

# The Marines or Jail: Take Your Pick, Young Man

BY RON JACOBS

If life is a poker game, Rube (name changed) was one of those players who was never dealt an exceptionally good hand but played well with what he had. A bluff here and the right bet there, if you know what I mean. He was arrested on his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday for smoking pot in some small town outside Albany, New York. The judge, in all his benevolence, gave him the choice of four years in juvenile detention or two in Vietnam with the Marines. Rube chose Vietnam.

That was the summer of 1967. After an accelerated six weeks of boot camp he found himself in the jungle forward of Danang. His was a standard soldier's story with just a bit of a twist. Fire, heat, blood, death. And dope. Rube would laugh every time he lit up a big pipe load of the red Vietnamese pot. Some sentence, he'd grin. Busted for pot in the States and being paid to smoke it in Vietnam. It wasn't until he got to Saigon for a little "rest and recreation" that he tried heroin and fell in love. Eighteen months and a hell of a habit later, his tour was over. What else could he do? He pulled an ace from the pile and requested another year in Nam. The killing machine was chewing up bodies at an increased rate and loved volunteers. He got his extension.

By the time his second tour was up, Rube was committed to a life with heroin. The Marines let him go in San Diego and Rube headed to the Bay Area. After six months in the Haight, he went east to New York City and the Lower East Side. He found a job at the Fillmore East rock club where he sold dope on the side to keep his supply steady.

After the club folded in 1971, Rube hopped trains back to California. He ended up in the Santa Barbara switching yards. While buying breakfast in town one morning he ran into some folks who would become his family. Camping on the beach and smoking a lot of weed, the endless summer really was. When the rains came, they pooled their cash and headed up to Berkeley. After trying their luck on Telegraph Avenue for a few months, his friends went back to Santa Barbara and Rube split for Alaska with a pouch full of

acid. Once in Fairbanks he hooked up with a buddy from Vietnam and sold it all. Then he headed into Denali forest for a few weeks. When the nights grew cold, Rube bought a ticket for California, stuck around for a couple of months and then headed to Oaxaca. By the time I met him, Rube had been following the same routine for a half dozen years. He had tried to live the so-called straight life while in love with a woman who grew tired of his nomadic life, but the nine to five routine just didn't sit with his nature. Last I heard, he was back in prison for heroin possession.

A couple of news items in the past couple weeks caught my attention. One was a brief article on the CNN website about a

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young man being given the choice of jail or the military by a judge whose court he was in. I don't remember the young man's offense or his decision, just the general story. The other item was also about the military and its need for young warm bodies to fit into its uniforms. The Boston Globe ran an article by staff writer Charlie Savage (11/29/04) that described military recruiters' tactics in two different high schools in Maryland and Virginia. Recruiters relentlessly target one of the schools, where the student body is composed of mostly working class youth. The other, a school with a more upscale enrollment, is virtually ignored, according to the article. The truthfulness of the article was somewhat amazing given its source, but only strengthened the argument made by Steve Earle in his song "Rich Man's War."

For those of us who grew up during the Vietnam War and draft, the first scenario is a familiar one. At least a couple of my buddies ended up in the military

because they were busted for drugs or some other violation of the law and were given the choice of prison or the marines. The second scenario isn't too far from the military's standard operating procedure either. Even during the military draft, the men who ended up doing most of the dying were from working class and poor backgrounds. There was even a plan built into the draft system known as "Channeling." The purpose of this plan was to justify the deferment of college bound young men, undergraduates and post graduate students as being in the larger national interest. Unmentioned was the fact that these men came from backgrounds that usually included higher incomes and better education. Indeed, their numbers also included most sons of members of Congress, the officer corps, and many civil servants, not to mention the sons of CEOs and their administrative cohorts. The other side of this plan was called "Project 100,000." Its purpose was to bring into the service via the draft those young men who scored the lowest on the Armed Forces Qualifying test (AFQT)—the test given to all men and women who wish to join the military. Although the Defense Department claimed that Project 100,000 was designed to give these young men a chance to benefit under the regimen of the military, the reality is that these men usually ended up on the frontlines before most everyone else.

According to the Globe article, the current recruiting methods reflect this class bias. In fact, so do the casualty figures coming out of Iraq. When I talk with my son and his friends, most of them feel untouched by the war on Iraq. Even if they oppose it, most of them have no human connection to the bloodshed being perpetrated in their name. The stories of veterans of previous war only mean so much. After all, they're from the history books. Perhaps as more Iraq war vets began to tell their stories, the reality of that war-ravaged landscape will become clearer to the young men and women of our country.

As it does become clearer, I certainly hope that they will refuse to allow themselves or their friends to participate in this war or any future ones. If the timing works out, the popularization of such a sentiment could well end the draft before it begins. I will certainly do my part. CP

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## Coups and Rumors of Coups

# Are the Strategists of Tension at Work in Bolivia?

BY FORREST HYLTON

In the 1970s, after Italy's 'Hot Autumn' of student and proletarian strikes, which far exceeded the reach of the Communist Party (PCI) and the trade unions, the CIA, in conjunction with an assortment of industrialists, politicians, generals, intelligence chiefs, and fascist paramilitaries grouped together in a secret society called P-2, helped implement a "strategy of tension" by subcontracting terrorist attacks and attributing them to the ultraleft. The goal was not so much to de-legitimize the latter as to target the moderate PCI, whose Eurocommunist theories about the parliamentary road to socialism were informed by the legitimate fear of a US-backed coup like the one that overthrew Salvador Allende in Chile in 1973. By the mid-1970s, the PCI offered to contain the growing crisis and control the ultraleft. This scared the far right. The "strategy of tension" was designed to create a climate of fear and instability — through terror — that would scare people away from the center-left, which could practically taste electoral victory. It was a bloody strategy, in that the slaughter of civilians was intrinsic to its success. One of the most infamous incidents of the period was the 1979 Bologna bombing, in which eighty people died.

In 1980, two of the men responsible, Stefano della Chaiæ and Pier Luigi Pagliai, played leading parts in the brutal "cocaine coup" that brought General Luis García Mesa to power in Bolivia on the back of foreign mercenaries, cocaine barons, and the Brazilian military. As in Italy, the principal "threat" in Bolivia came not from the ultraleft, but from the steady ascent of a center-left coalition (UDP) dedicated to reform and "responsible management" of capitalist crisis.

One of the UDP's most capable leaders, writer and orator Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz — who, as Senator, had initiated a "trial of responsibilities" against former dictator General Hugo Banzer Suárez — was "disappeared." In addition

to working to end government impunity, Quiroga had authored a bill that led to the nationalization of Gulf Oil in 1969, and he symbolized a tradition of resistance (the 'national-popular') that was mistakenly thought to have been vanquished after Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada's plans for a neoliberal order were implemented by President Victor Paz Estenssoro in 1985-86.

## CURRENT EVENTS

Times have changed, of course, and Bolivia today is not what it was twenty-five years ago. Yet a surprising and un-

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sual series of dinamitazos, or dynamite attacks, rocked La Paz on November 15, 17, and 24. The last was blamed on the Bolivian National Liberation Army (ELN-B), which, according to antiterrorist "theory," is an offshoot of its Colombian parent organization. Predictably, Hernán Aguilera Aparicio and Zacarías Tiburcio Mamani, accused of belonging to the ELN-B, were rounded up on November 25, though they proclaimed their innocence. Mamani supposedly "confessed" (presumably under torture) to belonging to the ELN-B, but the General Commander of the National Police, Coronel David Aramayo, confirmed that Aguilar Aparicio had worked for the rightwing Banzer-Quiroga gov-

ernment (1997-2002) for three years as a member of the staff for Trade Union Affairs under the Vice-Ministry of the Interior. His job was alternately to spy on and negotiate with trade union leaders. Curiously, while Aguilera Aparicio was sent to San Pedro to await trial on charges of terrorism on November 26 (he asked to for capital punishment, which does not exist in Bolivia, should evidence prove him guilty be found), Mamani was set free, though he is to be charged with complicity with terrorism. Judge William Dávila asked prosecutor Salomón Paniagua for evidence of Mamani's involvement in terrorism, which Paniagua failed to produce.

The dinamitazos came on the cusp of coup rumors first launched by President Mesa, then amplified by Evo Morales and MAS, and ratified by the Permanent Human Rights Assembly. Who was accused of plotting? According to Bolpress, one of Bolivia's two independent news agencies, retired and active military officials, factions of the MNR loyal to Sánchez de Lozada, Evo Morales and fractions of MAS, and, above all, the US Embassy, which reportedly asked for Mesa's resignation. MAS, Mesa, and the Human Rights Assembly preferred to be vague about who was conspiring, though Evo Morales stated, as ever, that the US Embassy and the MNR were behind it all. (Morales has announced coup plots so often since October 203 that few are still willing to listen.)

The coup rumors appear to be part of a de-stabilization plan that the Mesa administration, supported by MAS and representatives of "civil society," has not authored, but has shrewdly manipulated to warn against the potentially disastrous consequences of radical direct action. The dinamitazos — aimed at Mesa's TV station (PAT), the Officers' Circle, and the Ministry of Defense — weakened the already fragile illusion of executive authority and control. The dynamite attacks had a peculiar quality to them, though — there were no civilians in