

Martin ALMADA

The Condor Plan and Dictatorship in Paraguay

Starting with World War II, a radical change occurred in Latin America due to a powerful increase in the number of political parties and revolutionary organisations for national liberation, with the arrival to power of progressive governments that proclaimed a break with the capitalist model: Cuba and Chile.

THE REGIONAL CONTEXT

The counter-offensive of North America was immediately felt, a country that emerged as a political and military hegemonic power that considered Latin America as its backyard. Thus, by the initiative of the United States, in 1942 the Organization of American States (OAS) created the Inter-American Defense Board to protect Latin America from communist influence.

Later in 1960, the United States created the School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone. It was in this school that young Latin American officials were trained to neutralise the mighty progressive force.

They were especially trained in torture techniques for pulling confessions out of political prisoners. The Roman Catholic priest Roy BURGOISE gave it the name "School of Assassins" in 1990.

In 1961, it was also by U.S. initiative that another military device was created in order to keep back the current of change that was advancing under the name of the Conference of American Armies. The first meeting took place in the Panama Canal Zone in November 1961.

Police, military, bilateral and multilateral treaties were signed. It was thus that the *Plan Condor* came into being: a criminal military agreement created by the Chilean General Augusto PINOCHET in order to fight back first those who opposed his politics of state terrorism, and later democrats, without distinction.

The military governments of Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay were part of *Plan Condor*. According to Patricia MCSHERRY of Long Island University, who studied *Plan Condor*, various documents recently declassified by the U.S. State Department prove that United States intelligence military officials thought of Condor as a legitimate anti-terrorist organisation.

MCSHERRY adds that "we know that the base in Panama, which also sheltered the School of Americas of the American Army, was the centre of hemispheric counter-insurgent plans and Plans during the seventies. The evidence highlights the seriousness of the involvement and

complicity of the United States in the repression undertaken in Latin America as part of the Cold War, and in the murders of the Operative Condor."

The powerful North American military intervention in Latin America resulted in: a recession of the workers' movement; a period of state violence, that is, state terrorism; destruction of democratic participatory spaces; physical destruction irrespective of revolutionary movements' militants and leaders; and the establishment of the neoliberal model, i.e. the dictatorship of the market.

The market developed under the influence of globalised neoliberalism (multinational interests) to the detriment of the State. That is why we now have a state for the poor and a market for the rich. According to this approach, all economic and social issues can be solved through the market.

THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

From 1952 to 1955 Paraguay was pushed by multinational companies interested in oil to finalise the war against Bolivia. More than 30.000 Paraguayans and the same number of innocent Bolivians died in this war.

During World War II it was obvious that the Autonomous Federations in Paraguay sympathised with Germany and its allies. Later, in 1947, the bloodiest civil war in her history took place, and blows to the palace followed the complicity of the governments in the neighbouring countries: Argentina and Brazil.

The figure of Roberto L. PETIT, a young lawyer, appeared on the political scene in the fifties. He foresaw the need to conclude the agrarian reform, and was later given the charge of



the police department, where he immediately set free all political prisoners, including the communist ones. At that time the democratic government of Federico CHAVES was presiding.

PETIT's behaviour so disturbed the Embassies of Brazil and the United States that they decided to accelerate the fall of President CHAVES. General Alfredo STROESSNER was in charge of the military blow that took place on 4 May 1954 with the clear support of the Brazilian government. Its first victim was Dr. Roberto L. PETIT.

We must mention that STROESSNER was invited in May 1953 by the Pentagon to visit military installations in North America and that he also visited the Panama Canal Zone. U.S. military aid and training helped to consolidate the repressive infrastructure of STROESSNER's government.

On the other hand, the advice of the United States facilitated coordination between the intelligence services of Paraguayan armies and their counterparts in the region. Within the frame of the "cold war", STROESSNER stood out as the most faithful ally of the United States in Latin America.

STROESSNER could "reign" for thirty-five years due to his politics of "granite unity" between "the Government, the Autonomous Federations and the official party." Corruption, contraband and drug traffic were also the tripod of his government.

An alleged danger of internal disturbance promoted by the communists was the argument wielded by STROESSNER to enjoy the unconditional military support of the United States. Thus he managed to send more than 2000 Paraguayan officials to train for the anti-subversive fight at the School of Americas in the Panama Canal Zone.

As a proof of his loyalty, STROESSNER sent a Paraguayan occupation troop to the Dominican Republic in 1965, when the United States invaded that country. Another hallmark of STROESSNER's government was permanent torture, without exception even for children, women or old people.

It was also during this 35 years of military and police dictatorship that it was the daily bread of people to be confronted with fear, exile, premeditated murders, lies, tortures, impunity, nepotism, sinecure, corruption, detentions and disappearance of victims.

It should be mentioned that the Roman Catholic church in Paraguay maintained a position of commitment to her people and also fought against dictatorship.

EDUCATING FOR FREEDOM — MY DETENTION AND TORTURE

In the sixties I was the headmaster of the Juan Bautista Alberdi Institute in San Lorenzo, fifteen kilometres away from Asunción. Inspired by the theology of liberation, we carried out democracy in the lecture hall and we established the criteria that the school must be an antechamber of democracy.

It was also at that time that I was elected president of the Association of Teachers, and it was under those circumstances that we promoted the Consumption, Economy, Credit and finally Housing Cooperative. We built a neighbourhood for teachers and we launched the idea: "A personal house for every Paraguayan teacher."

In the seventies I was offered a scholarship by the Argentinean government to carry out my doctoral degree in pedagogy at the National University in La Plata. I was the first Paraguayan to receive a doctorate in education.

On 26 November 1974, finding myself in the company of my wife at the Alberdi Institute, I was imprisoned and taken directly to the chief of the Secret Police of the dictatorship. There the military assistants of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Bolivia and Uruguay, who wanted to know about my links with university subversives in Argentina and Chile, submitted me to an interrogation.

The Paraguayan soldiers wanted to know about my links with the subversive plot against the president of the republic and my militant position in an alleged armed revolutionary movement. My crime was defined as follows: Martin ALMADA, intellectual terrorist.

I was then taken to the torture room. I was frightened while looking at my torturers. It seemed to me that their eyes launched fire, that they stopped being human in favour of being animals. The work was perfectly shared:

Francisco RAMIREZ, alias "Tata" (meaning "fire"), threw me in a bathtub full of fetid water, excrement and urine. Nicolas Lucilo BENITEZ implacably wielded the whip. Camilo Federico ALMADA SAPRIZA gave me kicks and held the position of secretary of the act.

Juan Ramon Bogado CABALLERO, discharged the karate blows. Lorenzo Fortunado LASPINA beat my back with a braided wire. Obdulio ARGUELLO hit my head with a police club. Agustín BELOTTO held me in a basin and stepped on my chest to keep me at the bottom of the bathtub. I faced this situation for 30 long days.

While I was in the torture room my wife, teacher Celestina PEREZ, was kept prisoner in the Juan B. Alberdi Institute. During 10 days she was systematically subjected to psychological torture, as they called her to make her listen to my screaming and outcries during the torture sessions.

The ninth day she received my bloody clothes with a shoemaker's needle, the proof that they had also pulled out my nails. The tenth day at midnight she received a call by which she was told that "your husband died, come and take his corpse." She had a heart attack due to this news and died of pain.



After three years in prison I went on a hunger strike for 30 days. I gained my freedom thanks to the strong endeavours of the Inter-Church and Amnesty International Committee. I travelled to Panama and thanks to the support of this government, I was designated a consultant for UNESCO for Latin America with the headquarters in Paris from 1978 to 1992.

During all this time in Paris, my "hobby" was to follow the steps of my ex-torturers through the police magazine in Paraguay, and especially to follow the tracks of *Plan Condor*.

DISCOVERY OF THE TERROR ARCHIVE

On 3 February 1989 a military coup d'état took place in Paraguay that overthrew Dictator Alfredo STROESSNER, after 35 years of iron governance. In June 1992 the new national constitution was approved. This one consecrated the legal entity of *habeas data*, a Latin phrase meaning "bring me the records."

On 11 September 1992, in Asunción, I made a *habeas data* demand to Judge Dr. José Agustín FERNÁNDEZ. It was done in order to find out the reasons for my detention and torture from 1974 to 1977. There was extensive media coverage of all my efforts in front of the legal power. I received a phone call telling me that my records were outside Asunción, of which I informed Judge FERNÁNDEZ.

He ordered the register from the "Productions" Office of the

National Police on 22 December 1992. It was thus that we found tons of documents which allowed us to know, among other things, how *Plan Condor* functioned.

This plan was promoted by the Chilean General Augusto PINOCHET in 1975 in order to eliminate any opposition to the military regimes in the Southern Cone of Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay).

Operation Condor allowed the action of foreign forces inside the countries of the Southern Cone, who imprisoned and eventually caused to disappear individuals from the other nations — i.e., the globalisation of state terrorism.

Suits were filed against PINOCHET (Chile), VIDELA (Argentina), FIGUEREIDO (Brazil), BANZER (Bolivia), STROESSNER (Paraguay) and ALVAREZ (Uruguay) in Spain, Germany, Switzerland, France, Italy, Chile, Argentina and Paraguay. I appeared in the courts of these countries to present documents on *Plan Condor*, the criminal pact.

Martin ALMADA was awarded the Alternative Nobel Prize in 2002 in the Swedish Parliament for his work in defending human rights in Latin America. His email address is almada@rieder.net.py.

Ekaterina KOLESNIKOVA

A Dictatorship in the Midst of Europe: The Case of Belarus

The recent development of the Republic of Belarus is distinguished by the striking difference between two periods in its post-communist history. At the beginning of the nineties, Belarus was one of the most promising young Eastern European democracies with stable political and economic ties to other countries. Nowadays Belarus is a politically and economically isolated country governed by the personalised dictatorship of its president, Alexander LUKASHENKO.

A NEW REPUBLIC

Belarus became an independent republic after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Having one of the most developed economic systems and the newest stock of production assets among all the Soviet republics, Belarus had the potential to become a highly developed European economy.

In 1994 the first democratic constitution of the Republic of Belarus was adopted, and soon the first democratic elections of the president were held according to this Constitution. In the early nineties there were two main political powers in the Republic.

On one hand, there was the ruling elite that had been formed mostly by the communist nomenclature with the prime minister at its head; on the other hand, the nationalistic opposition, the Belarus Popular Front, formed the second political power.

This nationalistic opposition was the one calling for the Republic's independent development and for breaking up the political and cultural ties with Russia. They also concentrated their efforts on forming a Belarusian cultural policy.

Contrary to other post-Communist republics, the Belarusian Parliament, which was formed during the Soviet era, was not re-elected until 1995, so the opposition Belarus Popular Front could not have access to power.

Besides, the strategy of extreme nationalism promoted by this Front was hardly acceptable in a country where the majority of the population had close relationships with Russia and where a great part of the Belarusian people either worked in Russia or had relatives there.

Additionally, despite the fact that in the early nineties Belarus was suffering from high rates of inflation and unemployment, neither of the two political groups proposed a consistent programme of economic reforms in the country.

AN UNEXPECTED PERSON

While these two political powers prepared their participation in the presidential elections, a member of the parliament, Alexander LUKASHENKO, entered the bid for the presidency rather unexpectedly.

He put the main focus of his presidential election campaign on the fight against corruption in the ruling circles (surrounding the prime minister) and also on anti-nationalistic policies (aimed at criticising the opposition, the Belarus Popular Front).

As it often happens in systems with a low level of political institutionalisation, almost any talented person "from the street" can enter politics and gain political power. Moreover, since the political parties in Belarus were young and had no experience participating in democratic elections, they had difficulties in becoming channels for recruiting a new political elite.

Alexander LUKASHENKO won the presidential elections in July 1994. LUKASHENKO's political opponents did not take seriously his election campaign, nor his extraordinary personality.

Coming from a village and offering very simple and clear ideas, he was accepted as the only fighter for plain people in the republic. Using populist slogans that reflected the hopes of the Belarusian majority, LUKASHENKO won the support of