administration has decided to keep them out of the country, presumably fearing that, if allowed in, they would mislead the public and threaten our foreign policy.

There is something—though not much—to be said in the administration's defense. The "free marketplace of ideas" is a notion both overworked and overpraised. A market is a market is a market. In ideas as in less exalted commodities, what prevails in an unregulated market is not truth but those half-truths which can be mass-produced and attractively packaged. In what appears to be the administration's view, Mrs. Allende and Mr. García Márquez are dangerous precisely because they offer that sort of half-truth.

There is a case to be made for the Chilean junta, but that argument is subtle and complicated, turning on a knowledge of the painful necessities and limited choices which face a developing regime. By contrast, the critics of the Chilean Government can appeal to simple ideas and prejudices long established in the United States. The junta is visibly undemocratic and palpably repressive. Even the word "junta" sounds alien and menacing to North American ears. In any political argument, in other words, Mrs. Allende and Mr. García Márquez would start—other things being equal—with a considerable advantage in the terrible simplifications that so often persuade mass audiences. This media-conscious administration *lives* by a mixture of the superficial and the inconsequent, and it is no surprise that Mr. Reagan wants to deny to others his own favorite ground.

The fatal objection to the policy of excluding Mrs. Allende and her ilk is that it is futile. The defects of the Chilean regime are no secret; there is nothing Mrs. Allende or Mr. García Márquez could tell North Americans that they have not already heard. Perhaps Mrs. Allende or Mr. García Márquez is a great demagogue or charismatic personality, but I suspect that Holly Near's song "Una Mujer" has more potential than either for moving North Americans to protest against the administration's policies. I suppose that one might argue that the administration must do the best it can, and since it cannot deport Ms. Near, it must, willy-nilly, exclude Mrs. Allende. At best, the administration's policy amounts to locking the barn in the hope

of holding a lost horse. And excluding persons and forbidding ideas gives the prohibited doctrines an undeniable fascination and a hint of power. Free speech, its other virtues aside, is certainly a safer course for any government than *ineffective* repression.

Meanwhile, other forbidden visitors—the illegal immigrants—continue to stream into the United States, especially from Mexico. It goes without saying that this influx has a depressing effect on the job market, particularly since "illegals" are characteristically hired at substandard wages in nonunion shops. American workers, more and more protectionist about products, have reason to be alarmed.

In this case, however, the administration professes to be relatively helpless and openly proclaims its weakness. After all, spokesmen remind us, modern transportation and communication make it painfully easy to get past the Border Patrol. Employers, eager for cheap and docile labor, are ready accomplices. Given all this, the administration's spokesmen ask us, what can the government *do*?

Conservatives ought to have a ready answer. At the moment illegal immigration is punished only by deportation; and in the case of Mexican labor that penalty is no more than an inconvenience, certainly no deterrent to trying for the prize of employment in the United States. Some more serious sanction—for example, six months' unpaid labor cleaning up litter and graffiti—might at least give potential illegal immigrants greater reason for caution. But even the more liberal alternative—a massive program to strengthen Mexico's economy and its power of attracting and holding workers—ought also to commend itself to the administration. Generosity and good-neighborliness aside, Mexico is the real stake in the game of dominoes the administration wants to play in Central America, and a strong Mexico is a necessity for any of the innumerable saner policies we might follow toward Latin America.

No policy, of course, can stop illegal immigration altogether, but either of the notions I have suggested could slow it down. The Reagan administration, however, has followed neither course. It has, in other words, acquiesced in illegal immigration, and it is hard to avoid the conclusion that it has done so because it welcomes that immigration. Illegal immigrants are, after all, a lever against the unions and against the minimum wage. Possibly, by keeping labor costs down, they even help make American business competitive in international markets. In the administration's view, any increased unemployment among U.S. workers must be set against the contribution of illegal labor to our recovery, presuming that "recovery" at such a price is really worth having.

This is, in the end, a very secular administration, devoted—whether ably or no—to a prosperity measured by the statistics of productivity and profit, whatever the human cost. It is quite in character for Mr. Reagan's government to welcome Latin Americans enthusiastically when they come as willing bodies, but to greet with inhospitable suspicion those who would bring us words that articulate Latin America's resistant soul.

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