

# Abroad

*Che's Revenge:*

## TROUBLE FOR BOLIVIA'S JUNTA

by James Kohl



In mid-May of this year, thugs employed by the Bolivian Ministry of the Interior beat to death Colonel Andrés Selich Chop in downtown La Paz. Selich, former commander of the U.S.-trained Ranger regiment, is best remembered as the "Hero of the Americas," an anti-communist zealot whose troops surrounded and defeated Che Guevara in 1968. There is, however, one part of the Guevara episode that Selich prefers to forget: the moment when Che, awaiting imminent execution, spat in his face. Subsequently, Selich parlayed his role in the capture and execution

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of Guevara into a successful military/political career. Instrumental in the rightist coup of August, 1971, Selich became Minister of Interior, where he refined Bolivia's instruments of political repression—notably torture—and became involved in numerous political plots.

Relieved from his cabinet position in December 1971, he became Bolivia's ambassador to Paraguay, until it was discovered that he was behind another unsuccessful coup attempt. He was stripped of his official positions and exiled. But he disappeared sometime in 1972 and was rumored to be heading back to Bolivia. Discovered early this year, he was taken to the Ministry of the Interior, where he experienced the torture techniques

which he himself had helped to develop before his fall from grace. He did not survive them: the official announcement said he had been killed by falling down a flight of stairs.

Ironically, the murder of Selich (who was wearing a ring taken from the dead Guevara) and government bungling of a cover-up, has definitively exposed the extent to which the present Bolivian government will go in repressing opposition. Other, more important developments, have escaped exposure.

The August 1971 coup, led by Colonel Hugo Banzer Suarez and other military and civilian rightists, has brought to power an unstable coalition government. Internationally the coup is a success for both the Nixon Admin-

istration and its hemispheric ally Brazil. Both countries contributed materially to the coup and subsequent consolidation of the Banzer regime. Brazilian military matériel was funneled into the country via air and surface routes in the Santa Cruz region where the revolt initially began. American support was immediately forthcoming in the critical period of post-coup consolidation. Initially \$22 million in special "Emergency Funds" were granted; total American aid to the regime is presently estimated at over \$60 million. Bolivia received over \$4 million in military aid alone, the largest sum granted a Latin American nation in 1972. In return the Banzer regime, despite official nationalistic rhetoric, has done its best to develop a "favorable" business climate—a euphemism for repression of critics and de-nationalization of the nation's sub-soil resources.

Meanwhile, the regime is caught in the midst of powerful cross-currents, not the least of which are the conflicting loyalties of its various adherents. Colonel Selich was a commander of the most Americanized military unit—even its name (Ranger) is American. Other influential officers represent pro-Brazilian, pro-Peruvian, pro-Argentine and pro-Chilean factions. Military officers hold key cabinet positions in the government, but their loyalty is questionable. An air of continual plotting surrounds garrisons and ministries, punctuated by numerous cabinet shake-ups and transfers and exile of garrison officers. Additional fissures separate junior and senior officers, army and air force, and officers whose training abroad has inclined them to competing ideologies and models of development.

Civilians are equally divided. Political control is exercised by a tiny white elite in a nation two-thirds Indian. A little over two decades ago Indian peasants were subjected to institutionalized forced labor and bought and sold with the land on which they lived and worked for white masters. The following years brought formal reform, but in practice the situation remains unchanged: the Indian majority is ruled by a white, Spanish-speaking dominant class. However, where political power at the national level was previously exercised by

representatives of the highland departments (which include the demographic, agricultural and cultural majority of the population), power is now held by representatives of the eastern, tropical lowlands.

These individuals, including President Banzer and Foreign Minister Mario Gutiérrez Gutiérrez, occupy a unique position in the Bolivian experience. At one time the lowlands were of secondary political and economic importance. But recent colonization programs, snowballing agricultural production and discovery of vast oil and mineral resources have accelerated capitalist penetration of the eastern lowlands. The Banzer coup has made the *camba* (easterner) a political reality.

*Cambas* in the present regime are characterized by racism, pro-Brazilianism and an authoritarian political philosophy expressed by a Falangist Party which evolved in the 1930's. Primary Falangist issues involve anti-communism, pro-Catholicism and a passionate commitment to reclamation of the seacoast lost to Chile in a 19th century war. Repression of a 1959 Falangist urban revolt in Santa Cruz by highland peasant militias served to focus and symbolize *camba* antipathy toward the Indian descendants of the historic Inca and Aymara peoples. Despite the fact that nearly all Bolivians share Indian blood, the Falangists cling to delusions of European racial purity and notions of cultural superiority.

It is interesting, in this regard, that a great many wealthy German agrobusinessmen have settled in the Santa Cruz region, and in a recent interview one of them discussed financial and personal participation in the August 1971 coup. European attention to Bolivia's German community began with the discovery of the Nazi war criminal Klaus Altmann, alias Klaus Barbie, the "Butcher of Lyon." Altmann, known internationally for sending thousands of Jewish children to Nazi death camps in France, is known in Bolivia as an influential entrepreneur. Public attention has uncovered land deals involving Altmann and the wives of President Banzer and ex-President Alfredo Ovando Candia. The Bolivian government has refused Altmann's extradition to France.

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The Falange, of limited middle and upper class constituency, nevertheless suffers dissension. Personalities and power, rather than ideological differences, continue to precipitate conflicts. Most recently Mario Gutiérrez Gutiérrez, party wheelhorse and foreign minister, suffered a serious reverse in Falangist in-fighting with Carlos Valverde. A past-Falangist guerrilla in the late 1950's, Valverde represents the extreme right of the party and his ascendancy suggests not only the drift of the Falange, but increasing fragmentation of the party.

Besides the military and Falange, the MNR (National Revolutionary Movement), the other third of the governing coalition, is seriously divided. Víctor Paz Estenssoro, an ex-president who represents the most conservative sector within the MNR, has come to lead a faction, not a party. His participation in the coalition has been denounced by nearly all the MNR's major political figures, some of whom were jailed in 1971-1972. Each month seems to bring further erosion of Paz Estenssoro's power within both his erstwhile party and the coalition which calls itself the FPN (Popular Nationalist Front).

**T**he governing coalition under President Banzer is clearly a formal alliance of diverse civil and military factions. It is to be expected, therefore, that the coalition should lack a coherent ideology. Thus the regime focuses on nationalism as a substitute for a concrete political philosophy and administrative program. Hatreds between MNR and Falange stem from the 1950's and a populist period of MNR rule and limited reforms (e.g. agrarian reform, nationalization of mines, universal suffrage) which the Falange opposed. At that time Falangist opposition included armed resistance, and its repression by the MNR has left a legacy of bitter hostility between the two groups.

Cooperation within the governing alliance is a necessary convenience to the two parties, but continuing enmity can be expected. Additionally, the military's tolerance of the MNR, which overthrew a military government in 1952 and then, briefly, disbanded the armed forces, rests only on

present needs for MNR civilian support. The increasing polarization of factions within the coalition presents a serious problem to the regime which may temporarily be averted, but cannot be solved, by repression and invocation of threats to national security.

Meanwhile, universities have been closed, faculties purged and hundreds of students executed since the first days of Banzer rule. Academics have joined leftist militants, outspoken clerics, trade union and peasant leaders, and personal enemies of government figures in prisons and makeshift jails throughout the country. Over 1000 political prisoners are presently detained and subjected to the government's violence. A few thousand of the more fortunate have managed to flee. Some have escaped dramatically, as in the prison escapes from Coati Island on Lake Titicaca and the jungle prison of Alto Madidi. Others have quietly slipped across the borders into neighboring Peru and Chile. No constitutional guarantees remain to protect the legal rights of the regime's opponents.

Given the extreme factionalism characteristic of Bolivia today, the question arises as to the basis of Banzer's power. Recent events strongly suggest the influence of powerful elements within the military aligned with representatives of the tropical eastern bourgeoisie and supported by the urban middle and upper classes. President Banzer and Falangists Mario Gutiérrez Gutiérrez and Carlos Valverde are well known defenders of eastern interests. Following a cabinet crisis generated by the death of Colonel Selich, important military figures with ties to eastern agrobusinessmen have moved into the ministries. Colonel Alberto Natusch Busch, minister of agriculture, Colonel Juan Pereda Asbun, minister of industry and commerce, and Colonel Walter Castro Avandaño, the new minister of interior, are all strong institutionalists committed to defense of military hegemony over unpredictable civilian politicians. Air Force Chief of Staff Colonel Luis Garcia Pereda, is closely tied to lowland Beni ranching interests.

Bolivian political instability has traditionally been resolved through

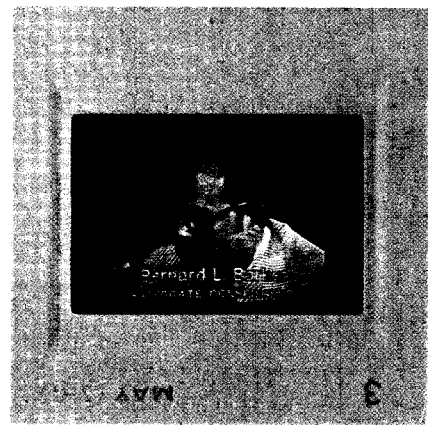
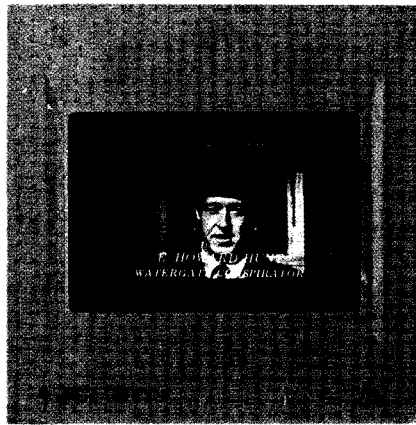
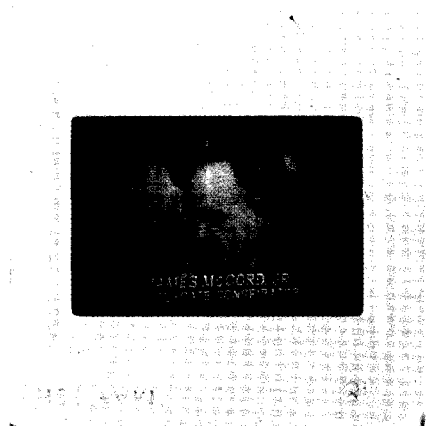
force of arms, and the military, despite its factions, has usually managed to express its will in national affairs. The one exception to this pattern was the MNR period of 1952-1964 which, ultimately, was terminated by a military coup. Thus far Banzer has managed to maintain significant military backing and has succeeded in defeating dangerous opponents such as the late Colonel Selich and recently exiled Generals Ayoroa and Zenteno Anaya.

The regime continues to direct its rhetoric toward alleged external threats to internal security. Chile and Cuba are generally presented as the sources of machinations against Bolivian security. Bolivia has lost territory to all her neighbors—Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Paraguay, Peru—through war and treaty. The issue of regaining the seacoast lost to Chile has been a Falangist concern for three decades and Foreign Minister Gutiérrez Gutiérrez has invoked threats of war to prompt serious discussion of a settlement.

Ironically for this pro-Brazilian regime, the real threat to national security will come from Brazil. Brazil, with its "economic miracle" based on repression of opposition, control of trade unions and catering to foreign multi-national interests, has serious designs on Bolivia. Prospective needs in terms of energy and steel resources have directed Brazilian attention to eastern Bolivia. Today some 30,000 Brazilian squatters have settled along both sides of the Bolivian-Brazilian border. This situation has historically precipitated crises resolved through war or the "pacific conquest" strategy initiated by the Brazilian Viscount of Rio Branco at the turn of the century. Bolivia has never emerged victorious from such confrontations and no reasonable prediction would forecast otherwise for the future.

Even if Bolivia can avoid indefinitely the threat of foreign military disaster, its fortunes do not now seem likely to prosper. Five years after the U.S. helped destroy Che Guevara and the embryo of rural guerrilla war, the regime in La Paz seems far from stability. Indeed, it appears set on a course which contradicts avowed nationalist goals, exacerbates social tensions and increases political fragmentation. The next call to popular insurrection may reach a more attentive audience. ■

# An Inside Look: Watergate and the World of the CIA



“Are these men really former CIA men or are they still subject to the orders of the CIA? The CIA would like to have it one way, and then to have it overlooked the other way.”

**E**xplosive as the Watergate revelations have been, no disclosure has been more ominous than the 1970 Domestic Intelligence Plan attributed to the pen of Tom Charles Huston. The plan, as revealed last June, provided for the use of electronic surveillance, mail coverage, undercover agents and other measures to an extent unprecedented in domestic intelligence-gathering. This program was to be directed by a committee of representatives from all of the national intelligence agencies. It goes far toward justifying the worst paranoia Americans have felt during the past quarter century over the growth of secrecy and deception in our government. Much of this anxiety relates to what might be called “the CIA Mentality,” the stealthy abuse of power and the practice of deception of the American public—all performed under the cloak of secrecy and often in the name of anticommunism and national security. In fact, what makes the Watergate

case different from other scandals is that the system and methods used, the means by which it was all planned, staffed with experts, financed clandestinely and carried out was all taken from the operating method of the CIA.

The Central Intelligence Agency was created, and its powers and responsibilities defined, by the National Security Act of 1947. Its character was developed over a span of 11 years by its greatest mentor and guiding spirit, Allen Welsh Dulles. The “Frankenstein” product of this implausible union of a well-intentioned law and of a scheming opportunist is the agency as we find it today.

Before 1953, when Dulles became the Director, Central Intelligence (DCI), the CIA was primarily concerned with performing its assigned task: as the central authority for all of the various intelligence organizations of the government, the CIA’s business was to collect and interpret information gathered by other intelligence units. But that all soon changed.

In 1948, President Truman established a committee to review the CIA, to make recommendations for improvement and to evaluate its past performance. The members of this committee were Allen Dulles, Mathias Correa, and William Jackson, and their report was without question the most important single document on this subject ever pub-

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*L. Fletcher Prouty was the Air Force officer in charge of Air Force support of the CIA, a position he held from 1955 to 1963. His office put him in constant contact with the top officers of the intelligence establishment, and he has traveled to over 40 countries at CIA request. He is one of the few people with inside knowledge of the CIA who was not required to take a lifetime oath of silence. His book, The Secret Team, is published by Prentice-Hall.*

by L. Fletcher Prouty