Dominoes continued

sored aggression, implying that revolutions everywhere were being masterminded from the Kremlin. By identifying the Soviet Union with communism and communism with revolution, the Truman doctrine placed the U.S. government at odds with the forces of social change and revolution throughout the world. Insurgent movements in Third World countries were looked upon as challenges to America's imperialist will, and the number of military dictatorships dependent on U.S. support increased year after year. When thoughtful Americans raised questions about these dictatorships, the boogey-man of a Soviet-inspired communist consipiracy was used to enforce their silence.

Finally, Reagan's aggressive speech contained elements of the Nixon Doctrine (1969) which evolved as a response to the loss of tens of thousands of American lives during the increasingly unpopular Vietnam carnage. This doctrine, announced by Henry Kissinger in July 1969, stated that the United States "would furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume primary responsibility for its defense." On November 3, 1969 Nixon elaborated on this policy with the statement: "In the previous administration we Americanized the war in Vietnam. In this administration, we are Vietnamizing the search for peace." Vietnamization has since become the cornerstone of American foreign policy —U.S. client states could count on an endless flow of American arms and money to maintain control of their restless populations. But if the U.S. has learned anything from its experiences in Iran and Nicaragua it should be this: military firepower, however delivered, just won't feed the increasing millions of hungry and distressed people in the world.

Falling Dominoes

Another underlying assumption of Reagan's speech on Central America was a revised "domino theory" designed to instill fear in the minds of the American public. This theory assumes that if we lose El Salvador to the communists, the next to go will be Guatemala, then Honduras, Costa Rica, Panama, in a pattern of toppling dominoes. At the northern end of this line of toppling dominoes is oil-rich Mexico, the biggest domino on the Soviet "hit list." It is said that if we do not stop "the commies" in Central America, and draw the line with El Salvador, we may be fighting the communists within our own borders. "Repeat after me, children," the President seemed to be saying, "the commies are coming, the commies are coming."

So goes the Central American version of the "domino" theory. The theory, as Reagan is articulating it, is substantively false and distorted. Yet the theory has elements of the truth within it which give it plausibility. It is true inasmuch as it states a fundamental historical fact about Central America which cannot be denied: revolutions could occur in one country after another because most of these societies have suffered a history of imperial domination and are plagued with severe poverty and repressive military and police violence. Most of them are ruled by military dictatorships (at least in the most crucial dominoes of El Salvador and Guatemala) whose primary goal seems to be the creation of a "stabilized" profitable investment climate for the multi-national corporations. Stabilization essentially means maintaining U.S. economic and military control. A lost domino is one which has been destabilized by popular liberation movements. So we lost Cuba and Grenada in the Caribbean Basin, and Nicaragua in Central America.

Yet the Reagan version of the domino theory is essentially false inasmuch as it locates the causes of these revolutionary tendencies strictly outside of these societies, eventually blaming the social conflict on Nicaraguan, Cuban, and Soviet "adventurism." It is the old "outside agitator" myth writ large in Central America, a myth which became very popular in the U.S. during the 1950's when "McCarthyism" and "the red scare" were used to silence dissent, suppress critical thinking, and discipline the American labor force. Underlying all of this is a deeply rooted counter-revolutionary metaphysics (which is a negation of the legacy of the English, American, and French Revolutions) which assumes that people, no matter how exploited and repressed, should never revolt, should never organize themselves in order to radically alter the structure of the established society. It also assumes the right of the state to use violence against those who revolt.

Pax Americana

Only an empire can claim to lose dominoes. Only an empire can claim it has the right to intervene in the internal affairs of another country to protect "its vital interests." The CIA, the U.S. government, the multi-nationals, and the U.S. military have allied themselves with small oligarchies (large landowners, the military officers corps, big capitalists associated with the multi-nationals) to set up "a real terror network" consisting of numerous military client-states (dominoes) in virtually all of Central and South America. Should we really be surprised by the fact that there are anti-imperialist liberation movements trying to knock these dominoes down?

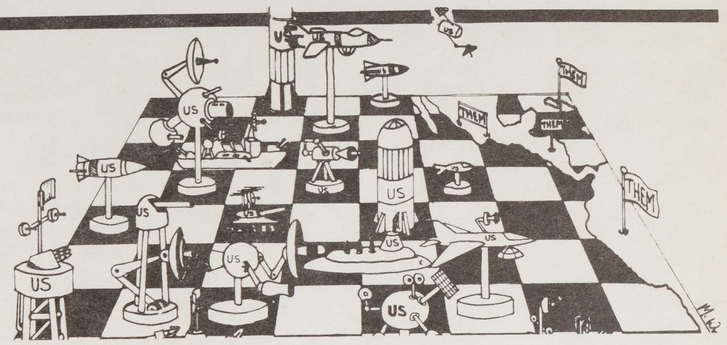
There is an important and urgent lesson here for the American people, a lesson which has been painfully learned by other great empires of the past which have sought to police the world and dominate its markets and natural resources. Pax Americana is currently following the tragic and bloody pathway of Pax Romana and Pax Brittanica—the road to imperial oblivion and mindless decadence. It has over-extended itself and is facing numerous crises and revolts around the globe. The domino theory can be applied everywhere—Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Africa, Western Europe, Central and South America. And the sun never sets on America's dominoes!

Supporting Democracy

In 1826, Simon Bolivar, frustrated by the U.S. in his attempts to create a United States of Latin America, made the following statement: "The United States appear to be destined by providence to plague America with misery in the name of liberty." Misery in the name of liberty, and we might add, dictatorship in the name of democracy.

It is a historical fact that the United States has set up numerous repressive military dictatorships which rely on organized state terrorism to maintain control over their oppressed, starving, and exploited Indian and peasant populations. Contrary to the myth that the United States always promotes "free elections" and "democracy," it has a record of opposing democracy and elections whenever they have brought "unfriendly" governments to power. History is replete with such examples.

The most famous example comes from Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, the U.S. government sabotaged the free elections promised by the 1954 Geneva Accords because, as Eisenhower himself admitted, Ho Chi Minh would have received 80% of the vote. In Guatemala, the U.S. overthrew the democratically elected government of Jacabo Arbenz (1954) to protect the interests of United Fruit, setting up one of the most ruthless dictatorships in Central America. In Chile, a country which had one of the oldest democratic traditions in South America, I.T.T., the CIA, and the U.S. military worked together with fascist groups within the country to overthrow the democratically elected government of Salvador Allende (1973) whose experiments in democratic socialism were replaced by a fascist dictatorship. The overthrow of the popular Iranian leader Mohammed Mossadegh in 1953 in exchange for the Shah, produced results similar to those in Latin America.



Supporting Dictatorship

Ronald Reagan's claim that more military and economic aid is needed to support "democracy" in El Salvador, is a bold-faced and cynical lie. It is part of a disinformation campaign which is based upon a denial of social and historical reality. The money and weapons are needed to prop up a floundering dictatorship so that it might wage a more effective war against its own population. According to human rights groups, an estimated 30 to 40 thousand people, most of them civilians, have been brutally murdered by the government and its allied "right-wing death squads." The victims have been people from all walks of life—peasants, Social Democratic Christians, priests, nuns, trade union leaders, teachers, journalists, lawyers, doctors and nurses. The commonly practiced methods of social control are brutal beatings, disappearances, torture, and rape. Civil liberties are almost non-existent for those who openly oppose the regime. The murderers of Archbishop Romero and the American nuns have not yet been brought to trial. God help the American people if this is what the Reagan administration means by "democracy."

The situation in Guatemala, another U.S. client state, is not much better. Amnesty International claims that at least 12,000 unarmed civilians have died by violence since 1978. The new dictatorship, General Efrain Rios Montt (who siezed power in a military coup on March 23, 1982) was trained in counterinsurgency at Fort Bragg and has followed a strategy of state terrorism based upon the organized killing, torture and bombing of unarmed civilians. Ronald Reagan's love for democracy has led him to choose an ex-lobbyist for this government as his new ambassador of "peace" for Central America.

Invasion of Nicaragua

The American government and the CIA are currently sponsoring an illegal armed invasion of Nicaragua from neighboring Honduras. Honduras itself is being rapidly turned into an American counterinsurgency base, an intelligence and military center responsible for coordinating counter-revolution throughout Central America. The invasion is in many ways reminiscent of the Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba on April 15, 1961. Yet, in Central America the stakes are far more serious because it can escalate and regionalize the conflict into a major bloody war.

Fortunately, this attempt to destabilize the Nicaraguan government is under increased criticism in both the United States and around the world. Pressures are building to cut off funds for the operation which is under the day to day control of the CIA. The Reagan Administration is trying to counter this response with a propaganda blitz portraying the counter-revolutionaries as "freedom fighters" who deserve U.S. support. But the cat is out of the bag. Almost everyone is aware that these U.S. trained, armed, and financed "freedom fighters" are former soldiers from the toppled dictator Somoza's National Guard. It is unlikely that they will be successful in their attempts to overthrow the Sandinistas. More likely is a war between the Sandinistas and Honduras which could provide an excuse for direct military intervention by American forces. If the U.S. government continues to justify these policies in terms of national security, there is an outside possibility that "Americanization" would replace "Vietnamization" as a means of achieving U.S. goals. The response of the American people is also an important factor which this administration can ill afford to neglect.

Sanctimonious Hypocrisy

The sanctimonious hypocrisy of the U.S. mass media has been staggering, nauseating, and Kafkaesque. Its sensational coverage of the Iran crisis and the invasion of Afghanistan helped to recreate the cold war climate of the 1950's which allowed Ronald Reagan and his right-wing coalition to gain access to the White House. Concern for violations of trade unions and civil liberties in the Soviet "sphere of influence" such as Poland are focused on hysterically and repeatedly, while far more brutal human rights violations in Latin America are given far less coverage. Were Lech Walesa an opposition leader in El Salvador, Guatemala, Chile, or Argentina, he would either be "missing," underground with the guerrillas, or his severed head would be found floating along the blood-stained shores of some Latin American river. At least Lech Walesa is still alive. Archbishop Romero, however, is dead, and that sums up a real difference.

It is of crucial importance that the American people become informed and put a stop to their government's disastrously repressive and regressive policies in Central America. As long as these policies continue to be practiced (and paid for with American tax dollars), we do not have any ethical right to unilaterally criticize Soviet policies in Eastern Europe and Afghanistan. On what principles could we do so? Respect for human rights? Self-determination?

One of the wonders of the world in 1983 is the U.S. government's continued attempts to prevent fundamental social change at home and throughout the Third World. It has revived the Cold War and stirred up international tensions in Latin America and the Middle East. It has supported reactionary government and militarism everywhere. Yet there is hope if the American people come to realize that an extended war in Central America is far more a threat to their security than a victory for the Salvadoran revolution would be. If we could learn to cooperate with these revolutionary movements, we might even improve our chances for survival into a non-imperialist future.