AGGRESSION IS THE WORD

The Guatemala Crisis . . by J. Alvarez del Vayo

United Nations

THE unwarranted attack against a small country whose only crime has been to challenge, on behalf of its own national sovereignty, the sovereignty of a foreign private company and to run its internal affairs to suit itself, came near producing two victims—Guatemala and the United Nations. Until its final half hour the emergency meeting of the Security Council, held last Sunday on the urgent request of Guillermo Tarjillo, Guatemalan Foreign Minister, was a painful exhibition of double-talk and evasion.

Guatemala had laid before the Council a charge of aggression, citing acts which had taken place in the previous few days and the events leading up to them. But the American representative, Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., rejected the complaint on the ground, voiced earlier by the State Department, that the disturbance in Guatemala was simply an internal revolt, not an aggression. He was supported by the two Latin American members, Brazil and Colombia, who one day soon will have to justify their behavior before Latin American public opinion. Although they did not go so far as to accept the Lodge thesis, their resolution proposing to leave the issue to be dealt with by the Organization of American States served his purpose just as well. Besides allowing time for the plot against Guatemala to develop, it would effectively have blanketed the charge of aggression.

But the Guatemalan Permanent Delegate, Dr. Castillo-Arrubla, an able lawyer, convincingly argued, in his second speech of the afternoon, that it is the Security Council and not any regional organization which has the obligation under the Charter to act when aggression has been charged. Earlier he had offered abundant evidence that the attack had been launched from outside, with opposition politicians who had fled Guatemala, mercenaries, and other nationals of neighboring countries jointly participating in a plot against Guatemala and its legally elected government.

When, after some four hours of discussion, the Brazil-Colombia resolution was killed by the Soviet veto, the session was saved from total failure by an opportunel intervention on the part of Ambassador Hoppenot. The French representative introduced a resolution, which was adopted unanimously, calling for an immediate end of actions that might lead to further bloodshed, and urging all nations to abstain in the spirit of the Charter from lending aid to such actions. Since this was the most Guatemala could possibly hope to win, Dr. Castillo-Arrubla promptly notified his government of the resolution and reported back to the Council that Guatemala was sure the recommendations contained in the Hoppenot resolution would be observed by all members of the United Nations. The Soviet representative, Mr. Tzaran, also stressed the importance of the resolution, interpreting it in anti-interventionist terms obviously aimed at the United States.

It was significant that many people during and after the meeting came up to me to ask: Does this remind you of Spain and the League? Certainly it did, except that in Spain the people were fighting in the streets against the Fascist-sponsored rebels long before their case was submitted to the League of Nations. It is to be hoped the Guatemalan people will resist with equal determination and not count on the sort of international support that was so swiftly mobilized in the case of South Korea.

But aside from what may happen in the days ahead—and as Dr. Castillo-Arrubla warned, one thing that could happen is the spread of the fighting to nearby states—it is important to keep constantly in mind the background and meaning of the entire affair.

PRESIDENT EISENHOWER’S June 16 statement to the press, in which he described the situation in Guatemala as belonging to a pattern which “we had looked at with great displeasure in more than one country,” seemed to indicate that the “roll-back” policy, which so far had not been possible to apply in Eastern Europe, was due for a trial closer to home. A surprisingly large number of public figures, including some outstanding liberal journalists, have been supporting a “get tough” policy with Guatemala, advising measures which range from total blockade to encouragement of a military coup against the Arbenz government.

In fact a partial blockade against the little country is already in effect and has led to at least one international incident which left a bad taste in the mouths of many Europeans. The sixteen cases of ammunition shipped by a Swiss firm to Guatemala and confiscated at Hamburg by the United States proved to contain practice shells which a Swiss government spokesman declared to be “absolutely useless for war.” Swiss authorities, traditionally scrupulous in their adherence both to their own strict laws and to international regulations regarding the arms trade, were shocked by the American action. Even some of the usually pro-American newspapers of West Germany showed no great enthusiasm for the Hamburg incident.

Last week the United States, seeking

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a total arms embargo against Guatemala, announced it had asked friendly nations for the right to search and seize all Allied ships suspected of violating the ban. The first reaction came from the British press and public and was a violent one. Said one London newspaper: "We cannot permit Mr. Dulles to turn the Caribbean into his own private sea." Undoubtedly many Britshers felt it particularly odd that such a request should come from a country which had fought more than one war to defend the principle of the freedom of the seas. Other Western countries have indicated that they will not accede to the American request.

SOME Washington circles openly suggested that a coup by the Guatemalan army would achieve the desired results quicker than an embargo. The key to the success or failure of the present invasion undoubtedly lies in the continued loyalty of the military to Arbenz.

Meanwhile the outside world had been fed a series of "news leaks" indicating that the Arbenz regime had taken recourse to acts of terror and brutal repression in order to stay in office. Secretary Dulles echoed the reports in telling newsmen in Washington recently that only the "Communist type of terrorism" stood in the way of a thorough anti-Communist house-cleaning by the Guatemalan people—read more correctly, the army. By within forty-eight hours Guatemala exiles in Mexico, who had originated most of the reports, were admitting that they had been "grossly exaggerated." In other words the stories were as empty as the Swiss practice shells. On the contrary, the government gave safe-conduct papers to a large number of opponents who wanted to quit the country.

President Arbenz, according to his friends, had been much encouraged by the support tendered him by many leading Latin Americans, foremost among them Lázaro Cardenas, former President of Mexico. Since his retirement Cardenas has rarely spoken out on any issue, domestic or international, a fact which gave his public statement in behalf of Arbenz immense weight. Former President Árêvalo of Guatemala also came out in Arbenz's support during an interview at Buenos Aires which got little space in the United States press. Said Arévalo with humor: "There is not a single Russian in my country today, but there are 25,000 Americans. Perhaps it would be advisable to look among them for secret and dangerous Communists." Parliamentarians and other outstanding Latin Americans will be meeting shortly in Santiago to discuss the Guatemalan situation.

Originally the United States had hoped to obtain collective action against Guatemala through a conference of foreign ministers to be held at Montevideo. But perhaps the growing pro-Guatemala feeling in Latin America made this plan seem less advisable, particularly in view of Uruguay's tradition of strong democratic liberalism. The talk now is of a special session of the Organization of American States to be held at Washington. But wherever the meeting takes place, and wherever its form, the central issue will be intervention versus non-intervention as it was at Caracas. Isidro Fabela, a noted Mexican expert on international law and a former member of the International Court of Justice at the Hague, has written an analysis of the Caracas meeting for Cuadernos Americanos, one of Latin America's most distinguished periodicals. Fabela is convinced that the Caracas "anti-Communist" resolution violated basic principles of national sovereignty. He believes further that any action taken against Guatemala on the basis of the resolution would be an even graver violation.

Fabela calls the Caracas meeting "basically a continental anti-Communist manifestation." Its implications were such, he continues, that the American republics must be watchful lest "under the pretext of anti-communism the achievements of all preceding inter-American conferences be destroyed." A non-Communist champion of democratic principles and practices, Fabela attacked the United States role at Caracas:

We do not believe outside interference with Communist activities in the Americas is possible. This is so not because any of the Latin American republics are Communist but because they are sovereign. Such interference would not be compatible with freedom of thought, speech, and association... The act of approving a resolution which would coerce, suppress, or curtail these liberties constitutes an attack against inalienable rights which are contained in the constitutions of the republics of America, beginning with the Constitution of the United States.

Fabela believes that the issue is one of the most important raised in the Western Hemisphere for many years. It goes far beyond Guatemala, "whose government cannot truthfully be called Communist"; it is a matter which affects all the hemisphere republics equally. Paying tribute to President Roosevelt and former Secretary Hull, he compares their sympathetic attitude with that of Secretary Dulles, who literally confronted the Caracas conference with a "diktat." The Dulles resolution constituted no mere verbal threat against communism, the writer recalls. Its provisions for "the recall of heads of missions, the rupture of diplomatic relations, the partial or total interruption of trade movements by rail, sea, and air" indicate the kind of punishment that would be inflicted upon any country "guilty of communism or maligned as such by the Council of the Organization of American States." Fabela condemns this threat to set a nation "outside the pan-American community... ostracized like a leper and exposed to armed intervention" as a manifestation of "international McCarthyism" which must be opposed by all Latin American countries whatever the nature of their governments.

FABELA sees the solution to the problem in the Mexican amendments to the Caracas resolution which would have preserved the principle of non-intervention. Under Dulles's leadership the conference defeated the amendments, but there is no doubt that they received widespread moral support among the other delegations. In the opinion of Latin Americans to whom I have been talking, Mexico may again lead in opposing the measures against Guatemala which the United States is planning to propose at the forthcoming inter-American gathering. President Arbenz insists that the issue hinges on a fight between a sovereign nation and a private commercial corporation, the United Fruit Company, backed by Washington. But it is on the issue of non-intervention, a principle hailed by all hemisphere conferences preceding Caracas as the only real foundation for "inter-American cooperation and solidarity," that the coming verbal battle will be fought. The sad truth is that the real battle now being waged on Guatemalan soil involves precisely the same issue.
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