A History of Modern Latin America

1800 to the Present

SECOND EDITION

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12 Progress and Reaction

By the late twentieth century Latin America had grown immensely; its population increased from 61 million in 1900 to 200 million in 1968. Ten cities, spanning the region from south to north – Buenos Aires, Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, Recife, Santiago, Lima, Caracas, Bogotá, Mexico City, and Havana – already had more than 1 million inhabitants, and the region was becoming the most urbanized in the world. Class differences were apparent in cities, where a prosperous middle class was emerging, but the rising tide was not lifting all boats. The majority of laborers earned wages that kept them in persistent poverty; recent migrants from the countryside crowded into shantytowns mushrooming on the cities' outskirts. From the early 1960s until 1990, Latin America was one of the most turbulent regions on the world's political stage. Tensions pitted armed, nationalist movements for self-determination – generally influenced, if not fully guided, by socialist, anti-imperialist ideas – against pro-capitalist, multinational business interests loyal to landowning oligarchies, the military, and commercial elites. A variety of groups, political parties, and social movements embarked on a range of strategies to enact change. Although some movements for political and economic change turned to armed struggle, others sought to bring about reform through the electoral arena.

Modernization and Progress

Mexico, the only country, apart from Cuba, to have undertaken a prolonged social revolution in the twentieth century, fell into bureaucratic complacency that left social inequality intact, even at the cost of violently repressing dissent. The Party of the Mexican Revolution (PRM, *Partido de la Revolución Mexicana*) changed its name in

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1946 to the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI, *Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), with "institutional" the operative word. Although nominally a member of the Socialist International, the PRI no longer represented the socialist labor movement, intellectuals, and agrarian reformers, except through rhetorical flourishes every six years during presidential campaigns. The PRI had become a party of technocrats and bureaucrats; economists trained at the Harvard Business School and other graduates of North American MBA programs; entrepreneurs, professionals, and members of the expanding middle class. Its goals were prosperity and stability, to be achieved through traditional capitalist channels. In contrast to its attitude toward Cuba, which the United States continually berated for lack of a "two-party system" that mimicked its own, Washington was unconcerned that Mexico's PRI made little pretense of sharing power. Like the Liberal Democratic Party of Japan and India's Congress Party, the PRI emerged from the post-World War II era as a monolith that shifted electoral offices back and forth among competing factions of little ideological difference. Throughout the twentieth century sporadic violence, strikes, and peasant, student, and worker protests met with severe repression from police and military forces, most notably in the 1968 protests preceding the Olympic Games in Mexico City. Widespread demonstrations have broken out in the early twenty-first century as Mexicans have taken to the streets in protest over government corruption, complicity with drug cartels and violence, and inability to protect the citizenry.

In other areas of Latin America, especially the Southern Cone, tensions between left and right dominated politics during the 1960s and 1970s. The 1964 military coup in Brazil, followed by years of censorship and the dismantling of activist forces in trade unions, community organizations, universities, and religious orders, was the opening salvo in a string of dictatorships that enveloped the region for decades. Brazil's military junta drew the blueprint for what came to be known as the "National Security Regime," a particular form of authoritarianism characterized by systematic surveillance of the civilian population, combined with the use of torture and disappearance against sometimes randomly selected suspects, to instill widespread fear and compliance.

At this time the US government, working largely through the CIA, sought to ensure that Latin American allies followed a staunch anti-communist, pro-US business agenda. As a result, even moderate governments with little affection for communism and the Soviet Union, who were merely interested in a neutral stance regarding the two superpowers or who wanted to maintain diplomatic ties with Cuba, became the object of CIA intervention, resulting in a string of military coups stretching from Brazil in 1964 to Chile and Uruguay in 1973, and Argentina in 1976. The CIA maintained a base of operations in Panama and a Southern Command Headquarters in Paraguay, a country that all too well illustrated the results of maintaining a close alliance with the United States. Paraguay had barely been rebuilt since the genocidal War of Triple Alliance (1865–70); it languished under the 35-year military dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner (1912–2006). A staunch ally of the United States, Stroessner ruled from 1954 to 1989, during which time he brooked no opposition, under penalty of torture and death, while presiding over a people with one of the lowest income and literacy levels, and highest infant

mortality rates, in the hemisphere. The late Mexican novelist and political commentator Carlos Fuentes denounced what he saw as a dismal cycle:

> We start a democratic process, such as the one that took place in Guatemala in the forties and fifties, such as the one that took place in Chile in the seventies, and it is promptly destroyed, promptly intervened, and promptly corrupted by the same people who create the illusion that Latin Americans are incapable of governing themselves. If there has ever been a Catch 22 in history, it is this one.[1]

Brazil's Military Coup

The chain of events that led the military to intervene in 1964 against the democratically designated president João Goulart (1919–76) resembled events in Guatemala in the early 1950s. Like Juan Arévalo, Jânio Quadros (1917–92) won the presidency, in 1961, on the basis of promises to take a neutral stance in foreign policy, increase manufacturing and overall industrial growth, lay the groundwork for a broader participatory democracy, and take up the issue of land reform. Communist-inspired Peasant Leagues under the leadership of Francisco Julião (1915–99) were demanding equitable distribution of land and higher wages for rural workers in a massive campaign that penetrated 13 of Brazil's then 22 states (currently 26). The Peasant Leagues, or *ligas*, pursued a number of strategies, encouraging peasants to seize unoccupied land, and uniting rural workers into trade unions through which they demanded higher wages, better living conditions, and regulated hours. Operating under the slogan "land reform by law or by force," the *ligas* were prepared to take up arms to win demands if peaceful tactics failed.

Agitation in the early 1960s was not limited to land issues, nor were the *ligas* the only activists. Members of the Catholic clergy, supported by activist bishops, urban trade unionists, students, and professionals, were increasingly vocal in calling for schooling and medical care for the urban and rural poor, decent wages, and improved access to water, roads, public transportation, and other services needed to guarantee a better quality of life for the majority of the country's citizens. Conditions at home, combined with the example of the Cuban Revolution, inspired a generation of young Brazilian activists to replicate the socialist revolution that was claiming to bring equality to Cuba. Reminiscent of the chain of events in Guatemala, Quadros's timid responses to agitation from the left met with heated opposition from conservative landowners, industrialists, and politicians. In a land where powerful rural bosses had exerted unchecked raw force since colonial times (a situation immortalized in the tales of Brazil's foremost novelist, Jorge Amado), attempts to impose even moderate reforms met with outrage. They called on their allies in the military and police to crush rural workers, small landowners, and impoverished peasants who occupied disputed landholdings. In a gamble that backfired, the beleaguered Quadros resigned after only a year in office, speculating that he would be reinstated since the prospect of the more radical vice-president, João Goulart, becoming president would be completely unacceptable to hard-line conservatives. Quadros miscalculated, however, and Goulart, with the backing of a group of powerful politicians, became president in August 1961.

From the very first days, rumors of a military takeover swirled around Goulart's presidency, serving as a powerful brake on the few reforms the government hoped to enact. The rural oligarchy's refusal to consider agrarian reform was joined by business interests in Brazil and in the United States who viewed the political situation as unstable, especially when Goulart's closest political ally, Leonel Brizola (1922–2004), the governor of Rio Grande do Sul, nationalized a subsidiary of International Telephone and Telegraph (IT&T). Multinational companies interested in reaping high profits counted on a docile workforce that would tolerate meager wages and abysmal working conditions, and on a government that offered favorable tariff agreements, low taxes, and lax enforcement of health and safety laws. In the United States, the Lyndon Johnson Administration was less than pleased. In an era of intense Cold War rivalry between the United States and the communist world, exacerbated by the successful Cuban Revolution and widening conflict in Southeast Asia, the United States distrusted any political leader who sought to maintain a middle ground or spoke of even moderate reform. Vice-President Goulart had traveled to China (and was there when Quadros resigned), which angered a US State Department that considered any attempt by Latin American governments to forge a non-aligned foreign policy as contrary to US interests; friendly relations with "Red" China were out of the question. Finally, Goulart's mismanagement of state affairs and hesitancy in dealing with a considerable opposition made his term in office precarious from the start.

In early 1964 the expected began to unfold. On March 31 troops under the command of General Olímpio Mourão Filho (1900–72) marched on the federal capital in Rio de Janeiro, setting the coup in motion. Other branches of the military joined within hours and, under the leadership of General Humberto Castello Branco (1900–67), deposed the legal government. João Goulart flew into exile in Uruguay, where he lived until dying of a heart attack in 1976. Many initially greeted the military intervention enthusiastically, including most of the media, the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, the business and political elite, and even a group of prosperous women who believed that Goulart's policies had caused prices to climb and granted their maids too many rights. On the other hand, some sectors that greeted the coup warmly, in hopes that it would halt rampant inflation and instability, drew back as the full force of the military's repression, especially the arrest and torture of thousands of citizens, unfolded. The United States promptly recognized the military regime and set about negotiating a generous military and economic aid package. This warm relationship continued through the string of dictators that ruled Brazil from 1964 until the return of democracy in 1988, despite the regime's widely publicized human rights violations.

The National Security State

For the working class, the rural and urban poor, the landless, homeless, and illiterate, as well as democratic forces, the coup was a severe setback. The 1964 coup d'état ushered in a new type of military regime. Rather than a government based on the

politics of personal clientelism and corruption, the new regime adopted a bureaucratic and institutional military rule. In contrast with the single, self-interested rule of Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic, Anastasio Somoza in Nicaragua, or Fulgencio Batista in Cuba, for example, the Brazilian model demonstrated an ideological commitment by the full military bureaucracy to hold power. Beginning in 1964, a coalition of generals sought to transform both state and society, introducing a model of national economic growth secured within a controlled environment that permitted virtually no opposition. The national security state evolved over a number of years. Originally, from 1964 until 1967, Brazil's military junta ruled through a series of exceptional measures without changing the basic structure of the government. At the same time, they began a process of rewriting the national constitution. In 1967 a compliant Congress ratified a new constitution that allowed indirect elections for president; however, only military leaders could be candidates. It granted the president the right to govern through decree, even when the legislature was in session, effectively eliminating congressional disagreement or debate. While on paper laws existed to protect individual rights, they were either not enforced or constantly nullified by decrees to ensure "national security." What began as a "moderate" military dictatorship in 1964, based on purging the system of opponents while keeping some institutions of civil society in operation, turned more repressive in the midst of growing opposition a few years later.

Latin America's Youth Movement

In Brazil, and throughout the world, 1968 was a pivotal year. It began with the "Tet Offensive" – in which the Viet Cong army shocked the world by demonstrating its ability to overpower American forces in the heart of Saigon and the rest of South Vietnam – and continued on as a period marked by student protests in Paris and among university-aged youths in the United States, Western and Eastern Europe, and Japan, culminating in a bloody massacre of students before the opening of the Olympic Games in Mexico City. In Brazil, students mounted huge demonstrations against the generals, joined by powerful sections of the industrial working class in São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro. Seeing the "communist threat" everywhere, fearing the rise of an opposition movement among workers, intellectuals, and even some of the traditional elites, and equating any call for democracy with subversion, the regime cracked down. Late in 1968 the military began to govern through a series of institutional acts added to the framework of the constitution. Institutional Act 2 allowed for indirect elections, dissolved all existing political parties, and created two new ones: the Brazilian Democratic Movement Party (PMDB, *Partido do Movimento Democrático Brasileiro*) as the opposition party (at least on paper), and the National Renovating Alliance (ARENA, *Aliança Renovadora Nacional*) as the pro-government party. For so-called crimes against a broadly interpreted notion of "national security," Institutional Act 5 suspended the legislature, forced three Supreme Court judges into retirement, eliminated many lower court judges, and suspended habeas corpus (the right to challenge detentions and imprisonment).

Mexico

In Mexico, ostensibly a democracy and thus unlike Brazil, students directed their anger at the official party, the PRI. They decried the failure of the 1910 Revolution to right the wrongs of society, and noted that, despite the half-century since the Constitution of 1917, a majority of Mexicans and all but a handful of indigenous people lived in poverty. They contended that Mexico's opposition to US imperialism rang hollow, despite its refusal to join the US-mandated 1961 OAS boycott of Cuba. The Mexican left argued that the PRI maintained diplomatic relations with Cuba only so long as none of the nation's social reforms reached Mexico. In hopes of winning peace at home and prestige abroad, Mexico launched a full-scale campaign to host the 1968 Olympics. The effort succeeded, and despite complaints that sponsoring the Olympics would deplete valuable resources needed for social programs, Mexico became the first Latin American country to host the games. At a cost of $200 million, an astronomical figure at the time, Mexico began an ambitious building project in the capital, including hotels, housing for athletes, tourists, and visiting dignitaries, massive stadiums and athletic facilities, and even a new subway system.

Throughout the summer before the games were to open, unrelated intermittent protests based on inter-school rivalries, and a few full-scale riots, broke out in Mexico City high schools. A peaceful demonstration celebrating the July 26 anniversary of the Cuban Revolution turned violent when the *granaderos* (police riot squads) overreacted in an attempt to disperse the participants. By August the demonstrations were constant and had spread to most high schools, as well as the major universities in Mexico City. Tension mounted as the opening date of the Olympics drew near and the demonstrations grew in size; one in the Zócalo, Mexico City's central plaza, called by the student strike committee, attracted nearly a million people, making it one of the largest demonstrations in the city's history, and certainly the largest protest since the days of the Revolution. Although centered on student demands, the protests began to attract supporters from broader sectors of society, including the working class and even rural peasants, who added their own grievances to those of the students. The police once again met the protests with extreme violence, bringing in tanks and unleashing the *granaderos*, who fired on the crowds. By the end of the summer, some students had been killed; many had been beaten and jailed.

The Massacre at Tlatelolco

During subsequent months the demonstrations began to die back; however, a group of militant students called a demonstration for October 2, 1968, in the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco area of central Mexico City. The rally at first drew only 5,000–6,000 participants, many of them neighborhood residents who stopped to watch on their way home from work. Also at the Plaza were a number of people who were chatting and socializing, children playing games before the evening meal, and a number of passers-by, who were simply in the vicinity. Without warning, the police

stormed the Chihuahua apartment complex, a 13-story building on the Plaza, and other police, already posted inside, opened fire on demonstrators, onlookers, and children alike. Troops advanced, helicopters circled and dropped flares. In one of the most shocking shows of force in Mexican history, hundreds of people were killed outright, and others died en route to the hospital. Reports that surfaced later revealed that police pulled the wounded from ambulances that were trying to take the victims to hospitals, military vehicles prevented medical personnel from reaching the wounded, and hospital emergency rooms near the Plaza were invaded by the military, who dragged bodies back into the street. The government attempted to dismiss the entire event, claiming that fewer than 30 people had died (observers put the number at between 300 and 500), that the students had initiated the attack, and that the police and *granaderos* had actually exercised restraint in the face of wild provocations from the demonstrators. However, the presence of a large contingent of international press in the city to cover the Olympics revealed the true story to the world. Nonetheless, the Olympics went ahead as scheduled and the government moved swiftly to cover up the event, which came to be known as the Massacre at Tlatelolco. So long as the PRI remained in power, the 1968 incident was seldom mentioned.

The PRI's loss of the presidency in 2000 laid the basis for a full investigation of the Massacre and of the disappearance of hundreds of other dissidents during the 1970s. In 2006, two days before the close election that pitted the candidate of the National Action Party (PAN, *Partido Acción Nacional*), Felipe Calderón (b. 1962), against the candidate of leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD, *Partido de la Revolución Democrática*), Andrés Manuel Lopéz Obrador (b. 1953), a judge ordered the arrest of the 84-year-old former president Luis Echeverría (b. 1922), for his responsibility in the killing of the students in 1968 and the disappearance and deaths of hundreds more while he was president from 1970 to 1976. The timing of his arrest led PRD supporters to argue that the current PAN president, Vicente Fox, was attempting to win support for Calderón by showing his ability to get tough on past human rights violations, and thus turn attention away from criticisms of his own conservative administration's record of abuse, especially against the indigenous population in Oaxaca and the more remote area of Chiapas. (Echeverría was held under house arrest until his release in 2009 when a federal judge cleared him of all charges.)

Throughout Latin America the experience of the Mexican students reverberated against a continuing chain of demonstrations and upheaval. In 1968 the Brazilian dictatorship entered its most repressive phase. The institutions of civil society either disappeared or were restructured; military officers presided over all universities; student groups were closely monitored; and many of the country's leading intellectuals, artists, musicians, and writers went into exile. In other countries, however, the intensity of student protests mirrored that of those occurring elsewhere throughout the world, and Cuba remained a beacon of inspiration for revolutionary change, despite Castro's embrace of the Soviet Union, which was in turn suppressing pro-democracy activists in Czechoslovakia, East Germany, and other areas of Eastern Europe. In Latin America the 1970s opened with the election in Chile of a socialist head of state. Argentina saw the return, and demise, of Juan Perón, Latin America's best-known populist and

demagogue, while elsewhere some of the continent's most brutal military regimes held sway. The decade drew to a close with the Sandinistas' victory in Nicaragua, after a decade of fighting. The late 1960s and 1970s saw Latin American nations traveling down vastly divergent paths, few of them peaceful.

The Chilean Road to Socialism

Chile, hemmed in as it is by high Andean peaks along its entire eastern side, is a 4,000-mile-long, string-bean-shaped country. With a population of just 11 million in the late 1960s, Chile had a limited domestic market for its own manufactures and agricultural products. The economy mainly relied on the export of copper from mines owned and controlled by the US-based Kennecott and Anaconda companies. In 1960 the two mines accounted for 11 percent of the country's gross national product, 50 percent of its exports, and 20 percent of government revenue, pumping $150–200 million a year into the economy. Despite this heavy reliance on commodity exports to support internal growth, on the surface Chile's economic house appeared stable, though closer scrutiny revealed otherwise. A key issue was unemployment and seasonal unemployment, since neither the landholding system nor the copper mines utilized large numbers of laborers. Land was used mainly for raising sheep and cattle, neither of which demanded much care. With a few farm hands, and the addition of more in the busy season, ranchers could tend large herds of livestock, harvest crops, slaughter animals, shear wool, and maintain their operation.

With so much of Chile's economy reliant on copper exports, and the mines under the control of foreign corporations, the economy was vulnerable to demand fluctuations of the international commodity chain. During wartime (including World War II, the Korean War, and then the Vietnam War) copper prices were high, since it is an essential mineral used in war materiel. In the late 1960s, however, prices fell when the military market was glutted with copper and demand declined. President Eduardo Frei (1911–82) of the dominant Christian Democrat Party, who held office from 1964 to 1970, attempted unsuccessfully to resolve Chile's development problems, including breaking the inflation–stagnation economic cycle resulting from a too-heavy reliance on exports and on the narrow, consumer-driven market. These constant problems, combined with discontent over low wages and massive inequalities in income distribution, laid the groundwork for the success and ultimate victory of a new approach proposed by the Popular Unity (UP, *Unidad Popular*) coalition. With the right and center divided, Salvador Allende, a medical doctor and perennial Socialist Party candidate, squeaked into office with 36 percent of the vote and the narrow approval of Congress, which ultimately decided the outcome in favor of the UP.

The forces of conservatism (landed oligarchy, multinational and domestic corporate executives, the Catholic Church, rightists in the military and the media) moved into action to stymie implementation of the UP political program. Similarly, the election of a socialist, no matter what his particular program might be, attracted the attention of high-level US government officials, many of whom had been actively working since the

1960s to prevent the rise to power of a politician on a reformist ticket. After Allende's election they shifted from surveillance and intelligence gathering to direct action, justified by Henry Kissinger's (b. 1923) cavalier dismissal of the Chilean elections. The US Secretary of State and former National Security Advisor to President Richard Nixon (1913–94) reportedly remarked: "I don't see why we should have to stand by and let a country go communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people."[2]

The UP experience in the early 1970s was a microcosm of the deep-seated dilemmas and divisions facing many Latin American societies. Allende came to power through elections, not through armed struggle along the lines of Castro's Cuba or Guevara's *foco* strategy. As such he was tied to a program of redistributing wealth and mounting social reforms within the confines of a constitutional process, even in the face of intense opposition from an entrenched elite and powerful military at home, and a hostile set of policymakers and corporate managers abroad. Peter Winn's book *Weavers of Revolution* captures the essence of that tug of war as it played out on the shop floor of a single domestic textile plant owned by Juan and Amador Yarur. According to Winn: "Yarur came to symbolize both the demise of the old regime and the new socialist order struggling to be born."[3] In a pattern that mimicked the broader struggle in Chilean society, older, unskilled, socially conservative workers lived in fear of being fired, aware as they were that their minimal education provided them few other options in society. Begrudgingly or not, they had become resigned to their exploitation and grateful for the occasional bonus or Christmas roasting hen that the Yarur management doled out to loyal workers. In the 1960s, a younger, better educated, and socialist-inspired workforce launched a union-organizing drive, rejected the owners' paternalism, and demanded decent wages, rational work rules, employee benefits, and modern working conditions. Yarur thus represented a microcosm of Chile, where a younger, more militant segment of the population was mobilizing for change, both at the ballot box and on the factory floor, and coming up against a traditional society that feared it.

To create chaos in the Chilean economy and undermine President Allende, and with the financial support of the Anaconda and Kennecott copper giants, International Telephone and Telegraph and other major multinationals, factory owners in Chile cut back on production. With ample funding from the fiercely anti-communist US labor federation, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), independent truckers refused to deliver goods to cities, thereby sparking widespread shortages and inflation. At the same time, throughout the country the UP's program was being put into practice by ordinary people who supported Allende, sometimes without any officially sanctioned right to do so. When owners abandoned factories, workers took them over, expropriated the property from under the old owners, and began to work the machines on their own. Peasants occupied land long denied them, and shantytown dwellers moved into vacant lots and set up soup kitchens and rudimentary housing. Caught between a rock and a hard place, the constitutional government was powerless to stop the insurrection from below, while fully aware that the more the poor demanded, the more precarious was Allende's chance of remaining in power. Leadership for an aggressive confrontation with the right came from university students and militant youths in the radical left-wing Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR,

Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionária), a group that supported the UP but claimed that Allende's only security lay in arming the workers and peasants and moving more rapidly with factory and land occupations to stave off the imminent assault from the right. As Allende was maneuvering for gradual change, the MIR was calling for armed struggle in the spirit of Che Guevara.

The Chilean Road to Socialism Dead Ends

On the morning of September 11, 1973, the military, under the leadership of General Augusto Pinochet (1915–2006), an army officer who had managed to neutralize or eliminate military officers loyal to Allende and the Constitution, began the bombardment of the Moneda, Chile's presidential palace. A fleet of US navy warships took up positions off the port at Valparaíso, in a move reminiscent of the gunboat diplomacy the United States had exerted earlier in the century, and a group of US military advisors gathered in the coastal town of Viña del Mar with the Chilean military. Despite repeated denials from US government officials, declassified documents have since shown that Nixon and Kissinger, along with public and private intelligence agencies, were apprised of, and even enmeshed in, the planning and executing of the military takeover. Allende died in the Moneda, most likely taking his own life. His close associates were apprehended and killed, or fled into exile. Military leader General Augusto Pinochet moved swiftly to close Congress and ban all media outlets supportive of Allende or opposed to the military takeover. Universities were purged of opposition; the military ruled through executive order; and Chile entered the dark days of repression, torture, disappearance, and death for thousands of activists who were unable or unwilling to leave. For a while militants remained inside the country, attempting to mount resistance to the junta, but many who tried were rounded up and their organizations crushed and dismantled. An estimated 1 million people left the country.

The efficacy of the "Chilean Road to Socialism" would be debated in years to come: Did the UP fail because the left pushed too hard, thus precipitating the military coup? Did sabotage from the right leave the UP with no other choice but to mobilize in an attempt to save the social gains Allende had promised and even initiated? Was it possible to transform a society through the ballot box, especially in countries of Latin America with deep-rooted militaries and powerful oligarchies? Was it the United States, the CIA, and the multinational corporations who overturned Allende's government, or were the contradictions between the agenda of the left and the powerful interests on the right, between rich and poor, and between competing definitions of revolutionary strategy within Chilean society most responsible? Because Chile's economy partially revived under military rule, some economists contend that the dictatorship brought prosperity to a disorganized economic order, while others argue that the massive sell-off of public resources that characterized the Pinochet period actually undermined the nation's economy. Throughout the years of the dictatorship, income distribution was highly unequal and suffering and persecution was widespread (Figure 12.1).

Figure 12.1 Isabel Reveco, a forensic anthropologist, shows Chilean Judge Juan Guzmán the remains of persons presumed "disappeared" during the Pinochet regime, ca. 2000. (Patrick Zachmann/Magnum Photos)

Questions about the Allende government persist into the twenty-first century, especially because Chile is now in its third socialist administration since the return to democracy in 1990. After years of legal wrangling, including a dramatic house arrest in London and eventual deportation back to Chile to face charges on human rights abuses, kidnapping, and murder, General Pinochet died before going to trial. Other officers have been charged and convicted in what remains a long-running attempt to redress the grievances caused by the lengthy and brutal dictatorship.

Urban Guerrilla Warfare: Uruguay

Overshadowed by the more widely publicized military takeover in Chile, the events in Uruguay were possibly even more tragic in terms of the chain of events that led to the destruction of a vital democracy. Nearly the smallest country of South America, Uruguay for much of the twentieth century was reputedly one of the most prosperous. In events similar to those in Argentina, early genocidal campaigns against the indigenous people left the plains and rolling hills vacant of inhabitants. Uruguay welcomed immigrants, mostly from Italy, some from Spain and other parts of Europe, who

settled on the land and developed the main economic enterprise: agriculture. In 1903 José Batlle y Ordóñez (1856–1929) assumed the presidency after a protracted civil war between conservative and liberal factions. His efforts at unifying the country and establishing a complex social welfare system are credited with raising Uruguay's standard of living to a level on a par with that of industrialized European nations. Its advanced social system, cosmopolitan capital and major port city of Montevideo, and long-running, stable democracy earned it the nickname "Switzerland of the Americas." With an economy heavily reliant on agricultural exports, especially beef, mutton, hides, and tallow, as well as wheat and other grains, Uruguay prospered during both world wars, particularly World War II. When world food prices dropped after war-ravaged Europe and Asia recovered, Uruguayan exports plummeted, and the nation entered a crisis for which it was quite unprepared. Social services were cut, wages fell for the unionized workforce that had been accustomed to fair compensation for their labor, and social tension mounted. By the 1960s the period of economic and political stability had begun to unravel, and the government faced widespread opposition from the students, workers, and low-income families who were bearing the brunt of economic hardship.

Like their counterparts in other Southern Cone countries, Uruguayan students and radical young professionals spearheaded an underground guerrilla movement that was for many years one of the most daring and successful organizations of its type in Latin America, if not beyond. Named after the Inca revolutionary Túpac Amaru II, who fought against the Spanish colonial army in late eighteenth-century Peru, the "Tupamaros" attracted members of trade unions, peasants from some of the poorest rural areas, and university students. Initially the Tupamaros staged highly creative, and popular, "Robin Hood-type" guerrilla actions, such as robbing banks and invading food warehouses and distributing the cash and food to the poor. They became well known for publishing exposés of graft and corruption among businessmen and politicians, much to the embarrassment of Uruguay's elite. The Tupamaros had both an underground revolutionary organization and an above-ground counterpart organized into the *Frente Amplio* (Broad Front), a coalition of many parties representing the left and center-left, which was effective in winning support for the clandestine movement among some sectors of the population, but not enough to win electoral office, as the UP was able to do at roughly the same time in Chile.

By the late 1960s their tactics escalated to political kidnappings and assassination. Their most spectacular feat was the kidnapping and subsequent assassination in 1970 of Dan Mitrione, a USAID public safety officer who was known for his role in training police throughout Latin America in surveillance and torture methods. Manuel Hevia Cosculluela, a Cuban double agent who spent eight years with the CIA, credits Mitrione with a torture lesson plan: "The precise pain, in the precise place, in the precise amount, for the desired effect."[4] He reportedly built a soundproof basement in his house in Montevideo where he demonstrated his technique to local police using neighborhood beggars as subjects. *State of Siege*, an internationally released film by the Greek-French film director, Costa-Gavras, was based on Mitrione's capture and interrogation. The French actor Yves Montand's riveting portrayal of a bland, unnamed USAID agronomist stands in for Mitrione.

From 1969 through 1971 the Tupamaros successfully kidnapped and held for ransom a powerful bank manager, Pereyra Rebervel, and Geoffrey Jackson, England's ambassador to Uruguay (in one case in exchange for the release of political prisoners and in the other as a guarantee that national elections would proceed on schedule). As the economic crisis deepened, the military and police escalated their war against the insurgents. Soon the civilian government collapsed, and the army seized power in 1973, ushering in 11 years of military rule that were among the most repressive in all of Latin America. Montevideo, once a stunning port city of European-style architecture similar to Buenos Aires, fell into disrepair; a huge number of Uruguayans emigrated to Australia, Europe, and other countries of Latin America; and much of Uruguay's prosperous middle-class life ceased to exist.

In 1984, after over a decade of stultifying repression, the dictatorship ended. In the same wave that restored democratic governments in Argentina and Brazil, the military stepped down in Uruguay, and Julio María Sanguinetti became president of a country that the military had all but destroyed. In a general amnesty, Tupamaros held in prison for over a decade were released; they regrouped under the *Frente Amplio* and began winning elections. Tabaré Vásquez (b. 1940), a medical doctor who trained in France, became the first president to win on the *Frente Amplio* ticket in 2004. In office from 2005 until 2010, Vásquez introduced a number of social and political reforms, including improving education and health care, providing food assistance to the poor, and investigating human rights violations that had taken place under the military dictatorship. He ordered the military to cooperate with forensic anthropologists to locate the sites, and unearth the remains from unmarked graves where Uruguayans who were apprehended and disappeared in the 1970s and 1980s had been buried. José Mujica (b. 1935), president from 2010 to 2015, was a member of the high command of the Tupamaros and participated in some of their most famous exploits, including twice tunneling out of high-security prisons. When democracy returned in 1984, he and his wife, Lucía Topolansky (b. 1944), also a Tupamaro and currently a senator, entered electoral politics. As president, Mujica introduced some of the most controversial measures in all of the Americas, including the legal possession of small amounts of marijuana, right to same sex marriage, and full reproductive rights for women, including abortion in the first trimester.

Urban Guerrilla Warfare: Argentina

Whereas Uruguay's path to armed conflict represented a dramatic shift away from years of European-style social democracy, Argentina's descent into a chaotic war between the military and police on the one hand, and urban guerrilla organizations on the other, constituted yet another chapter in that nation's twentieth-century struggle between left and right. For the most part, the right held power through a string of military governments. In the 1940s and 1950s the Peronist government, despite its corruption and uneven record of defending the masses, had managed to wring from the traditional oligarchy and industrialists concessions that improved the lives of many working people.

From 1970 to 1976 Argentine politics began another tug of war and, although there were many players, this round of the struggle pitted the government, supported by military and paramilitary forces, against powerful underground urban guerrilla combatants. What led to this shift?

After he was deposed in 1955, Juan Perón had spent his time in exile as the guest of a series of right-wing governments: in Paraguay, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, and Panama, where he met his third wife, nightclub dancer María Estela (Isabel) Martínez. He eventually settled in Spain. In Argentina, despite years of military rule interspersed with civilian governments supported by the urban middle class, Peronism, with its contradictory strains of social welfare, personalist demagoguery, and corruption, lingered just below the surface of Argentine political life, permeating civil society institutions, especially the trade union federation. For its part, the military was presiding over a nation in economic chaos, resulting from the accumulation of an enormous foreign debt that in turn fed inflation, as the government borrowed more and more money from abroad to make payments and stabilize Argentine society. By the late 1960s the central government was unable, or unwilling, to wring concessions from the oligarchy in order to increase wages, offset rising hunger, or hold onto a modicum of support from middle-class consumers unable to buy essentials, much less luxuries. The government attempted to install wage and price controls by printing money in hopes of staving off the crisis, but this simply contributed to spiraling inflation.

Confronting constant demonstrations and increasing attacks from guerrilla movements, especially the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP, *Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo*) and the leftist, Peronist-inspired Montoneros, the government decided to allow the Peronists to field a candidate in the 1973 presidential elections. Winning with a bare 49 percent of the vote, Peronist candidate Héctor Cámpora (1909–80) assumed office in a caretaker capacity, awaiting Perón's return from exile later that year. On June 30, 1973, a crowd estimated at 3.5 million people came to Buenos Aires' Ezeiza Airport to welcome the 77-year-old Perón home from exile in Spain. This huge congregation included members of militant left- and right-wing Peronist groups, powerful trade unions, organized political parties, and a huge number of unaffiliated citizens who hoped that Perón's return would bring an end to the internal conflict. Instead, marksmen from the terrorist *Alianza Anticomunista Argentina* (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance), better known as the "Triple A," opened fire on the crowd, killing at least 13 and injuring hundreds. The Triple A was a far-right group under the leadership of José López Rega (1916–89), Perón's personal secretary who had accompanied him into exile. This event, known as the Ezeiza Massacre, marked the opening round in a battle between left and right factions of the Peronist movement that terrorized Argentina until the 1976 military coup. With Perón back in the country, Cámpora stepped down, thereby signaling the end of the left's hold on the presidency, and paving the way for Perón to run for president with his third wife as vice-president. He won easily, garnering 62 percent of the vote.

During 1973–4 Perón failed (or refused) to unite and pacify the wings of the Peronist movement, opting instead to allow the military to hunt down and jail any supposed opponents of the regime. He had signaled in an August 1973 speech to the governors

of the country his disavowal of support for the Montoneros, for the tactics of discontented youth, and for the strategy of guerrilla warfare. Perón's 1973 speech was the signal that drove the entire guerrilla opposition permanently underground, and members of above-ground mass organizations ceased to operate openly. After less than a year of corrupt, ineffectual, and repressive time in office Perón died on July 1, 1974. His vice-president and 43-year-old wife Isabel assumed office in the fourth civilian government in less than a year. With no governmental experience, and less political sense, Isabelita Perón was a disaster, her presidency nothing short of a catastrophe. From 1974 until the military stepped back into formal power in March 1976, the government was actually in the hands of José López Rega, who served as the president's confidant, astrologer, and henchman. From his position as Minister of Social Welfare, López Rega directed the "Triple A" paramilitary death squads, who worked in tandem with the army, navy, and air force to terrorize the population into submission (see Box 12.1).

In response, guerrilla movements stepped up their opposition. The Montoneros, the largest of the groups, had achieved a high level of notoriety as a result of their daring bank robberies and kidnappings, and were known to have accumulated a very substantial cache of money from multinational corporations who paid protection money to ensure the safety of their executives. Formed in 1964, the Montoneros were a clandestine army with broad influence in the above-ground opposition movement, including trade unionists, university students, and community activists. Although they claimed the mantle of Perón, especially the social welfare programs run by Eva Perón in the 1940s and 1950s, the Montoneros stood apart from conservative trade union leaders, whom they criticized for refusing to oppose the fascist tendencies of López Rega and other right-wing Peronists.

Dictatorship and State Terror

On March 24, 1976, the military, under the leadership of General Jorge Rafael Videla (1925–2013), overthrew Isabel Perón's government and launched a single two-pronged campaign they labeled a military "War Against Subversion," and an economic front called the National Reorganization Process (*Proceso de Reorganización Nacional*). Both strategies were joined in what came to be known as *el Proceso*.[5] For seven years, from 1976 to 1983, the army embarked on a political program no previous government, civilian or military, had attempted: to wipe out all vestiges of Peronism (ignoring ideological distinctions) and its organizations, along with the last remnants of democratic, civil society. The military dictators outlawed all representative bodies, silenced the legal opposition, and began arresting anyone they deemed suspicious using the pretense of combatting the ERP and Montoneros. However, it is widely assumed that the guerrillas had lost most effectiveness by early 1976, months before the military coup, only to be soundly eliminated, along with all opposition, during the reign of state terror.

Under the guidance of the Minister of the Economy, José Alfredo Martínez de Hoz (1925–2013), the junta instituted a set of neoliberal reforms based on driving down the cost of labor and borrowing from abroad. Employing a strategy similar to that of the

Box 12.1 The United States and Operation Condor

Declassified government documents show that the United States was supportive of a plan called "Operation Condor," a secret alliance linking the military dictatorships of Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, Uruguay, and Brazil that coordinated the arrest, detention, disappearance, and torture of dissidents in these countries during the 1970s and 1980s. Under the military dictatorship of Alfredo Stroessner, Paraguay served as the center for this coordination and the conduit between the military regimes and the United States. In a cable from US Ambassador Robert White (Paraguay) to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, sent October 20, 1978, the ambassador states in part:

> On October 11 I called again on Chief of Staff (Paraguay) Alejandro Fretes Dávalos. He read me the Acta or Summary Minutes resulting from the visit of General Orozco, Chief of Intelligence to Asunción …

The document is basically an agreement to coordinate all intelligence resources in order to control and eliminate subversion. It speaks of exchange of information, prompt use of communication facilities, monitoring of subversives, and their detention and informal handover from one country to the other. It repeats over and over the need for full cooperation and mutually facilitative acts in the context of a fight to the death against subversion …

> Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay make of [sic] the net, although Uruguay is now almost on the inactive list … They keep in touch with one another through U.S. communications installations in the Panama Canal Zone which covers all of Latin America.

Source: From *National Security Archive* (2001: 1). Available online: www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/

Pinochet government in Chile, the Argentine junta won the allegiance of the elite, and to some extent the urban middle class, by assuming $15 billion in private debt, bolstering economic growth with higher spending on military materiel and internal defense, and dramatically lowering wages by effectively outlawing unions and arresting and disappearing labor activists. A month after the coup, and amidst reports of widespread human rights abuses in Argentina, Washington approved $50 million in military aid to the junta. At the urging of the United States, on March 27, 1976, three days after the coup, the IMF extended the military government $127 million in credit. Subsequently, with the assistance of David Rockefeller, a personal friend of Martínez de Hoz, the IMF and Chase Manhattan Bank extended a series of generous loans totaling $1 billion. The working class fared less well. Wages lost nearly 40 percent of their purchasing power,

unemployment rose to 18 percent, although it was never officially acknowledged (an annoying Argentine ploy, then as now), and industrial output fell by 20 percent. The economic problems Argentina faced before the 1976 coup paled in comparison with the situation when it ended. In a mere seven years, the external debt alone jumped from $8 billion to $45 billion.

The repression of the 1970s and 1980s claimed the lives of more than 30,000 civilians, the vast majority of them never accounted for and simply "disappeared" from society without leaving behind any record of arrest, detention, or charges (Figure 12.2). On December 27, 1978, at the height of the war, the US Embassy officer in charge of human rights, F. Allen "Tex" Harris, wrote in his briefing memo to the US State Department that the "armed services had been forced to 'take care of' 15,000 persons in its anti-subversion campaign." Today that number is known to have been much higher, since the Federal Court of Argentina earlier that same year had compiled a secret document (made public after the dictatorship left power) reporting that 22,000 of the

Figure 12.2 The Navy School of Mechanics, or ESMA (*Escuela de Mecánica de la Armada*), Buenos Aires. The largest of the many torture centers spread throughout the city during the dictatorship, the ESMA continued as a school for training cadets while areas of the building served as torture cells, storage lockers for property stolen from prisoners, and a small "hospital" where young women gave birth before their babies were taken from them and given to friends of the military leaders. All but a handful of people taken to the ESMA "disappeared." (Andor Skotnes photo)

disappeared had been killed.[6] Years after the return to civilian government in 1983, a few conscience-stricken former military officers, such as navy captain Adolfo Scilingo, testified before the National Commission on Disappeared People. Scilingo described how prisoners were drugged, loaded onto military planes, and thrown out, naked and semi-conscious, into the Atlantic Ocean. Residents of towns along the Río de la Plata have for years discovered human remains washed up on the shore; more recently, mass graves have been exhumed in remote areas of the coastline, where either compliant or fearful citizens, along with military regiments, attempted to bury the evidence of the massive number of executions.

Who were the victims of *el Proceso*? The sweep of the military was broad and often indiscriminate. In factories and workplaces, unionists were sorted out and disappeared. At the Ford Motor plant, 25 union delegates were detained and disappeared inside the plant's very own clandestine detention center for days, weeks, or months until they were secretly transferred to the local police precinct, which had been transformed into a military center. According to Pedro Troiani, a union delegate for six years in the Ford plant in Pacheco until the 1976 coup, "The company used the disappearances to get rid of unionism at the factory." Similarly, an estimated 20 workers disappeared from the Mercedes-Benz plant, which had also been transformed into a clandestine torture and detention center. At least 46 workers from the offices of the Buenos Aires Provincial Bank were singled out for union-organizing activity, apprehended, and never seen again.

According to the Commission's report, *Nunca Más*, published in 1984 (translated into English as *Never Again*, 1986), most of those arrested and disappeared were university and high school students, young professionals and workers. Most had been active in political organizations – as noted in earlier chapters, the 1960s and 1970s were a time of youth and labor activism across the globe – but others were simply taken because their name was in the address book of a detainee. The overwhelming majority of those arrested and disappeared were under the age of 35, as, oddly enough, were the men and women who arrested, tortured, humiliated, and executed them. A disproportionate number were Jews; the military's anti-Semitism was documented in *Prisoner without a Name, Cell without a Number*, newspaper editor Jacobo Timerman's graphic testimony of his arrest and torture, published after an international outcry secured his release. In addition to the more than 30,000 disappeared and presumed dead, over 800,000 people left the country.

Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo

During the darkest period, from 1976 to 1982, the lone voices of public opposition belonged to a few mothers who began to gather in the plaza in front of the presidential palace, called the Casa Rosada (the Rose, or Pink, House). They began marching, at first on Sundays and later every Thursday, demanding to know the fate of their disappeared children. Wearing white scarves as a symbol of their children's diapers, and carrying photographs of their young adult sons and daughters, the Mothers of the Plaza

de Mayo began to draw international attention to the brutal repression the military had unleashed (Figure 12.3). They exposed the blind eye of most world governments in relation to human rights abuses in Argentina, and denounced the warm relationship between the US government and the generals. Recently declassified cables sent from Washington to Buenos Aires corroborate the Mothers' criticism, revealing that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in the days after the March coup, had ordered his subordinates to "encourage" the new regime by providing financial support (see Box 12.2).

The War of the Malvinas/Falkland Islands

Despite repression and forced austerity that reduced wages by 40 percent in a little over a year, the regime was unable to resolve the economic crisis. A record number of bankruptcies occurred in 1982; inflation soared from a destabilizing 300 percent in 1975–76 to 500 percent later in 1976, and the international debt continued to skyrocket. The economic crisis added to general disquiet at home, and mounting criticism from abroad over human rights abuses and highly publicized cases of disappearances.

Figure 12.3 The Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo (wearing white scarves embroidered with the names of their children and carrying a photograph) march every Thursday afternoon in front of the presidential mansion (Casa Rosada) in Buenos Aires, demanding to know the fate of their children and grandchildren who disappeared during the military regime. (Nancy Borowick photo)

Box 12.2 March 26, 1976 – State Department Staff Meeting Transcripts: Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Chairman, DECLASSIFIED SECRET

Two days after the military coup, Secretary of State Kissinger convened his weekly staff meeting. In this declassified secret transcript of the first conversation on Argentina, Assistant Secretary for Latin America William Rogers informs Kissinger that for the Argentine generals' government to succeed they will make "a considerable effort to involve the United States – particularly in the financial field." Kissinger responds "Yes, but that is in our interest."

Rogers advises that "we ought not at this moment rush out and embrace this new regime" because he expects significant repression to follow the coup. "I think also we've got to expect a fair amount of repression, probably a good deal of blood, in Argentina before too long. I think they're going to have to come down very hard not only on the terrorists but on the dissidents of trade unions and their parties." In response, Kissinger makes his preferences clear: "Whatever chance they have, they will need a little encouragement … because I do want to encourage them. I don't want to give the sense that they're harassed by the United States."

Other documents reveal that in September 1976 several Argentine military officers traveled to Washington where they met with Secretary Kissinger and other US officials. They returned to Argentina "euphoric" over the approval their tactics had received from the United States, especially from Kissinger, who, they reported, realized there would be "a lot of blood."

Source: National Security Archive. Available online: www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/news/

News that the children born to pregnant detainees were being sold for international adoption or turned over to military families after the babies' mothers had been killed was especially damaging to the military regime.

In an attempt to win popular support, the military launched in April 1982 a drive to take back the Islas Malvinas, or Falkland Islands, from the British, who had taken them from the Spanish in l833. Argentina's claim that the islands should have reverted to them along with the rest of the territory when the country achieved independence from Spain, had languished in international courts for years. General Leopoldo Galtieri (1926–2003), the military officer who launched the attack on the sparsely inhabited islands over 500 miles off the coast of Argentina, never thought Great Britain would defend their possession; in the language of modern invasions, he though it would be a "cake walk." Britain did, however, send a small but extremely well-equipped force, including nuclear-powered submarines, and dislodged the Argentine invaders in a matter of weeks. In addition, the Argentines miscalculated badly when they assumed the United States would side with them against the English, although such an assumption was not without basis. President Reagan had warmly received General Galtieri at the

White House when he visited Washington in 1981; the Argentine army was clandestinely training an army of "Contras" to dislodge the victorious Sandinistas from the government of Nicaragua; and the US ambassador to the United Nations, Jean Kirkpatrick, argued publicly, and unsuccessfully, in favor of allying with the Argentines against England. The fiasco of the Malvinas spelled the death knell of the military regime. The nationalist fervor that gripped the nation in April 1982, when the Argentine army boasted of its seizure of the islands from its former neocolonial power, had evaporated by June, when the starving army returned to Buenos Aires in humiliating defeat. General Galtieri resigned as head of the junta and his successor promised elections.

In 1983 the Radical Party candidate Raúl Alfonsín Foulkes (1927–2009) won the presidency and began the process of rebuilding the devastated economy and political structures. Alfonsín successfully prosecuted and imprisoned many of the previous military rulers and their collaborators, but was not able to turn around the economy or stem hyperinflation. In 1989, conservative Peronist candidate Carlos Saúl Menem (b. 1930) was elected president. He promptly pardoned many top military officers convicted of human rights violations and adopted a subservient stance toward the neoliberal policies of the IMF and World Bank in hopes of rehabilitating the economy, which included introducing a disastrous scheme of pegging the value of the peso directly to the dollar. Not only was Menem personally dishonest, but graft and corruption permeated every branch of his administration. His governments and those that immediately followed oversaw the further demise of Argentina's once rich and stable democracy, until such point that the nation was teetering on the edge of bankruptcy by December 2002.

The movements in pursuit of a socialist alternative in the Southern Cone drew together members of an ethnically homogeneous population whose divisions existed along lines of class, region, and gender, and whether they were urban or rural. In the Andean countries, on the other hand, popular uprisings have often foundered on ethnic and racial divisions that have persisted since as far back as the colonial era. There have been, however, times when leaders from both sides of the cultural divide have attempted to find common ground to change society.

Movements for Revolutionary Change: Peru

Peru's history with guerrilla struggle dates back to the 1960s, with the emergence of Cuban-inspired Marxist groups similar to those that appeared in other parts of Latin America. Years of intermittent military government, along with the failed experiment of Haya de la Torre's left populism, led progressive reformers to belief that the only way to achieve even a modicum of equality was by embracing a revolutionary Marxist program. In the years after Haya's demise, Trotskyist agronomist Hugo Blanco (b. 1934) attempted to organize a land reform movement in the country around the highland city of Cuzco. Although the program never got off the ground, Hugo Blanco succeeded in leading strikes and land seizures that put the issue of agrarian reform before the government in the 1960s. Failure to win reform through legitimate channels produced the

same outcome in Peru as it had in neighboring countries: an insurgent guerrilla movement, uniting intellectuals and some on the left who had been involved in the ongoing struggle for social change. As in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile, recruits to the new guerrilla movement had grown discontent with the go-slow approach of existing leftist organizations, especially the Peruvian Communist Party.

The most prominent of the 1960s groups was the Army of National Liberation (ELN, *Ejército de Liberación Nacional*), which attempted to organize the rural peasantry into strategic hamlets capable of attacking the seat of government. By 1970 the ELN had all but disbanded, most of its leadership was in jail, and the remaining militants were unable to convince the moribund Communist Party of the need to adopt a more activist program. While many activists looked to the Cuban model, in hopes of bringing the same transformation to their own country, a small fraction of the Peruvian left was looking further east, to China and its Cultural Revolution (1966–76), as a model for revolutionary change, eventually spawning one of the most doctrinaire Maoist organizations in the hemisphere.

Sendero Luminoso, Shining Path

Under the leadership of Abimael Guzmán Reynoso (b. 1934), a philosophy professor at the University of San Cristóbal of Huamanga University in Ayacucho, a city in the central Andean region, a faction of the Communist Party of Peru formed itself into a highly disciplined guerrilla organization that came to be known as *Sendero Luminoso*, or Shining Path. The name derived from a quote from the founder of Peru's communist party José Carlos Mariátegui ("Marxism-Leninism will open the shining path to revolution") that appeared on the masthead of the group's newspaper in 1964. The name Shining Path was used by outsiders to distinguish the organization from other (pro-Moscow, or pro-Cuba/Guevarist) Peruvian communist parties. In the late 1960s, Shining Path emerged as a powerful political force among intellectuals, running for electoral positions at Huamanga, in particular, as well as other universities, and distinguishing itself by its serious application of Marxist ideas to the local university struggle. Eventually the party's rigid sectarianism caused it to fall out of favor among intellectuals, and it left the university milieu to organize among impoverished peasants.

In a country with high poverty rates and disastrously low educational levels, abysmal health care and very weak infrastructure to connect urban and rural areas, Peru's indigenous people were by far the most deprived, isolated, and forgotten members of society. These descendants of the ancient Aymara, Quechua, and other indigenous groups scattered along the Amazon River basin in the far Northeast were concentrated in remote villages far from the institutions of European custom and culture. Indicative of the scale of the indigenous presence in the population is the fact that Quechua is one of Peru's two official languages, along with Spanish, and there are many areas of the country where Spanish is seldom spoken. Illiterate and non-conversant in Spanish, Indians who left the countryside in search of work in urban areas found few opportunities and ended up crowded in shantytowns on the outskirts of Lima, Cuzco, Arequipa, Callao,

and other cities. It was, however, in the countryside, not urban areas, that Shining Path developed its strongest following.

Shining Path launched its first military operation in May 1980, on the eve of Peru's first national elections in 17 years. The timing of this event illustrates the group's unique politics and differentiates its strategy from those of other guerrilla forces in the hemisphere. Rather than resorting to clandestine actions after the legitimate above-ground movement had been suppressed, as was the case in Argentina and Uruguay, Shining Path sought to use the clandestine arena to destroy, or in their words to "expose," the hypocrisy of bourgeois elections. The opening salvo in May 1980 was followed by more than a decade of guerrilla warfare that targeted the police, military, and government officials, as well as large numbers of social reformers, political activists, and managers of state-controlled agricultural collectives. Arguing that even trade unionists, community activists, and human rights workers were supporters of the status quo, Shining Path cadres sought to destroy all vestiges of Peru's European heritage and to replace it with a "pure" rural, communal indigenous society. Throughout the 1980s, Shining Path expanded the territory under its control and increased the number of militants in its organization, particularly in the highlands and around Ayacucho. It gained some support from peasants, by publically beating and killing widely disliked figures such as cattle rustlers, tax collectors, and wealthy local merchants. While peasants may have supported the guerrillas' goals, only a small minority ever adopted the strict Maoist dogma emanating from the tiny cadre of leaders clustered around Abimael Guzmán.

At first the national government viewed Shining Path as an aberration, unable to believe that a university professor preaching a Maoist doctrine among non-Spanish speaking indigenous peasants in remote rural areas would register much success. Once the government had registered the threat, it launched a brutal and unforgiving attack on the villagers, without bothering to separate Shining Path followers from those who remained neutral or even opposed the guerrillas' tactics. As the military swept through Ayacucho and other regions where Shining Path was known to have sympathizers, arbitrarily arresting, torturing, and raping whomever they encountered, the effect on the peasantry was nothing short of disastrous. Whole villages were wiped out, and many rural dwellers found themselves victims of both *senderista* attacks and military reprisals.

By the mid-1980s Shining Path had moved from the countryside to the cities, stepping up assaults on key infrastructure, industries, and residential neighborhoods in Lima. Beginning in 1983 and continuing over the next decade, the *senderistas* increasingly controlled wide swaths of territory on the outskirts of Lima, stretching into the central and southern regions of the country. From bases in the countryside, they attacked urban areas, cut power to whole quarters of Lima, bombed Popular Revolutionary Alliance of America (APRA, *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*) party headquarters, detonated explosives in shopping centers, and set off a huge car bomb in the wealthy neighborhood of Miraflores, which killed over 20 people and injured many more. In addition to targeting government institutions and the wealthy, Shining Path also sought to eliminate those it considered to be competitors for the loyalty of the masses – particularly other leftists, progressives, and human rights activists. It came into conflict with the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA, *Movimiento*

Revolucionario Túpac Amaru), another armed guerrilla organization, and some smaller leftist parties and peasant self-defense groups. In 1991 Shining Path cadres killed three foreign missionaries (one Italian and two Polish) who were working among the poor in Ancash. In an especially gruesome finale, the guerrillas then exploded the priests' bodies in the center of town. In February 1992, they assassinated María Elena Moyano, a much admired community activist in one of Lima's largest shantytowns. Simultaneously, Shining Path was abandoning whatever socialist, reformist doctrine it had originally espoused and turning into a cultish terrorist organization, grouped around its bizarre and increasingly self-absorbed leader, Abimael Guzmán.

Women and Shining Path

One of the unique features of the Shining Path guerrilla organization was the high percentage of women cadres. Journalist Robin Kirk conducted an extensive study of the women *senderistas* and reported that, according to Peruvian police intelligence records, of the 19-member Central Committee, eight were women. Compared to other political organizations, clandestine or above-ground, this was a remarkably high number. Women were frequently commanders of army units, carried out attacks on villages, were known to lob dynamite sticks hidden in their shawls at police stations or other targets, and were often designated to carry out the final, execution-style, assassination of Shining Path's captives. According to Kirk, not only was the first guerrilla to fall in battle a woman, but women were in leadership in the military and communication wings of the party. Peruvians, the majority of whom were appalled by the *senderistas*' brutal tactics, were even more at a loss to explain the particularly violent actions of, mainly, indigenous women.

Women may have been drawn to Shining Path because it provided a sense of purpose and promised to create a better life for them and their children. Moreover, when *senderistas* took control of an area they immediately prohibited drinking, imposed a strict code of discipline for sexual relations between men and women, closed brothels, and outlawed infidelity, gambling, and other vices that were seen to interfere with party discipline and pose security risks. The appeal of a group was considerable when it banned the main scourges indigenous women endured from their husbands and boyfriends – alcoholism, infidelity, and abuse. Possibly, women who had faced a lifetime of violence may have welcomed the chance to learn to fight, shoot a gun, and otherwise defend themselves. The party also actively recruited women to its ranks, and like most revolutionary organizations, argued that women's liberation would come about as a result of their active participation in the struggle. On the other hand, while Abimael Guzmán promoted women's emancipation and wrote frequently of its importance in party dogma, he maintained paternalistic, even patriarchal, control over the women with whom he had contact, to the extent that they were expected to worship "Comrade Gonzalo" and satisfy his sexual demands. In spite of this, the large number of women and girls involved in Shining Path was unprecedented for Latin American guerrilla movements at the time. While many women were involved in the Central American revolutions of the 1980s,

even in Nicaragua and El Salvador the number of women leaders never matched those in Shining Path.

Owing to its widely publicized abuse of the population and increasingly brutal military tactics, Shining Path became known far more for its atrocities than for its ability to redress the grievances of the poor. Caught between two powerful forces – the military and the guerrillas – most Peruvians were hard pressed to decide which was worse. The organization's reprehensible tactics were met with reprisals from local townspeople; men and women organized into anti-Shining Path militias, sometimes retaliating with the same brutal tactics as the guerrillas. Based on a tip from neighbors, the police began monitoring an apartment in Lima, which eventually led to the capture of the Shining Path leadership, including Guzmán himself. By the late 1990s, Shining Path militants were in jail, on trial, or had retreated from their activist program and splintered into competing factions, rendering the organization impotent. While the possibility of a resurgence of Shining Path activity cannot be discounted, Peru's attention shifted to the extra-legal activities of its military and government.

Repression and Fujimori

Controversy still swirls around Alberto Fujimori (b. 1938), the man who headed Peru during most of the turbulent era when guerrilla activity was at its height. The debate over Fujimori's leadership revolves around whether the government's tactics were as bad as, or worse than, the tactics of Shining Path. As far back as the early 1990s, Fujimori promised economic reforms but delivered mainly austerity and indiscriminate repression as a way of quelling the violence that gripped society. A member of Peru's small Asian community, comprised of Chinese and Japanese immigrants, Fujimori was a middle-class entrepreneur who rose in politics through business connections rather than through the military or political parties – the traditional road to national political prominence. As the first Japanese-American to win the highest office in any nation of the Americas, North or South, Fujimori initially was trusted (possibly due to stereotypes of Japanese businessmen as efficient managers) to be the kind of leader who would work diligently to attract foreign investment, create jobs, and otherwise stimulate the economy. This did not prove to be the case. Although elected to three terms, he was ousted from office in November 2000 in the face of widespread corruption charges that extended to his top ministers as well. Offered asylum in Japan, where his family had maintained citizenship rights after emigrating to Peru, Fujimori moved to Tokyo. Despite his continued popularity among many sectors of the population who approved of the draconian measures he enacted to curb the violence, his bid to return to political prominence collapsed when he was detained in Chile and subsequently extradited to Peru for trial. After several delays, the Peruvian Supreme Court in early 2008 found the former president guilty as charged and sentenced him to prison.

Despite the failure of his appeals, Fujimori's fate remains in question because of his continuing popularity among nearly a third of the electorate, and the unpopularity of his successors. Alejandro Toledo (b. 1946) held office from 2001 to 2006, but failed to

turn around the economy or put a stop to endemic corruption. Many Peruvians were particularly disappointed with Toledo's downfall because his rags-to-riches personal story held out hope for a new beginning. Born into an impoverished family with 15 brothers and sisters, Toledo rose to earn a PhD in economics from Stanford University before becoming president. After a hotly contested race in 2006, and despite charges of ineptitude and corruption during his earlier administration, Alan García (b. 1949), a former APRA president, won office with promises of a new beginning and a return to stable governance.

Conclusion

The focus of this chapter has been primarily political. The struggle to improve education and health care, to provide a social safety net for the chronically unemployed, the disabled, ill, and needy members of society, was taken up in the political arena. Members of different Latin American countries proffered solutions, with greater and lesser degrees of sincerity and practicality, but none succeeded. In the 1980s most of the region was under the boot of repressive military dictatorships or authoritarian regimes. The forces in control of the government answered moderate and radical demands with the same repressive measures, despite the resilient opposition of many sectors of Latin American society. From Mexico to Argentina, the era of student protest, urban guerrilla warfare, and socialism-through-the-ballot box had burst forth only to be brutally stifled.

By the late twentieth century, nationalism had proven the most enduring of the many ideological currents rocking Latin America. But this was the case not because of its cultural and political cohesion among disparate Latin American nations; rather because nationalism reflected widespread wariness of, hostility toward, and suspicion of the United States. Even right-wing governments whose very subsistence depended on US foreign aid found it convenient to play the nationalist card when their popularity sagged. The Argentine misadventure at the Falklands/Malvinas in 1982 was a case in point, and a lesson on how easily such schemes could backfire.

For its part, from the end of World War II until the fall of Eastern European communism in 1990, the United States justified its interference in Latin American internal affairs as necessary for stopping the spread of communism. Washington readily labeled modest attempts at self-determination, such as those in Guatemala in 1954, Brazil in 1964, or Chile in 1973, as communist takeovers that threatened the national security interests of the hemisphere. From the Monroe Doctrine of the early nineteenth century to the Roosevelt Corollary a century later, the United States defined Latin America's interests as essentially one with those of the United States. Falling under the weight of internal opposition as much as external interference, mild reform, violent revolution, and social democracy failed in Mexico, in huge Brazil, in cosmopolitan Argentina and Uruguay, and in neighboring Chile. Peru fell into a brutal and distorted revolutionary conflict with little clear difference between the side seeking social change and the one enforcing the status quo. Nevertheless, in a few tiny countries of Central America, rural and urban youth once again embraced the Guevarist strategy in a new attempt to wrest

power from the traditional oligarchy. The next chapter looks at the success and failure of those insurgencies.

Topics and Questions for Discussion

1 Describe the chain of events that led to the resignation of Brazilian president Jânio Quadros, and the military coup that overthrew João Goulart in 1964.
2 The decade of the 1960s was turbulent throughout Latin America (and many other parts of the world also), resulting in dramatic demonstrations and repression in Mexico and Brazil. Discuss the importance of the 1960s and describe the main political actors of the era.
3 What was the "Chilean Road to Socialism"? Why did the socialist government of Salvador Allende fall to a military dictatorship?
4 Describe the factors that led to the overthrow of Isabel Martínez de Perón's government. Why do you think Peronism is such an enduring political movement in Argentina?
5 What has been the role of women in revolutionary movements, such as Shining Path, and in opposing military governments?

Notes

1 *Americas in Transition*, a movie directed by Obie Benz: Ed Asner narrator (1981).
2 These words are widely attributed to Henry Kissinger. In his memoirs, Kissinger boldly justifies US efforts to undermine Chile's democratic process. See Kissinger, *The White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1979), ch. 17.
3 Peter Winn, *Weavers of Revolution: The Yarur Workers and Chile's Road to Socialism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 6.
4 Manuel Hevia Cosculluela, *Pasaporte 11333: Ocho Años con la CIA*, Mexico, 1981.
5 The period from 1976 to 1983 often has been referred to as "the Dirty War." Numerous scholars, both inside Argentina and outside it, dispute this term. There was no "war," dirty or otherwise, since the repression came from one source: the military. Many civilians who were apprehended were not military combatants, not involved in the guerrilla organizations, and had no means of defending themselves. Scholars of the period note that the repression and disappearances were the one-sided tactics of the military state against its own civilian population. I want to thank Argentine colleagues Cecilia Belej and Alejandra Vassallo from the University of Buenos Aires Women and Gender Studies Program for clarifying this point.
6 US Department of State Argentina Declassification Project, 2002. Copy collected by Carlos Osorio in 2006.