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# A Grand Historic Loop?

## Reading the Cold War as the Present

*Mitchell Belfer*

Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr's epigram that the 'more things change, the more they stay the same,' has underscored the logic of international political life throughout the ages. That people have been duped by their leaders and each other, that the promise of international progress is eclipsed by the realities of runaway nationalisms and exclusion and that petty differences are exaggerated to insurmountable levels has formed a main artery in the metanarrative of civilisation despite long periods of wound-licking and reflection. Each passing decade and ebbing century bears witness to humanity and its barbarity doppelganger.

Unfortunately, records are meant to be broken. The 20<sup>th</sup> century – the most destructive in history – had promised so much. International cooperation, economic productivity, technological advances and dialogue were meant to have replaced violence and armed force. And yet each innovation that brought people closer together were first used to assail one another: trains shifted armies in one direction and the vanquished in another, factories turned out the means of warfare while medical experimentation was deployed in horrific ways as a means of genocide, *democide* and *gendercide*.

As the century's early wars of nation gave way its later wars of ideology, the globalising technologies of international transportation and trade ensured that no state or people would be spared as the great- and superpowers engaged in proxy war while pitting nation against nation in a series of conflicts and crises collectively referred to as the Cold War. This was an age of innocence lost; democratic and demagogic dictatorships stood shoulder to shoulder as socialism was hijacked and used as a tool of repression. There was no "right" side to that war.

But there were victims. There were victims of circumstance and victims of trust – those that had their roles laid-out for them and those that believed the rhapsody of their partners. There were those that

played bloc-politics because they were obliged and those that wittingly joined the fray because of the orientation of their national moral compasses. In either case, the great powers bear responsibility for the turbulence of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; a century whose wounds remain deep and open.

*Editor's  
Analysis*

For this reason, it is essential not to relegate the Cold War to historical renditions but to treat those times as the pillars of the contemporary international environment. The European map that packaged the nation neatly into the state is a testament of those dark times. In Africa, the right angles of national frontiers bespeak a colonialism that severed nations and ensured a century of turmoil to rectify historical wrongs. Latin America and Asia – on the periphery of 20<sup>th</sup> century convolutions – are prone to dictatorship and internal combustion. And the small states? These have been deeply instrumentalised by the raw ambitions of the powerful.

From the vantage of the post-Cold War order, which prioritises human and not national security, it is easy to forget the nuances of political intrigue from a short history ago. But that was not another world, just a different version. So far, Karr has been correct. Every generation promises peace and every other generation delivers mortal combat. But Karr was no prophet; he was a satirist poking fun at the incredulity of a progressing humanity that lacked the wherewithal to progress. His was a lesson that has not yet been learned; there is no such thing as political or human determinism. History is neither a loop nor elastic, it is only human.

# Cold War Engagements: Czechoslovakia and Latin America

Political, economic, and cultural relations  
between Czechoslovakia and  
Latin America in the second half of the  
20<sup>th</sup> century

*Kateřina Březinová*

Traditional interpretations of Latin America's Cold War describe these affairs as a direct outcome of superpower rivalry in the region or as a result of U.S. democracy-promotion programs. However, as Cold War archives open around the world, it becomes evident that prevailing interpretations of Cold War history are in need of revision. The upheaval that afflicted Latin America in the latter half of the 20th century was not simply the result of a single group of actors and influences. New records now allow us today to look at a fuller, more nuanced story of Latin America's Cold War that has been significantly shaped by minor, yet influential players, such as Czechoslovakia.

In this issue, a special dossier entitled "Cold War Engagements: Czechoslovakia and Latin America" inquiries into Czechoslovakia's political, economic and cultural relations with the countries of Latin America in the second half of the 20th century, is bringing together the results of recent archival research carried out predominantly in the archives in the Czech Republic. It comes in synergy with the homonymous conference held at the Metropolitan University Prague on November 8, 2013.

All articles in the dossier 3/2013 share the common interest in improving our understanding of Cold War international relations, led



by the following questions and concerns: What political, cultural and economic policies were adopted by the Czechoslovak state towards the countries of the region, and how were they carried out? Does the research reveal autonomous Czechoslovak action in Latin America notwithstanding the crucial influence of the Soviet Union over foreign policy towards the region? How was intelligence deployed there? How did the intensification of cooperation with Latin America affect Czechoslovakia internally? To what extent does the legacy of mutual relations during the Cold War influence bilateral relations until today?

First, we present a larger overview of the diplomatic relations among the countries of Latin America and Czechoslovakia (J. Opatrný). Then, the articles pass on to focus on Czechoslovakia's activities in specific countries, most importantly its traditional and strong trade allies in the region such as Brazil (M. Pelant) and Mexico (L. Majlátová), as well as "new" countries of prime political importance like Cuba after 1959 (H. V. Bortlová), Chile in the 1970s (M. Zourek, I. Witker) and Guatemala under the president J. Arbenz in the early 1950s. Last, an article on Czechoslovak documentary film propaganda (K. Březinová) completes the picture by inquiring about the internal aspects of the enhanced role of Czechoslovakia as the Socialist Camp's icebreaker in Latin America after 1960.

This special dossier 3/2013 in CEJISS is a result of the intense cooperation between the Ibero-American Centers at the Metropolitan University Prague and Charles University Prague. Its preparation was supported by the specific university research grant of the Ministry of Education of the Czech Republic, IRES-II-II-2013.

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# Czechoslovak– Latin American Relations 1945–1989

## The Broader Context

*Josef Opatrný*

After 1945, Czechoslovakia resumed its diplomatic and economic relations with Latin American countries; disrupted during the occupation of the Second World War. At that time, Czechoslovakia had the most diplomatic offices in the region of the entire Soviet bloc. Communication between Prague and Moscow showed that the Soviet desires' to use the Czechoslovak position in Latin America to its benefit. Accordingly, those Latin American regimes that sought opportunities to establish contact with the Soviet Union in the early 1950s, such as Bolivia or Guatemala, did so through Czechoslovakia. According to the documents of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs from the years 1954, 1956 and 1957, relations with Brazil, Argentina and Mexico were considered as the most important by the Czechoslovak authorities. Hence, they also continued to be among the priorities of Czechoslovak foreign policy in Latin America until 1989. Czechoslovak relations to Latin America were predominantly determined by political and economic factors. Politically, Czechoslovakia focused on country's relations with to us and on its political orientation; economically, the opportunities for Czechoslovak exports of machinery products, respectively of entire investment units and the import of raw materials and agricultural products were essential. Over time, Czechoslovak authorities increasingly emphasised the economic side of relations to Cuba, whose debt to Czechoslovakia was constantly growing. By the end of the 1980s, Czechoslovakia was either maintaining diplomatic relations with all countries in the region, or considering their recovery



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with the exception of small island states in the Caribbean, which had recently gained independence.

*Keywords: Czechoslovakia, Latin America, international policy, diplomatic relations, commerce*

*Josef Opatrný*

## Introduction

The history of Czechoslovak-Latin American relations began long before 1945. Despite the relatively limited interests of most Central European countries – such as today’s Czech Republic – when compared to the major European colonial and mercantilist empires, later eclipsed by the us, the first signs of contact between the two regions originates in the 16<sup>th</sup> century; a point reflected in Czechoslovak documentation which illustrates the First Republic’s attempts at establishing diplomatic and trade relations to Latin American countries following Czechoslovak independence in 1918. In fact, economic ties in the form of trade with Czech glass and linen firms date back at least until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The popularity of Czech glass in Latin America is evident from a 1720 letter of a Jesuit missionary and the existence of representation of the glass company Hecke, Zinke, Rautenstrauch in New Spain and later on in independent Mexico at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup>

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the first groups of emigrants from Czech lands headed to Latin America. These migrants established communities that, even before WWI, maintained contacts with local political and economic elites as well as to the ‘old homeland.’<sup>2</sup> Hence, in the early 1920s, Czech professionals, especially brewers and experts in the sugar industry, sought employment in local breweries and sugar refineries. The facilities were equipped with Czech engineering plants and supplied with the necessary ingredients for beer production – malt and hops – by exporters in Czech lands.

Following the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the creation of an independent Czechoslovakia, the political representation of the new state tried to improve its position on the international scene by establishing diplomatic relations with countries around the world, including Latin America. In order to expand its economic circles, new markets were sought for the products of Czechoslovak in-

dustry – those lost in former parts of the monarchy. Trade with Czechoslovak machines and guns led to the establishment of new customs and border protection.<sup>3</sup> On the other side, Czechoslovak importers in Latin America found tropical agriculture products like coffee, cocoa, tobacco, copra, vanilla, cotton, rubber, precious wood, leather, tannin, plant wax and oil, tropical medicinal plants, and raw materials in the form of nitrate, manganese, copper, lead, oil, etc.

Initially, the trade was limited due to problems with intermediaries, who retained a stronger position in the region than Czechoslovak importers. Greater success was ultimately achieved via Czechoslovak diplomacy, which was active in establishing contacts from the early 1920s with key countries in the region such as: Brazil, Argentina, Mexico and Peru (among others) and founded its representational offices in major cities of the continent. There were several skilled Czechoslovak diplomats deployed to Latin America, among whom Jan Havlasa (born Jan Klecanda) and Vlastimil Kybal excelled. Havlasa served as the first Czechoslovak Ambassador to Brazil and later on in Chile during the war. Kybal succeeded Havlasa in Rio de Janeiro (he also represented Czechoslovakia in Argentina at that time) and from 1935 he worked as ambassador to Mexico, having the accreditation for other countries in this part of the continent as well.

Kybal's vision is particularly interesting since he identified the further strengthening of Czechoslovak-Latin American relations as a chief objective. In 1935, he published *Po československých stopách v Latinské Americe* (*Following Czechoslovak trails in Latin America*), where he discussed why Czechoslovakia should develop stronger relations with the Latin American region. He wrote then that

At first glance, this issue might seem to be exotic, given the vast distance of that continent from our homeland, and maybe even blank or less important, regarding our rather sporadic, more or less random and totally incoherent existing contacts. I admit this objection as long as it concerns the past, though my interpretation is to show that even the world so distant and different, such as South and Central America, did not remain entirely politically foreign to the unfree Czech man between the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> century; yet I do not accept the objection about subordination or even futility of our relations with Spanish and Portuguese speaking America, that is with

continent with European civilization, which occupies 20 separate states of 19.4 million square kilometres with 111 million inhabitants.<sup>4</sup>

Kybal based his arguments on the knowledge of the importance of Latin America to the world economy in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, personal experience with the leading countries of the region – where he served as ambassador – and admiration of Latin culture underpinned by a marriage with a significant Mexican painter Ana Sáenz. Before joining the diplomatic service (1919), he worked at Charles University, where, besides examining the intellectual world of Czech society in the Middle Ages, he also studied the history of Roman countries in the 17<sup>th</sup> century and their relations to Central Europe. While working in the Roman archives, he met Sáenz, who as a young painter studied Italian art and, later on, became Kybal's interpreter of both the art of the Hispanic area and the art her own lifestyle. After the independence of Czechoslovakia, Kybal offered his services to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and served as a diplomat in Italy, Brazil, Spain, and finally in Mexico. Even as Ambassador, he persisted in his publishing activities, although he was no more writing for professionals but rather for a wider readership, providing basic information about the history of the countries, in which he served.

Well aware of the significance of personal contacts in the region for the development of bilateral relations, particularly in Mexico, Kybal attempted to attract influential personalities of the political and cultural elite, to support his efforts and inspired the creation of the Association of Friends of Czechoslovakia. Moreover, he strove to deepen the Czechoslovak-Mexican relations in the field of culture, lectured at Mexican universities, spoke on local radio stations, and contributed to the organisation of Czechoslovak fine art exhibitions. There is little doubt that Kybal's activities, together with the interest of (then) Mexican President Lázaro Cárdenas, who aimed to diversify international relations of his country, created appropriate conditions for Mexico's support of Eduard Beneš' government in exile based in London during the Second World War.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Czechoslovakia maintained diplomatic relations with most countries of Latin America<sup>5</sup> and Czechoslovak exporters and importers traded either regularly or occasionally with

partners in all countries of the region, where they supplied traditional glass in its various forms (luxurious handcut glass, commercial glass, laboratory glass, sheet glass and glass jewellery), textiles, footwear, machines and machinery equipment, locomotives, railway material, paper, chemical products, electro-technical material, ceramics, including sanitary ceramics, weapons, ammunition, etc.<sup>6</sup> In some cases, Czechoslovak goods acquired a positive reputation that, after the interruption of contacts during WWII, Latin American customers turned to their Czechoslovak suppliers requesting renewed cooperation after 1945.

One of the most commonly cited examples is the case of Czechoslovak tanks. Since they were apparently cherished by the Peruvian army, Peru sought to continue the contract after 1945. The contract was, however, discussed in a different political situation when Czechoslovakia and Latin America found themselves on the opposite sides of the ideological line that was increasingly dividing the world. Weapons, as well as strategic raw materials, such as ferrous metals and their concentrates, became subject to strict control of state institutions. In the case of Czechoslovak tanks, not only was a new contract not concluded, but Peru also banned the export of raw materials to Czechoslovakia and even suspended diplomatic relations with Prague.

Jacobo Arbenz' government in Guatemala was relying on the interwar Czechoslovak-Guatemalan trade relations as well. Thanks to Kybal's activities in the second half of the 1930s, Kybal was accredited not only in Mexico, but also in Honduras and Guatemala, where trade with Czechoslovakia was successfully developing. The main trading activity was based in exports of Guatemalan coffee and the importation of Czechoslovak weaponry. Nevertheless, when Arbenz' government tried to revive this trading tradition in the 1950s, the supply of Czechoslovak weapons served as the pretext for overthrowing his regime in 1954.<sup>7</sup>

## Relations during WWII

The period just prior to WWII, the months after Munich and the weeks after the declaration of the protectorate brought substantial transformation to Czechoslovak-Latin American relations. While Paraguay and Ecuador offered visas to Czechoslovak refugees within their immigration programmes; Czechoslovak embassies were to be ceded to Nazi



*In Argentina, former Czechoslovak diplomats and representatives of expatriate communities, which cooperated on joint projects with other representatives of migrants of Nazi-occupied states, tried to arrest the influence of pro-Nazi immigrant associations.*

Germany, which ended the contacts with Czechoslovak representation in exile in London that called for legal continuity with pre-Munich Czechoslovakia. Not all Latin American countries remained neutral when Nazi representatives were taking over Czechoslovak diplomatic missions however. Mexico, whose relations to Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy were shaped by its diametrically different approach to the Spanish Civil War, signalled to Czechoslovak diplomats that it would support the Czechoslovak position and not intervene in favour of Germany in case Czechoslovakia refused to pass its diplomatic mission to Germany. However, when Kybal's mission formally ended, and a new head of the embassy was yet to be appointed, Kybal's deputy passed the embassy to Germans anyways – as other Czechoslovak diplomats serving in Latin American states did. Actually, there were certain reductions going on already immediately after the Munich Agreement since the forthcoming delegation in Havana never opened the office and recently established offices in Caracas and Lima were closed.

Over the subsequent months, Beneš' government in London sought to approach the great powers to stabilise its international status. For that reason, Beneš' government did not pay much attention to Latin America. In the meantime, each Latin American country formulated its own policy towards the occupying as well as occupied European countries. These policies varied throughout the region; while Mexico provided asylum to European anti-fascists and refugees, Argentina's policies were raising concerns and criticism among the Allies since they seemed to support the axis powers. Thus, in Mexico, Egon Ervín Kisch and Lenka Reinerová collaborated with the German antifascist resistance. In Argentina, former Czechoslovak diplomats and representatives of expatriate communities, which cooperated on joint projects

with other representatives of migrants of Nazi-occupied states, tried to arrest the influence of pro-Nazi immigrant associations. Czechoslovak exiles strove to work with representatives of other exiled groups to garnish support for the restoration of sovereignty.

In 1941, discussions were held between representatives of the Beneš government and Mexican diplomats in London. On this occasion, the Czechoslovak side expressed interest in the reestablishment of the diplomatic relations that had been interrupted. Mexico approached this request with considerable understanding and, remarkably, at the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of American States in Rio de Janeiro in January 1942, it was the Mexican and Uruguayan delegations, which were vigorously promoting the adoption of a resolution, which was recommending to the governments of the countries in the region to continue diplomatic relations with countries that were fighting for independence. Despite strong Argentinian opposition, the resolution was adopted and in the following weeks the Czechoslovak exile diplomacy made a great effort in order to fulfil the resolution in the individual countries of the region.<sup>8</sup> At the end of March 1942, a joint Mexican-Czechoslovak declaration of resumption of diplomatic relations was already signed. Less than a month later a similar document was agreed between Uruguay and Czechoslovakia, which led to further developments in relations between Beneš' government and other Latin American countries. Hence, in the capital cities of Mexico, Brazil, Peru, Uruguay, Colombia (etc), Czechoslovak diplomats officially served. During the war, an embassy was opened in Havana where, prior to 1938, Czechoslovakia was represented only by its ambassador in Washington. Considering Argentinian policies during WWII, it is hardly surprising that diplomatic relations between the Beneš government and Buenos Aires were not restored before 18 April 1945.

### Relations between 1945 and 1948

In 1945, Czechoslovakia operated eight embassies in Latin America. Prague was represented by following diplomats: the pre-war ambassador František Kadeřábek in Argentina (succeeded by Alexander Kúnoši in 1947), chargé d'affaires Vladimír Nosek in Brazil (succeeded by Jan Reisser in 1946), Vratislav Trčka in Colombia (succeeded by Victor Jansa in 1947, who was also accredited to Ecuador as well as Trčka), chargé

d'affaires Eduard Kühnel in Cuba (the office was closed in 1947 and the Czechoslovak ambassador in Washington Juraj Slávik got accredited to Havana), Václav Hyka in Mexico (succeeded by Václav Láška in 1946), Vladimír Smetana in Peru (succeeded by Václav Kresta in 1946 and by Eduard Kühnel as chargé d'affaires in 1947), František Kadeřábek in Uruguay (succeeded by Miroslav Rašín in 1947), and Vratislav Trčka in Venezuela (acting from Colombia, succeeded by Vladimír Khek in 1947 as Khek already had an office in Caracas). Since 1946, Czechoslovak statisticians have also registered the results of trade with Latin American countries, where both exports and imports were dominated by Brazil and followed by Argentina. These countries maintained their position within the Czechoslovak trade over the following years. Their strong position in trade relations determined their regional significance that was attributed to them not only by the Ministry of Foreign Trade, but also by the MFA.

*Czechoslovak-Latin American Relations*

*Czechoslovak exports in thousands of Czech crowns<sup>9</sup>*

	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950
<i>Argentina</i>	15022	84583	76850	61329	69797
<i>Brazil</i>	53862	38949	64951	73193	61877
<i>Mexico</i>	6829	13995	9461	6026	10390
<i>Venezuela</i>	2532	16195	10526	9554	12653
<i>LA Total</i>	85903	188974	207143	175177	198159

	1946	1947	1948	1949	1950
<i>Argentina</i>	20001	39470	111071	122136	62996
<i>Brazil</i>	15521	116336	80470	35437	55828
<i>Mexico</i>	1981	2528	3969	12854	1731
<i>Venezuela</i>	–	5594	4189	–	646
<i>LA Total</i>	40825	169973	214098	182874	134833

Czechoslovak-Latin American relations were then affected by changes to the international political arena, where Czechoslovakia and Latin America found themselves on different sides of an increasingly divided world. Yet Czechoslovakia's political elite, especially those representing Czechoslovak foreign policy, maintained the illusion of preserving an exclusive position of Czechoslovakia in Central and Eastern Europe

*Czechoslovak imports in thousands of Czech crowns<sup>10</sup>*

– as a bridge – which fell under the Soviet zone of influence following the Yalta and Potsdam agreements. Churchill's famous 1947 speech ended such an illusion.

Negotiations over Czechoslovak participation in the Marshall plan, which was initially approved by the Czechoslovak government though rejected after talks in Moscow, acted as another factor that caused disillusionment.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the February 1948 events acted as a mere confirmation of post-war developments and confirmed post-war ideological and power distributions. At the MFA, Jan Masaryk's death marked the definitive end of an unrealistic dream,<sup>12</sup> even though Masaryk was succeeded by (then) Secretary of State, Vlado Clementis, who soon fell victim to power struggles within the communist regime. Dejmek's conclusion refers to the decline in the importance of the ministry in the structure of the state power and he suggested that the 'position of the ministry in the state power structure changed very quickly and significantly; now, the centre of gravity of the state power structure moved to the peak of the Communist Party apparatus.'<sup>13</sup> Czechoslovak foreign policy was no longer decided independently by the Central Committee of the Communist Party. Instead, it was formulated in Moscow.

The situation in February 1948 immediately impacted the personnel of Czechoslovak embassies throughout Latin America. Dejmek found that three quarters of the eight heads of embassies left their offices:

Many of them not only resigned (which in several cases led to another suspension of diplomatic relations with Prague), but also tried to keep the real estates of the delegations (apparently following the model of second resistance), such as ambassador Victor Jansa in Bogota or later on Miroslav Rašín in Montevideo.<sup>14</sup>

While events during the late 1940s and early 1950s – which were defined by the political and economic subjugation of Czechoslovakia and other Eastern European countries – confirmed Soviet domination in this part of the world, it is important to recall that some Western countries actively attempted to disrupt the Soviets' position in *its* sphere of influence. In other words, some Western states tried to limit Soviet power projects abroad. Despite the rhetoric of some countries' representatives, Latin America was, until the end of the 1940s, part of that political and economic bloc, which was created in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and fully constituted itself after WWI. Even the USSR respected such power

boundaries during the interwar period and this was unchanged by the rising Soviet ambitions to penetrate Latin America through COMINTERN. The position of the USSR in the region was visibly weaker than that of Czechoslovakia after WWII because Czechoslovakia benefited from its inter-war engagements. Hence, in the 1950s and 1960s, Moscow purposefully tried to take advantage of the Czechoslovak position in order to strengthen its regional influence.<sup>15</sup> Due to the subordination of Czechoslovak diplomacy to the diplomacy of the USSR,<sup>16</sup> Czechoslovakia willingly fulfilled that role in Latin America.

Still, the MFA viewed Czechoslovak activities in Latin America in the late 1940s and early 1950s with a certain amount of criticism. The national archives are revealing in this regard; they note that:

Due to a series of objective difficulties after 1948, the monitoring of issues in Latin America was superficial and non-systematic in this period. The analyses of the situation suffered from excessive generalization; the development in Latin America was paralleled to developments in Africa, Asia, without taking into account the particularities of historical, class and economic developments in Latin America [...] It was a period of certain disorientation regarding the countries of Latin America, which was perceived as a particularly hostile and dangerous area of pro-imperialist governments. This period ends just before the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the CPSU.<sup>17</sup>

## Relations during the 1950s

These criticisms were not, however, applicable throughout the whole region. As mentioned, in the early 1950s, there were new voices calling for weakening of the dominant position of the US in the region. In several Latin American states, influential groups emerged. Their programmes called for reduction of social disparities through social reforms, inclusion of marginalised groups in society, land reforms, industrialisation, and counted on the increased role of the state in the economy and in social and cultural spheres. In the early 1950s, these groups only came to the power very rarely through coups organised by young nationalist officers, who would manage to overthrow the traditional ruling group or dictatorship. Relatively moderate reformist governments in Bolivia and Guatemala opened the way for radical

groups. Subsequently, Bolivian and Guatemalan revolution in the early 1950s along with Peron's regime in Argentina alarmed the US during the Korean War. The reaction of the US to reforms and nationalisation efforts led to the deterioration of relations with the US and the desire for closer economic and political contacts to the USSR and its Eastern European satellites.<sup>18</sup> During the deteriorating economic situation in Argentina, Peron tried to use an anti-American rhetoric to strengthen his position. In Bolivia and Guatemala, nationalist regimes searched for a way to increase sales of their products and reduce dependence on customers from the US through economic cooperation with the countries in the Soviet bloc. During the process that took place after the unsuccessful attacks on the Moncada Barracks, Fidel Castro introduced in his enriching speech "History Will Absolve Me," a programme concerning the Youth Movement of the Century, which demanded the reduction of US influence in Cuba.

Czechoslovakia consulted Guatemalan attempts to establish economic contacts with Soviet diplomacy and, despite lengthy negotiations, met the request for arms supplies. Negotiations regarding the normalisation of diplomatic relations took place in Bolivia as well. Although the period of the early 1950s produced a clear Czech diplomatic loss in terms of the disruption of relations to Venezuela, the Czechoslovak activities in the region in 1954 led the MFA to draw up a document that dealt with the Czechoslovak-Latin American relations as a whole. The document *Otázky vztahů mezi čSR a zeměmi Latinské Ameriky s ohledem na hospodářské styky*<sup>19</sup> (*Relations between Czechoslovakia and Latin American countries with respect to their economic contacts*) brought a relatively comprehensive overview of the continent's mineral wealth and agricultural commodities offered on the world marketplace. While the commentary explicitly mentioned the disinterest of most Latin American states in economic relations with the countries of the Soviet bloc, it also expressed some long-term optimism:

In other Latin American countries – with the exception of Chile, Bolivia, Mexico and Paraguay – the interest in building trade relations with us and other countries of the peace camp did not develop to the same extent as in Argentina, Guatemala, Brazil and Uruguay. However, it is gradually rising.<sup>20</sup>

Between 1956 and 1957, two other documents discussing the relations of Czechoslovakia and Latin America were created in the department of the MFA that, besides the US, also dealt with Latin America.

The first document was prepared for the board of Ministers of Foreign Affairs in October 1956 under the title *Přehled současného vývoje vztahů mezi ČSR a zeměmi Latinské Ameriky a návrhy na další postup*<sup>21</sup> (*The overview of the development of relations between Czechoslovakia and Latin American countries, suggestions for further action*). The document not only reviewed relations between Czechoslovakia and Latin American countries, but also suggested approaches to take in states deemed by the MFA as important for Czechoslovak policies. In this context, especially Brazil, Argentina and Mexico were examined. The author of the text and a former ambassador to Argentina, Richard Ježek, wrote in the introduction:

In 1956, there was a further deepening and expansion of relations between the Czechoslovak Republic and the countries of Latin America. The position of Czechoslovakia, which has the most extensive diplomatic and economic relations of the socialist camp with these countries, got further strengthened.<sup>22</sup>

After listing the countries, where Czechoslovakia had embassies, the list continued with countries that held negotiation with the MFA about 'the establishment, respectively re-establishment' of Czechoslovak embassies or consulates:

Czechoslovakia has embassies in Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, and in April 1956 an embassy in Colombia, which also set up an embassy in Prague, was established. In June, Bolivia accredited a head of Bolivian embassy to Czechoslovak government. Furthermore, there are negotiations about the establishment, respectively reestablishment of embassies of Uruguay, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, and Chile in Czechoslovakia and of Czechoslovak consulates in Chile, Paraguay and Cuba.<sup>23</sup>

In autumn 1957, the board of the Minister of Foreign Affairs discussed the document *Výhledový plán vztahů mezi ČSR a státy Latinské Ameriky* (*The prospective plan of the relations between Czechoslovakia and Latin American countries*). The document was submitted 'due to the need for a long-term concept of relations between the Czechoslovak Republic and Latin American countries.'<sup>24</sup> It described Latin America as a region politically and economically dependent on the US and characterised its economies' as based on the existence of *latifundia* with feudal subordination of agricultural labourers to landowners, which was the case in most of the countries. Consider that

Another feature of this development is the one-sided orientation of each country's economy according to the interests of the monopolies. This is especially characteristic for example for Brazil and Colombia, whose prosperity depends on the production and sales opportunities of coffee, then for Chile, Bolivia and Peru, which rely on the extraction and sale of copper and tin, and for Venezuela, whose economy stands or falls with sales of oil.<sup>25</sup>

The position of the US in the economic and political life stoked – according to the author of the document – rising resistance of national bourgeoisies, which became the temporary and volatile ally

of the working class in the broad democratic anti-imperialist and anti-feudal front.' An example of resistance and national democratic forces against North American imperialism are the government changes that took place in Uruguay (1955), Brazil, Peru, Honduras, Ecuador and Panama (1956), as well as the increasing instability of the governments in Cuba, Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Colombia and Paraguay, the removal of Nicaraguan dictator Somoza and the increasing pressure put on the governments that aims to enforce the implementation of autonomous domestic and foreign policy.<sup>26</sup>

In short chapters, the author of the document dealt with individual countries, respectively groups of states, and in the conclusion underlined the importance of the Czechoslovak-Latin American relations for the entire "socialist camp." In Latin America, Czechoslovakia had the strongest diplomatic representation and the most extensive business contacts from all the countries of the Soviet bloc. Given the growing 'international-political and economic importance of Latin America, it was therefore desirable to further strengthen, deepen and widen Czechoslovak diplomatic, economic and cultural relations with Latin American countries.<sup>27</sup>

Particularly the importance of expanding business contacts was emphasised:

The coordination of our business in Latin America with other countries of the socialist camp will be essential to achieve this goal. It will be necessary to make a good use of consumption and export potential of those countries in the socialist camp, which for certain reasons are still unable to economically enter to the various countries of Latin America.<sup>28</sup>



The author(s) of the plan recommended focusing on a few major countries, which were traditionally the strongest in terms of trade relations such as Brazil, Argentina and Mexico. Attention was also paid to relations in the cultural and scientific spheres and the document stressed that

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'In most Latin American countries, the Czechoslovak Republic has reputation of not only economically and industrially advanced country, but also a country with an old cultural tradition and high level of science and art. It will be needed to support the contact of our scientific, artistic and other cultural institutions with similar organisations in the various countries of Latin America, organise the exchange of materials between institutions and mutual visits of scientists and artists in those cases, where the maximum effect is guaranteed. It will be also needed to make a better use of access to Czechoslovak scholarships by students from Latin America and possibly expand their amount.<sup>29</sup>

In Latin America, Czechoslovak diplomacy was to identify realistic goals and implement them in cooperation with the Ministry of Foreign Trade and with other Soviet bloc countries. The last sentence, which signals the knowledge of the region's traditions, is particularly significant since '(i)ncreased care will be given to purposeful social contacts (not only at the embassies, but also in Prague), as well as to the careful selection and training of diplomatic personnel.<sup>30</sup>

Documents realistically assessed Czechoslovak opportunities in Latin America, where the second half of the 1950s was a period when Czechoslovakia suffered the suspension of diplomatic relations from the Peru and Ecuador. Additionally, the differentiation process continued in Latin America with societies experiencing the growing strength of political reform groups and the radicalisation of views of young members of the middle class, who demanded, often with reference to Marxism, a revolutionary twist as the programmes of reform leaders were not enough for them. Communist parties were often forced to work underground, where their leaders living abroad sometimes managed to build organisational structures with the help of the USSR and its satellites. Later on, when legalisation took place, the parties took the advantage of these existing structures not only for fast entry into the country's political life, but also to strengthen its ties to Moscow,

Prague, and East Berlin. Thus, as soon as Pérez Jiménez's dictatorship in Venezuela was overthrown, Venezuelan communists sought out Prague as a potential weapons supplier. The end of the dictatorship in Caracas in early 1958 foreshadowed more significant changes such as the victory of Castro's guerrilla fighters in Cuba which influenced Czechoslovak policies in Latin America and the development of the region as a whole.

### The Case of Cuba

Czechoslovakia's relations to Cuba went through specific developments after 1959, which produced a number of factors that defined their relations until 1989. Already during the First Republic, Cuba enjoyed exceptionally good relations with Czechoslovakia, especially due to the common interests of major sugar exporters and the fact that the world sugar cartel resided in Prague. Although diplomatic relations between Czechoslovakia and Cuba were not fulfilled after 1947, they were not suspended during Batista's dictatorship either. Czechoslovakia's press reported on the guerrilla war in Cuba. Due to the sharply anti-us attitude of Czechoslovakia, which was following the Soviet line, the article evaluated the events as a manifestation of Cuban patriots' negative attitudes towards the US approach to Cuba. Given the tense relations between Castro and the Cuban Communists at that time, the article maintained an aloof attitude towards the 26<sup>th</sup> of July Movement.

After the fall of Batista's dictatorship, a number of factors signalled a convergence between Cuba and the USSR. Czechoslovakia was the country supplying the weapons that were purchased within the framework of loans given by Moscow to Cuba.<sup>31</sup> In 1960, the frequency of visits by Cuban delegations to Czechoslovakia and by Czechoslovak delegations to Cuba spiked and Cuba's image in Czechoslovakia's media changed to express appreciation for the Cuban revolution and for Castro. In April 1961, when Castro publicly announced that his regime was committed to building socialism, a new era of Czechoslovakia-Cuba relations began. Despite twists and turns, these relations remained exceptional in the region. Anti-US rhetoric and the successful defence of Cuba against attempts by the US to overthrow Castro's regime, contributed to rising popularity of Cuba and of Castro himself in a large part of Latin America. In Moscow and Eastern Europe, this raised hopes for further decline of the US influence in the region.

Such hopes had already been reflected in the concept of Czechoslovakia's 1959 approach towards Latin America. Accordingly, Cuba was recognised as a country that would be treated in a special way. Later, Czechoslovakia's government understood this concept as the beginning of a new approach of Czechoslovakia towards Latin America in general. The significance of this concept was confirmed when the MFA's 1962 documents evaluated the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s as follows:

In this period, our foreign policy action was based on the first conception of Czechoslovak relations with Latin America, which was approved on June 23, 1959. This concept, based on the analysis of the situation in 1959, formed the basis of our foreign policy in Latin America and established its basic tasks.<sup>32</sup>

Policy-makers divided the region into two parts; Latin America without Cuba and Cuba.

In the introduction to the first section, the authors assumed that 'in the context of the national liberation struggle of colonial and dependent peoples, a struggle led by Latin American countries against us imperialism enters a new historical stage.'<sup>33</sup> The new situation offered Czechoslovakia, and other Eastern bloc countries, new opportunities and, after a recap of the actual state of relations in the political and economic sphere, ten tasks. These were to:

1. implement a proactive policy in the region and take advantage of cooperation with the USSR and other 'countries of the socialist camp' [...] to improve the status of the entire socialist camp in Latin America,
2. create conditions for the expansion of trade and economic relations, especially in 'significant states of the region,' in cooperation with the USSR and other 'countries of the socialist camp,'
3. cooperate with the Ministry of Foreign Trade in the field of commercial policy and remove defects,
4. improve conditions for foreign trade and diplomatic activities through the establishment of consulates in the industrial centres (Monterrey and Sao Paulo),
5. initiate invitations to official visits of government officials, parliamentary delegations (Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Bolivia),
6. pursue the promotion of existing embassies and the expansion of their networks,
7. normalise relations at the embassy level in those countries where relations were either unfulfilled or interrupted,

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8. foster the expansion of cultural cooperation through cultural agreements, promotion of Czechoslovakia and cultural events 'of all kinds,'
10. make use of companies and friendship institutions that have ties with Czechoslovakia to promote the Republic,
11. take action in Brazil, which significantly influences other Latin American countries, in order to weaken the us anti-Soviet activity in Argentina and Mexico.

Accordingly, high Czechoslovak honours were to be granted to three Brazilian politicians, first and foremost to President Kubitschek, in whose case it was desirable to find an opportunity for his visit to Czechoslovakia.

The task of fostering stronger contacts within the region gained momentum in the late 1960s due to the spread of information about the onset of anti-American nationalist military regimes in Peru and Bolivia, and the victory of Salvador Allende in Chile's presidential elections. News about the successes of the leftist guerrillas FARC in Colombia, Sandinistas in Nicaragua and civil wars in other Central American countries also contributed. Subsequently, the media in the Soviet Union and other countries of Central and Eastern Europe welcomed any information about the victorious return of Peronism in Argentina and about urban guerrilla activities in Uruguay.

*The Caribbean crisis contributed to the deterioration of relations between Havana and Moscow, which naturally affected the relations between Havana and Prague.*

Relations with Cuba, however, went through a series of complex twists and turns after 1962. The Caribbean crisis contributed to the deterioration of relations between Havana and Moscow, which naturally affected the relations between Havana and Prague. The USSR however, did not initiate a single dispute between the Soviet Union, its satellites and Cuba; it was Havana that accused Moscow of retaining too

pragmatic of an attitude towards a potential armed struggle against the us. Cuba strongly supported the guerrilla movement in a number of Latin American countries, which had an impact on relations between Czechoslovakia and Cuba. From late 1962 to 1969, Cuba's secret service used Prague logistic capabilities to transport, to various Latin American countries, many thousands of Latin Americans who went through a physical or political training in Cuba. The Czechoslovak intelligence service also provided assistance to Operation Manuel,<sup>34</sup> although Czechoslovak authorities became increasingly hesitant in terms of their participation and contribution to the realisation of the Operation. They criticised the level of the action's preparation and its participants. Doubts concerning Czechoslovakia's participation were also fuelled as the position of Czechoslovakia in Latin America was threatened. Indeed, one document noted that

Operation Manuel is a complex and politically sensitive issue mainly because its implementation sometimes comes into conflict with the tendencies of communist parties in Latin America and puts Czechoslovakia into a position of a transfer station for sent revolutionaries. From time to time, articles discussing this topic appear in the foreign press. Our participation is aware of this danger and all efforts of the Czechoslovak intelligence service in Prague are always directed in such manner that the best interests of Czechoslovakia are protected.<sup>35</sup>

In the context of leaked details about a transfer of one Venezuelan participant, who contacted Venezuelan security authorities, considerations about the possible consequences of other leaked events appeared in 1967. In the first report of the National Security Corps it was noted that

We can expect further arrests of participants, who either passed through in the past or at present, and it is likely that, as a result of this repression, the transit through Czechoslovakia and the assistance given at check-in will be revealed in many cases. This is related to the possibility of new accusations of Czechoslovakia of allowing it happen or of its direct support for such action.<sup>36</sup>

During the 1960s, some political elites in Czechoslovakia began to realise that the expectations of the rapid spread and victory of leftist movements in Latin America failed to materialise and most likely would not do so in the near future:

Developments in Latin American countries show that reactions gained on importance while the revolutionary wave caused by the Cuban revolution started vanishing. Domestic interests are gradually merging with the U.S. interests. The volume of inter-American agreements between repressive organs (such as police and army) and their direct linkage with the equivalent organisations in the USA is merely an organisational expression of this unity of interests. These measures, together with reinforced anti-communist propaganda, show how U.S. imperialism as well as Latin American reactions learned a lesson from the Cuban revolution. It is an expression of their efforts to prevent emergence of a 'second Cuba' in Latin America. To maintain the current state, various forms, ranging from direct repression carried out by the military dictatorship to reformism, are being used.<sup>37</sup>

Rationality in the assessment of the situation in Latin America was awoken by developments in several countries, where reformist regimes supported politically and economically by the US were gaining power, or by Washington's policies that aimed to decrease tensions with some governments in the region. The Dominican Republic and Panama serve as examples of these attempts. Furthermore, the economic costs taught a valuable lesson; the USSR and other countries in the bloc, principally Czechoslovakia, had to bear the costs stemming from the maintenance of Castro's regime in Cuba. In the period of economic problems that forced the Czechoslovak economists to seek unorthodox ways to restore stability, the funds spent on 'solidarity with the Cuban people' were a memento when considering the eventual socialist orientation of other countries in Latin America, particularly when taking into account the developments in Chile after 1970 and Nicaragua after 1980.

Economic efficiency of relations to Latin America were prioritised by the MFA and the Ministry of International Trade despite the 1969 developments, which put an end to the programme of economic reform in Czechoslovakia and to the attempts aiming for more independent foreign policy that emerged during the Prague Spring. Yet Latin America remained attractive for Czechoslovakia's diplomacy, which continued to emphasise the economic dimensions of relations since the region was an important market for Czechoslovak engineering products

and for investment units while Latin American countries supplied raw material for the Czechoslovak industry.<sup>38</sup> Even though official propaganda and political proclamations emphasised the importance of leftist movements in Latin America in the 1970s and Prague interrupted diplomatic relations with Santiago after some hesitation following the overthrow of Allende's government, the economic policy was much

Czechoslovak exports in millions of USD (excluding Cuba) in the second half of the 1970s<sup>39</sup>

	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
<i>Brazil</i>	31.1	24.7	69.2	42.4	22.5
<i>Argentina</i>	9.1	7.4	25.2	36.0	26.3
<i>Venezuela</i>	15.9	13.8	21.0	22.8	22.6
<i>Mexico</i>	9.5	9.8	7.3	11.5	18.9
<i>Ecuador</i>	2.3	2.2	4.8	7.6	9.1
<i>LA Total</i>	82.9	73.4	147.9	138.1	129.2

	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979
<i>Brazil</i>	59.6	102.8	127.0	131.4	144.6
<i>Argentina</i>	14.9	18.7	24.3	37.9	49.5
<i>Venezuela</i>	1.3	4.5	5.7	4.8	4.0
<i>Mexico</i>	2.2	8.5	7.8	7.2	6.9
<i>Peru</i>	19.7	23.1	32.7	22.0	26.5
<i>LA Total</i>	123.1	189.5	242.8	251.9	283.3

more pragmatic. Despite the reduction in trade volume between Chile and Czechoslovakia after 1973, economic relations sputtered on.

Czechoslovak imports in millions of USD (excluding Cuba) in the second half of the 1970s<sup>40</sup>

### Relations during the 1970s and 1980s

Diplomats serving in some of the countries where nationalist military regimes came to power in the late 1960s or early 1970s noted that the countries' economies, which are subject to strict state controls, did not reach the expected boom. This led to political changes; privatisation of some recently nationalised enterprises and to the decreasing interest in cooperation with countries of the Eastern bloc. Brazil, followed by Argentina, remained among the most important trade partners of Czechoslovakia, as Czechoslovak diplomacy and propaganda turned a

blind eye to the crimes of the military regime in Argentina that left thousands of dead and missing people. Yet Eastern Europe, including Czechoslovakia, was concerned about Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile, which was perceived as the product of US influence. Besides that, Czechoslovakia maintained proper trade, political and cultural relations with Mexico, had close relations to Cuba and, after the fall of Somoza's regime, also with Nicaragua.

The last extensive material devoted by the communist government of Czechoslovakia to Latin America, and adopted by the MFA in spring 1988, Latin America was to remain a subject of key interest. The document, entitled *Vývoj v Latinské Americe a nové zaměření čs. zahraniční politiky vůči zemím této oblasti*<sup>41</sup> (Development in Latin America and the new focus of the Czechoslovak foreign policy towards the countries in the region) began with reference to the policy of the Soviet bloc countries:

In recent years, the countries forming the socialist community pay increasing attention to the elaboration of relations with Latin American countries. This attention is justified by the growing importance of Latin American countries in the international political and economic relations. In this context, it is necessary to rethink the position and role of Latin American countries in the contemporary world and especially in the Czechoslovak foreign policy.<sup>42</sup>

The document suggested that Czechoslovakia had traditional economic and political links to the region; diplomatic relations were missing:

only with Chile (suspended in September 25, 1973), Belize and some small island countries in the Caribbean – Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Dominica, St. Kitts and Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, which gained independence at the end of the 1970th and early 1980s. Relations with Paraguay, Guatemala, El Salvador, Haiti, Grenada and the Dominican Republic are currently in a state of peace.<sup>43</sup>

In the section on the economic relations, the authors regarded the traditional exchange of goods as the basis of contacts. Considering the exchange of goods, Czechoslovakia, however, registered a negative balance of about \$60 million (USD) in 1987 alone. Furthermore, when compared to 1986 and 1987, Czechoslovakia saw a significant drop in sales, from \$521.3 million (USD) to \$494.3 million (USD).



## Conclusion

Cuba and Nicaragua continued to be the countries favoured by Czechoslovakia throughout the 1980s. While Cuba was the first and the only truly socialist country on the continent – maintaining rich contacts in the political, economic, cultural, educational, scientific, sport and health spheres – Nicaragua was a state with interests in cooperation in all areas and, as Czechoslovak documents explain, mainly in ‘the international assistance, which was essential in order to overcome the consequences of the enduring armed aggression of the Somoza counter-revolution, which was supported and equipped by the USA.’

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The countries that kept-up their traditional relations to Czechoslovakia such as Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, were busy forming another group of states. According to the document from the late 1980s, Czechoslovakia was also supposed to maintain ‘stable, fair and friendly relations’ with Mexico; still, ‘significant imperfections in cooperation, especially in economic and commercial area’ existed. Other countries that Czechoslovakia paid attention to were Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia. Additionally, the document referred to Central America due to promising prospects resulting from the agreements signed in San José and to the Caribbean, where relations deteriorated as a consequence of the 1983 Grenada Crisis. The collapse of the dictatorial regime in Haiti was evaluated favourably by the document, although ‘the installed pro-American puppet regime retained its anti-popular and anti-democratic character.’<sup>44</sup> The authors anticipated the normalisation of relations with the Dominican Republic and, after Pinochet’s departure as president, also with Chile. A similar development was expected ‘after the fall of the regime of General Stroessner in Paraguay.’<sup>45</sup> In the economic area, as a response to the international wave of privatisation, emphasis was put on the expansion of cooperation with private companies and on the search for different forms of linkages that would contribute to raise Czechoslovakia’s imports to enhance exports.

The events of the following months then corresponded to the realistic evaluation of further developments in Chile and Paraguay presented by the document. Nicaragua, however, went through an anomalous development; the adoption of a new electoral law in 1988 heralded surprising defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990; in other words, at a time when events in the USSR and Eastern Europe were rapidly transform-

ing the region, the international political scene and, consequently, relations to Latin America. In the case of Czechoslovakia and later on in the case of the Czech Republic, the transformation, which begun in 1989, meant a gradual loss of interest in Latin America, both in political and in the economic sphere. Hence, the number of Czechoslovak embassies in the region declined, by 2011, to levels below 1945.

While this work drew on historical documentation to illustrate nearly a century of international engagements between Czechoslovakia and Latin American states, it is clear that the future is not going to be a repeat of history. Instead, with nearly 25 years separating the present times from the Cold War, there have been unleashed a series of energies that are acting to re-establish the long tradition of Czech relations to the vast continental and archipelago region of Latin America. This work did not seek to provide a historical narrative only however. Instead it worked at defining the manner in which such disparate regions and the countries in them have managed to forge relations despite immense distances at a time when globalisation had yet to enter the parlance of international relations. Now that such relations have been facilitated by new technologies and approaches, it seems natural that a new wave of diplomatic vigour will ensure.

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## Notes

- 1 Bohumil Baďura (1964), 'Apuntes sobre los orígenes del comercio vidriero entre Bohemia y México (1787-1839),' in: *Historica IX*, pp. 69-134 and Klaus Weber (2004), *Deutsche Kaufleute im Atlantikhandel 1680-1830, Unternehmen und Familien in Hamburg, Cádiz und Bordeaux*, München, pp. 139-141.
- 2 See: Josef Polišenský (1976), 'La emigración checoslovaca a América Latina 1640-1945: Problemas y fuentes,' in *Jahrbuch für Geschichte von Staat, Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft Lateinamerikas* 13, pp. 216-238; Josef Opatrný (1994), 'Algunos problemas del estudio de la emigración checa a América

- Latina,' in *Estudios migratorios latinoamericanos* 27, pp. 381-399 and Ivo Barteček (1997), 'Emigración desde países checos y Checoslovaquia hacia la América Latina (Balance de los estudios latinoamericanos checos),' in *Ibero-Americana Pragensia* xxxi, pp. 227-241. The texts on this subject were also published in the supplements of the yearbook *Ibero-Americana Pragensia* under the titles *Emigración centroeuropea a América Latina*, 1, *Iberoamericana Pragensia*, Supplementum 10, (Josef Opatrný ed), Praga 2000, *Emigración centroeuropea a América Latina*, 11, *Iberoamericana Pragensia*, Supplementum 12, (Josef Opatrný ed), Praga 2002, *Emigración centroeuropea a América Latina*, 111, *Iberoamericana Pragensia*, Supplementum 14, (Josef Opatrný ed), Praga 2004, and *Emigración centroeuropea a América Latina*, 1v, *Iberoamericana Pragensia*, Supplementum 17, (Josef Opatrný ed), Praga 2006.
- 3 On the topic of exports of agricultural machines see: Jiří Novotný and Jiří Šouša (1989), 'Máquinas Agrícolas Checas para América del Sur,' in *Ibero-Americana Pragensia*, xxiii, pp. 79-98. On the topic of exports of Czechoslovak weapons see Jaroslav Bouček (1988), 'Negocios con Armamento Realizados por la Empresa Škoda en América Latina,' in *Ibero-Americana Pragensia*, xxii, pp. 85-190 and Novotný and Šouša (2004), 'La contribución checoslovaca para la modernización del Ejército peruano (La exportación a Perú de tanques de la fábrica Československá-Kolben-Daněk de Praga, a finales de los años treinta del siglo xx),' in *IAP*, xxxviii, pp. 151-174.
  - 4 Vlastimil Kybal (1935), *Po československých stopách v Latinské Americe*, in 'Sbírka přednášek České akademie věd a umění,' No. 5, Praha, p. 7.
  - 5 On the issues of Czechoslovak Latin-American diplomatic relations see: *Příručka o navázání diplomatických styků a diplomatické zastoupení Československa v cizině a cizích zemí v Československu 1918-1985*, FMZV (Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs) Archival documentation division, 1987.
  - 6 Czechoslovak trade with Latin America in the past twenty years was mainly examined by the authors Jiří Novotný and Jiří Šouša (1986, 1987), 'Los Bancos Checos y América Latina, 1919-1938,' Primera parte in: *Ibero-Americana Pragensia*, xx, 1986, pp. 107-140, Segunda parte in: *IAP*, xxi, 1987, 35-54.
  - 7 Lukáš Perutka, *Checoslovaquia, Guatemala y México en el período de la Revolución Guatemalteca*, in print.
  - 8 For the activities of the Czechoslovak diplomacy in Rio de Janeiro see Vladimír Nálevka (1973), *Československo a Latinská Amerika v letech druhé světové války*, Praha, Universita Karlova.
  - 9 Archive of the Ministry of the Foreign Affairs (AMFA), 'Meeting of the Collegium 1953-1989, Book 18, 'Zpráva o vztazích Československé republiky s Latinskou Amerikou,' 10 November 1955, pp. 17-18.
  - 10 Ibid.
  - 11 On the Marshall plan see: Karel Krátký (2010), *Marshallův plán. Příspěvek ke vzniku studené války*, Plzeň, Praha.
  - 12 Jindřich Dejmek refers to Masaryk's 'never fully explained death' as to 'a tragic and symbolic epilogue to the existence of the Czechoslovak democratic diplomacy.' See: Jindřich Dejmek (2012), *Diplomacie Československa I. Nástin dějin Ministerstva zahraničních věcí a diplomacie (1918-1992)*, Praha:

- Akademia, p. 140.
- 13 Dejmek (2012), p. 145.
  - 14 Ibid, p. 136.
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*Josef Opatrný*

# Turbines and Weapons for Latin America

Czechoslovak Documentary  
Film Propaganda in the  
Cold War Context, 1948-1989

*Kateřina Březinová*

This article focuses on the Czechoslovak documentary film production concerning Latin America in the context of the Cold War. It is analysed as a crucial means of domestic propaganda, promoting involvement in a distant region before a wider public. This was achieved by creating a matching discourse of social and political developments in Latin America and of Czechoslovakia's particular role in it. First, the results of the original research in film and television archives are presented, and the titles are situated into a larger political and cultural context within which they came into existence. Second, there follows a semiotic analysis of the prevalent motives of the films, based on Barthes, Geertz and Lotman. The research then confirms the link between the salient foreign-policy actions and the documentary film production between 1948-1989. The semiotic analysis puts in evidence a highly pragmatic and manipulative nature of the Czechoslovak Communist propaganda, obvious for instance in its selective treatment of the military regimes in the Southern Cone. This text contributes to a better understanding of the complex nature of Czechoslovakia's political, economic and cultural engagements thanks to which it became an influential political actor in the Cold War Latin America. This study was written within the programme for support of specific university



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## Introduction

*Bariri was was not an end, however.  
It was the beginning of the invasion  
of Czech turbines to Brazil. (1972)<sup>1</sup>*

When the Cold War rivalry between the USSR and US began to play out in Latin America in the 1950s, Czechoslovakia held a crucial position in bridging the Soviet bloc's strategic foreign policy interests in the region. Being the only Communist country with an existing network of embassies across Latin America, coupled with a history of economic and military cooperation dating back to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was well positioned to actively cooperate with some of the reform-minded and left-leaning regimes of the Western hemisphere, such as Jacobo Arbenz's Guatemala, Salvador Allende's Chile, Velasco-Alvarado's Peru, Ortega's Nicaragua, and most importantly, with Fidel Castro's Cuba. In practice, this position meant the sale and transfer of know-how and technical personnel, credit conditions favourable for Latin American partners, as well as intelligence cooperation with the objective to demonstrate the advantages of socialism and ultimately introduce it in a highly strategic region where the US imperialism was, supposedly, on the losing side.

As a result of this constellation, Czechoslovakia's political, economic and cultural engagements in Latin America scaled up dramatically in the Cold War period. Notwithstanding that the foreign policy was defined, or in the best of the cases co-defined in a top-down manner by Soviet and Czechoslovak Communist authorities, a necessity soon arose to justify these new foreign policy goals to the general public. A wide range of domestic propaganda tools were deployed in this task.<sup>2</sup>

The documentary films are approached as a reflection of the Czechoslovak Communist regime's idea of its role and perceived mission

in the distant states of Latin America, rather than a record of “real” events. Along with Marc Ferro, they are conceived as a historical phenomenon, one that narrates a parallel history.<sup>3</sup> This text is, therefore, a contribution to a better understanding of the foreign policy ambitions of Communist Czechoslovakia in Latin America in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one that should help better to understand the complex political, ideological and economic reasons leading to Czechoslovakia’s emergence – fully in compliance with the Soviet Union’s interests – as an influential foreign policy maker in different Latin American countries.

The roots of the active role of Czechoslovakia in Latin America in the Cold War era date back to the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The newly created independent state then established an extensive network of embassies and consulates across the Western hemisphere designed to assist its trade interests; helping to open new markets for its vibrant arms industry. The tradition of trade exchanges and diplomatic cooperation, although briefly interrupted during WWII, put Czechoslovakia in a unique position within the Socialist bloc countries which had only limited presence in the region. This exceptionality became relevant towards the end of the 1950s: it was through Czechoslovakia that the USSR established its first indirect contacts with Fidel Castro’s armed movement in 1958.<sup>4</sup>

It was only after January 1959, when Castro and his men came into power in Cuba, that the USSR saw a real opportunity for action in the Western hemisphere. Until then, the region was understood as the exclusive area of interests of the US and Czechoslovakia was the first Socialist country to open an embassy and intelligence headquarters in Cuba. In the early 1960s expectations ran high: Czechoslovakia was to act as an icebreaker for the Socialist camp in Latin America, or a bridge between the two regions.

This article first outlines the Czech documentary film production relating to Latin America between the years 1948 and 1989.<sup>5</sup> The goal is to place the results of the original research in the Czech film archives (National Film Archive, Short Film archive and Czech TV archive) into a larger political, cultural and foreign political context within which these titles came into existence. Documentary films will then be the subject of semiotic analysis in the second part of the text. Last, the enclosed filmography offers as complete list of Czechoslovak documen-



tary production in the studied period, which was possible to identify in the archives.

## Czech Documentary Films Relating to Latin America, 1948 – 1989

*Turbines and Weapons*

### *From the “Sharp” to the “New” Course: 1948-1958*

Following WWII, the film industry in Czechoslovakia was nationalised. The instrumental use of film in service of the state was made easier than before, yet attempts to employ film as a cultural tool was, by no means, a communist invention. After 1948, the film production mirrored ideological impositions of the “sharp course” of cultural policy (1948) requiring all production to be in the service of the first Five Year Plan (1949-1953). Institution-wise, the film industry suffered from competing interests of the Ministry of Information (Mol) and the “Kulturprop,” propaganda department allied to the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, until it passed under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1956.<sup>6</sup> All information was subject to control of the authorities, exercised through *Hlavní správa tiskového dohledu* (the Main Council for Press Surveillance), a specialised censoring body. Calls for liberalisation followed even after the “new course” in cultural policy was announced (1953).

It was in this context that the first documentary films about Latin America appeared in the decade after the 1948 communist coup. They were invariably the fruit of the labour of Jiří Hanzelka and Miroslav Zikmund, amateur filmmakers who recorded their journey through Africa and America in the futuristic model of Tatra T 87 vehicle with a camera. Their trip from Buenos Aires to Mexico City, carried out between 1948 and 1950, was promptly turned into a series of documentary movies directed by J. Novotný, featuring, among others, *Ostrovny milionů ptáků* from 1952 (*Islands of Million Birds*, from Peru’s Chincha Islands) about guano extraction in Chile; *Lovci lebek* (*Headhunters* about Shuar indigenous peoples from Ecuador, 1953); *Býčcí zápasy* (*Bull-fights* featuring Mexico and Peru, 1955). Two films reflected Czechoslovakia’s commercial activities in the region: *Československé motocykly v Guatemale* (*Czechoslovak Motorcycles in Guatemala*, 1952) portraying the renewed trade exchange between the countries in 1950s. Howev-

er, it was the shipment of Czechoslovak weapons to Guatemala which caused the fall of Jacobo Arbenz's government in 1954.<sup>7</sup> *Stavba lihovaru v Argentíně* (*Construction of Distillery in Argentina*, 1952) is the celebration of Czechoslovak technological capacities, as it depicts the world's biggest distillery construction in Argentina supervised by Czechoslovak experts. Several Hanzelka and Zikmund's documentaries were also employed in a feature film *Z Argentiny do Mexika* (*From Argentina to Mexico*, 1953).

Hanzelka and Zikmund's films, though conceived and begun just before the communist coup, had to comply with the ideological impositions assigned to all cultural production in the early 1950s. The quality of the production was judged according to "educational" qualities. "Relaxing" movies, on the other hand, were to be avoided as 'escapist entertainment [is] sought by those who do not go with the times.'<sup>8</sup> While cinema programmes formerly featured a steady proportion of US blockbusters, this practice was dramatically curtailed after 1948 in favour of domestically produced movies or those from ideologically allied countries. As a result, the cinema attendance hit historical minimum in 1950.

Hanzelka and Zikmund soon became the "official" artists of the new regime.<sup>9</sup> As recent research shows, their films attracted the audience of millions: they met the Czechoslovak publics' desire for visually attractive entertainment, one where the political and educational contents could be easily ignored. Moreover, their films offered spectators the possibility of imaginary travels to exotic places, otherwise forbidden to the majority of Czechoslovak citizens at the time.<sup>10</sup> The popularity of the duo soon overshadowed the pre-wwII generation of Czech filmmakers with professional interest in Latin America who did not, however, meet the ideological requirements of the time: i.e. Škoda car and Aero airplanes promoter František Alexandr Elstner who filmed in Mexico, Argentina and Uruguay in 1930s, popular composer, adventurer and filmmaker Eduard Ingriš who left for exile in Peru after 1948 Communist coup in Czechoslovakia, and Vladimír Kozák, a Czech expatriate in Brazil whose almost 600 documentary films remain largely unstudied until this day.<sup>11</sup>

## *Latin America at the Crossroads, 1959-1968*

The change in Czechoslovakia's internal propagandic attention paid to Latin America changed dramatically after the victory of the *barbudos* led by Castro in Cuba in 1959. The Cuban Revolution dramatically upset a century-long hemispheric "*Pax Monrovia*" defined by us hegemony over Latin America, and polarised old debates about social injustice in the region. Moreover, as Tulio Halperín Donghi observed,

the Cuban Revolution came at an opportune moment, in the view of those outside Latin America who wished to encourage socialist transformations there, and at a perilous moment for the international champions of capitalism. When policymakers in Moscow and Washington, D.C., spoke of a 'Latin America at the crossroads' they both described this reality and indicated their own disposition to influence developments in the region.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding Czechoslovakia's engagement with the region in the 1960s, expectations ran high: Czechoslovakia was to become an ice-breaker of the Socialist camp in Latin America.<sup>13</sup> Through Cuba, its task was to penetrate the rest of Latin America. Building on the long-term, uninterrupted track of economic cooperation with Cuba, Czechoslovakia wasted little time before it became its 3<sup>rd</sup> most important trading partner. The MFA launched two high-level goodwill missions to other countries of Latin America with the expressed goal of establishing a favourable impression of Czechoslovakia before they too became the foci of revolution: in 1960 to Uruguay and Brazil, Peru, Colombia and Venezuela; in 1961 again to Brazil, then Mexico, Ecuador, Chile and Bolivia.<sup>14</sup>

This political mission was reflected in the new foreign policy strategy for Latin America, approved in Prague in 1960, and confirmed by internal propaganda. Apart from printed media, there was a boom in professional documentary production about Latin America in the 1960s, carried out through the state enterprise *Krátký film*, as well as shifting domestic discourse about the region. Two countries enjoyed more prominence than others in the 1960s: the newcomer Cuba and the traditional trade partner of Czechoslovakia, Brazil.

Cuba became the most important reference for the Czechoslovak documentary production in the early 1960s, especially after Castro

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*Following the tremors in diplomatic links between Cuba and the US in 1961, ties between Cuba and Czechoslovakia grew even tighter and the Czechoslovak Embassy in Washington became Cuba's official representation in the US.*

declared, in April 1961, that it was to become a socialist country. The first documentary title from Cuba, Bruno Šefranka's *Havana* (1961) was filmed in an excited atmosphere just after the failed attempt at a US-sponsored invasion in the Bay of Pigs / Playa Girón in April 1961. Šefranka's film portrays some of the captured Cuban exiles awaiting trial, showing them as glimpse at Cuba's past in contrast with the future symbolised by housing estates construction in Havana. Busy market streets in the centre of Havana are apparently not yet affected by the deficiencies caused by the state takeover of farms and retail commerce. The film is an inspiring piece of propaganda both by what is shown and by what is left unmentioned, most importantly the prominent role that the Czechoslovak weaponry played in the celebrated defeat at Bay of Pigs. Following the tremors in diplomatic links between Cuba and the US in 1961, ties between Cuba and Czechoslovakia grew even tighter and the Czechoslovak Embassy in Washington became Cuba's official representation in the US.

Reflecting politically motivated cultural cooperation, other documentary films about Cuba followed.<sup>15</sup> They portrayed the country as a model of tropical socialism, or a new tourist destination for organised travel from Czechoslovakia: *Ostrov slunce (Island of Sun)* by Papoušek, 1964; *Havana-Praha* by Růžička, 1962-63.

Brazil, a traditional trade partner of Czechoslovakia in Latin America, was undergoing a highly conflictive period in the early 1960s with a turmoil partially inspired by the Cuban example. Apart from facing a complex situation of internal political polarisation, (then) President Quadros defended the right of Brazil to lead an independent foreign policy: after re-establishing diplomatic relations with the USSR and refusing to express support for the Bay of the Pigs invasion of Cuba and he went on (1961) to award state recognition to Argentine-Cuban revolutionary icon Ernesto Che Guevara. This was to be one of his last

decisions as president. His successor, João Goulart (1961-1964), further intensified a reforms project and extending suffrage, legalising peasant leagues and adopting a programme of land redistribution.

In the midst of this reform period, Czechoslovak documentary filmmakers began focusing on Brazil. Jaroslav Šikl, for instance, directed a film about Brazil's new capital. *Dvě města* (*Two Cities*, 1964) compared the old, aristocratic and leisure-oriented Rio de Janeiro with the construction of the 'capital of architects,' the modern city of Brasília initiated in 1956 under the leadership of the president Juscelino Kubitschek whose Czech descent goes curiously unmentioned in the film. The closing lines leaves little doubt where the filmmaker's sympathies lie: Brasília was to become a 'City not blessed by Christ but by man' in reference to the emblematic figure of Jesus Christ above the city of Rio de Janeiro. By the same author and a result of the same trip, a film essay about the Amazon titled *Lidé od velké řeky* (*People on the Banks of the Big River*, 1964) depicts the 'life of ordinary people' from the rainforest.

Brazil continued to be Czechoslovakia's most significant trading partner in the region even after the installation of the military government in March 1964; the hydropower plant in Bariri on the river Tieté in Sao Paulo state was built with the help of Czechoslovak expertise, as well as a water dam supplying electricity to Brasília. Diplomatic relations were enhanced as well and the Czechoslovak Embassy in Brasília widened its portfolio to assume the role of official representative of Cuba after the Brazilian post-*coup d'état* government severed its diplomatic links to Havana.

Documentary films about Brazil continued to be produced in the second half of the 1960s. Now, it was with a salient non-political character avoiding any reference whatsoever to the repressive military government: Rudolf Krejčík's *Hrst kamínků z Brazílie* (*A Handful of Stones from Brazil*, 1966) offers a collection of holiday-style snapshots with highlights such as Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, and Iguaçu waterfalls; *Butantan*, 1966 depicts world-acclaimed biomedical research centre in Sao Paulo.

### *Propaganda vis-à-vis New Friends ... and Foes in the 1970s*

Czechoslovak documentary film production relating to Latin America in the 1970s mirrors the internal political changes that unfolded

in post-1968 Czechoslovakia and the new foreign policy realities in several countries of the region, notably in Chile under the presidency of Salvador Allende (1970-1973) and Peru under the reformist military government of Juan Velasco Alvarado (1968-1975). Ironically, among the first statesmen to publicly justify the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the allied armies of the Warsaw Pact was – to the dismay of many sympathisers with Cuba in the country – was Castro. Prague's foreign policy towards its partners in Latin America fell back under the domination of Moscow and the re-establishment of the orthodox Communist party line in Czechoslovakia affected those filmmakers who, such as Zikmund, had engaged in reform efforts during the Prague Spring. His political involvement hampered further professional activities of what were the icons of Czechoslovak documentary filmmaking in the previous decades.

Whereas the official propaganda kept insisting on the political importance of the left-wing movements in Latin America, evidence shows that in the 1970s, besides ideology, the governing principle of mutual relations became the economic importance of Latin American countries as markets for Czechoslovak machinery and industrial exports.<sup>16</sup> This pragmatic attitude affected, in turn, the logic of national propaganda making: an example of this phenomenon is the treatment of Argentina, the 3<sup>rd</sup> most important trading partner of Czechoslovakia after Cuba and Brazil. Violent actions undertaken by Argentina's military *junta* went conspicuously unmentioned, whereas the Chilean military regime was virulently attacked by Czechoslovak propaganda.<sup>17</sup>

When Allende was elected to president in Chile, and launched a process of restructuring Chilean society along socialist lines, the country soon became the Socialist bloc's most important political partner in Latin America, second only to Cuba.<sup>18</sup> This was a dramatic shift for a country whose diplomatic links with Czechoslovakia were severed between 1947-1965. Shortly after Allende assumed office, Šikl went to Chile to film a documentary piece *Viva Chile* (1971) – a comment-free mosaic of the country and its peoples. Land reform attempts of Allende's government were the main theme of another celebratory documentary by Hladký entitled *Majitelé* (*Owners*, 1973). Apparently, this film was completed only shortly before the military coup led by the general Augusto Pinochet; images of the deceased Allende were probably added only later. Hladký's *Předehra* (*Overture*, 1973) boasts the co-

operation of Allende on the script. This intense spell of Czechoslovak documentary activity in Chile was no longer possible after September 1973, and especially after diplomatic relations between Prague and Santiago de Chile were again interrupted in protest against the military coup *d'état*. Prague's economic policy towards Chile was, however, more pragmatic than its diplomacy and trade between the countries continued beyond 1973.

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In the early 1970s, a curious version of social revolution "from above" was taking place in Peru under the leadership of the reform military government of Juan Velasco Alvarado. A process of agrarian reforms was launched, along with some redistributive measures, and the state extended its strategic areas of industry, such as petroleum and fishing. Czechoslovak companies provided technical and expert cooperation in large-scale energy projects, such as Mantaro River, later also in Pucallpa and Laguna Yarina. Internal propaganda followed suit. Needless to say, in the 1970s, Peru was distant to most Czechoslovaks except for the tragic earthquake in 1970 that killed a national climbing expedition to the Andes.

Several films were produced under the direction of Šikl ranging from the didactic portrait of the country entitled *Peru*, through an attempt at explaining the social changes in El Condor Pasa to an essay about the harsh life of indigenous peoples living around Titicaca, *Lidé blízko nebe* (*People Close to Gods*), all produced in 1975. Perhaps the most accomplished Šikl's film *Čekání na loď* (*Waiting for the Boat*, 1976), depicts medical action of the Peruvian government deep in the Amazon. A military boat carrying doctors, vaccines and other advances of civilization is shown as it penetrates the jungle and reaches remote villages.

Czechoslovak documentary production in the 1970s paid considerable attention to Mexico – a country with stable trade, political and cultural relations with Czechoslovakia during the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was widely known among the Czechoslovak public due to the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, held in the atmosphere of growing internal discontent.<sup>19</sup> Nevertheless, Czechoslovak documentary films avoid any kind of politicisation, and choose to focus on the traditions and history of the country: Šikl's film *Odsouzení pro Niké* (*Convicts for Niké*, 1970) about the unsuccessful performance of the Czechoslovak team at the World Football Championship in Mexico; Špáta's *Velikonoce v Mexiku* (*Easter in Mexico*, 1971) offers a series of hol-

iday-style impressions of Mexican traditions and favourite pastimes.

Director Jiří Svoboda followed in 1973 with the film *Ciudad de México – Den nezávislosti* (*Mexico City – the Independence Day*). Skalský's *Mexico*, 1977, *Země pod Popocatepetlem* (*Country below Popocatepetl*, 1978) and *Mexiko 1978-1980* (directed with Vrabec) offers little more than a didactic collection of historical and geographic curiosities. Controversial issues, such as the violent repression of student gatherings at *Tlatelolco* square in 1968, or the rise of a rural insurgency in protest against the government of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) are completely omitted by the Czechoslovak documentary film production.

By the 1970s the two channels of Czechoslovak public television became an established platform for the dissemination of internal propaganda. It was in this decade that Czechoslovak tv also started to commission documentary films. Testimony to this new phenomenon are two films directed by Polák: *Expedice Cotopaxi 72* (1973) which documented Czechoslovak-Polish volcano research and *Za Kofány, barevnými indiány v pralesích Río Napo* (*Visit to Cofan, Colourful Indigenous Peoples of Río Napo*, 1973) depicted ethnographic work of the same expedition in the eastern stretch of the rain forest of Ecuador.

A complete list of the documentary films production in the 1970s also includes titles concerning Cuba that kept enjoying an extraordinary level of attention by the Czechoslovak internal propaganda, one that can only be explained by its importance as the only Socialist country in the Western Hemisphere.

### *The Last Cold War Decade: Nicaragua*

The last decade of the Cold War commenced with ground-breaking political changes in Nicaragua. In 1979, a violent internal conflict and decades-long rule of the Somoza family were put to an end. The victorious Sandinista government initiated massive land reforms, as well as promoted national literacy and health campaigns. The USSR, Cuba and Eastern European countries perceived this development as the long-awaited success of the Cuban example in the region; they offered financial support to Ortega's government. Czechoslovakia's economic and technological assistance took on the character of providing international aid though there was also close cooperation in the field



of intelligence activities. At the same time, Nicaragua was capable of mobilising a wider international movement of solidarity beyond the East-West division that sent volunteers to help with coffee and cotton harvests.

Czechoslovakia's internal propaganda assisted in creating the image of Nicaragua as a country undergoing the process of liberation from long decades of a US-supported, corrupt and bloody dictatorship, a country in an urgent need of "fraternal" aid and cooperation. Director Bojanovský was responsible for three films about Nicaragua in 1986: *Rama-Kay* is an ethnographic document about the inhabitants of the island Rama-Kay; *Vulkán (Volcano)* depicts sweeping political and social changes in the country through the lens of communist propaganda. Finally, *Nicaragua* (ČFT 30/86) was a short piece filmed as part of the weekly Czechoslovak Newsreel (*Československý filmový týdeník*) and designed to inform the public about political developments in Nicaragua.

Closing in on the end of the Cold War, the country enjoyed diplomatic relations with all countries of Latin America except Chile, Belize and some island states of the Caribbean.<sup>20</sup> In 1988, the last strategic documentary film of cooperation between Czechoslovakia and Latin America was edited by the communist government in which Cuba and Nicaragua enjoyed an exceptional position for ideological reasons. Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay were labelled as traditional and stable partners of Czechoslovakia, as well as Mexico. Though neither Venezuela, nor Ecuador ranked among top allies, especially the former was an important market for the Czech industry. Films focusing on these countries, such as Jakeš': *Mezi Caracasem a Canaimou (Between Caracas and Canaima, 1986)* and *Ostrov Margarita (Margarita Island, 1986)*, and Dvořák's *Ekvádorské děti (Children of Ecuador, 1982)*, *Quito, Město na sopce, (Quito, the City on the Volcano, 1983)* and *Želví ostrovy (Turtle Islands, 1983)* paid attention to natural beauties of Venezuela and Ecuador, respectively.

*Turbines and  
Weapons*

## Film Propaganda as a Mirror of The Communist Regime's Imagination

Several prevalent motives and themes can be detected in Czechoslovak documentary film production concerning Latin America between 1948-1989. Since the film industry was strictly controlled by the state,

these recurrent motives can be analysed as those that the communist authorities judged most suitable for 1. creating a desirable image of the situation in a particular Latin American country, and setting the suitable discourse, and 2. gaining support for existing Czechoslovak actions there.<sup>21</sup> This was especially important in such cases that the ideological partnership weighed more than eventual Czechoslovak economic losses, as was the case of Cuba and later Nicaragua. Documentary films are, therefore, approached here as a reflection of the Czechoslovak and Soviet communist regimes' imagination of their perceived role and mission in Latin America. Rather than perceiving them as a registry of "real" events, they are read as a cultural text '(s)ince images, sounds, objects and practices are sign systems, which signify the same mechanism as a language, we may refer to them as cultural texts.'<sup>22</sup>

The prevalent motives of the films are detected and analysed with the help of semiotic analysis as proposed by Barthes, Geertz and Lotman.<sup>23</sup> Film propaganda is not only capable of registering the reality but also, and more importantly, of manipulating it. Along with Ferro, we read it therefore as a historical phenomenon, yet one that narrates a parallel history. The prevalent motives can be characterised in the following way:

First, the *negative role of the United States in Latin America* where the US and its economic, ideological and foreign-policy interests in the region are portrayed with fierce criticism in Czechoslovakia's documentary production between 1948-1989. From Cold War propaganda logic, the US is consistently linked with references to violence, monopoly, and lack of legality. In the early 1950s, Hanzelka and Zikmund expressed their indignation at not being able to ride roads privately owned by the United Fruit Company depicted as an unconstitutional external hegemon in Central America: 'In the Banana republics of Central America, one word of the director of this company weighs more than Constitutional law.'<sup>24</sup> Any kind of anti-US action was, therefore, appreciated and that government of Alvarado was attempting to break Peru's dependency on the US was welcomed by Czechoslovak propaganda which depicted the Peruvian military government in positive terms (*El Condor Pasa*).

The failed attempt of the US-sponsored Bay of the Pigs invasion of Cuba (1961) also offered rich materials for Czechoslovakia's internal propaganda and images of sharks accompany comments about the US:

'Cuba has enemies with explosives made in USA [sic].'<sup>25</sup> Some of the US-trained Cuban exiles 'wanted to shoot their way back to the nationalised cement mill previously owned by their father.'<sup>26</sup> According to *Havana* (1961), the US blockade of Cuba was there to cause food shortages on the island of freedom, but this was not going to happen, as 'new [Cuban] agriculture overcome the monoculture production, and now produces everything.'<sup>27</sup> At the same time, it is noteworthy that references to the 1962 Cuban missile crisis was completely omitted by film makers; a remarkable contrast when compared to its prominence in the print media.<sup>28</sup>

Second, *the Spanish conquest of Latin America and especially its cultural heritage of Catholicism* were portrayed in negative, retrograde and manipulative terms, reflecting the Communist regime's anti-religious stance. Spaniards are featured as representatives of a cruel colonial system: 'terrible killings brought about by those who resembled white Indian god'<sup>29</sup> that enriched themselves at the expense of the conquered: 'Peruvian gold paid the construction of Madrid, see fleet and London'<sup>30</sup> while young Indian boys were exploited in the colonial mines (*El Condor Pasa*). Francisco Pizarro is labelled as 'illiterate savage,' a representative of 'Europeans, Spanish conquerors, who strangled with their own hands this culture and nations.'<sup>31</sup> The Church was 'introduced by their Royal Highnesses'<sup>32</sup> to control effectively the population. 20<sup>th</sup> century Communist propaganda echoes the Spanish Black Legend elaborated by Elizabethan propaganda centuries before.

Religion is, however, presented as gradually losing its exclusive position among the population, although in Nicaragua 'there is *still* a noticeable uproar from the Church's altar.'<sup>33</sup> The same is suggested in the case of Brazil: its new capital city is depicted as a 'city which is not blessed by Jesus Christ but a man' in reference to the emblematic statue of Christ above the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil's former capital. In future-oriented, modern Brasília, even the cathedral is built by architects of Marxists inspiration.<sup>34</sup>

Third, the *indigenous past and present* received a considerable amount of attention by Czechoslovak filmmakers. Starting with Hanzelka and Zikmund's portrayal of Shuar peoples from the early 1950s and ethnographic picture of Ecuador's Cofan Indians 20 years later, Latin America's indigenous peoples are depicted with sympathy, yet as exotic relics of the past. They are however, being reached and saved by

the advances of civilization, represented, among others, by the military boat penetrating the Peruvian jungle and bringing medical personnel and vaccines (*Čekání na loď*, 1976, *Lidé of velké řeky*, 1964). A dead and silent Mexican history 'drown in the blood running as a result of arms held by Spanish conquerors' does have a future: optimistic and multi-racial Mexican youth – 'heirs of the winners and losers' – is shown climbing the pyramids: 'little Indians alongside white boys and mestizo'.<sup>35</sup> Rama peoples of Nicaragua can – thanks to Sandinista victory 'live as they wish for the first time since inhuman Somoza regime'.<sup>36</sup> In *Peru 87*, highland indigenous people are confronted with images of construction of the power plant on the Mantaro River. The film is creating the image of progress impossible to stop.

Critical attacks on indigenous religious beliefs can be found in otherwise sympathetic accounts of the Shuar peoples. Hanzelka and Zikmund explain the violent headhunting tradition as a result of evil-manipulation of their spiritual leaders, much alike the attacks against Catholicism: '(t)hey are manipulated by their shamans. They are the real originators of the killings as unlimited lords of Shuar until today'.<sup>37</sup>

Fourth, the *depiction that contemporary Latin America as a region of sharp social inequalities that can be remedied by more just governments* was focused on in Czechoslovakia. The lack of universal healthcare observed (in the late 1940s) by Hanzelka and Zikmund in the leper colony of Paraguay set an early tone for the Czechoslovak official perspective of the region: 'they cannot buy their own life, so they are waiting for death. We must not forget that cultured nations [...] have an obligation to turn back to life [...] people from Santa Isabel'.<sup>38</sup> Most documentary films depict poverty in Latin American neighbourhoods, or in the countryside, in contrast to luxurious constructions: favelas of Rio de Janeiro and working class outskirts of Sao Paulo which lack running water and electricity while the high-rise buildings pride themselves in the swimming pool on the rooftop (*Z Argentiny do Mexika, Peru 87, Předehra, Ecuador, země na rovníku*).

There are exceptions to this landscape of poverty and injustice, and models to follow, however: Cuba is shown as building socialist-style housing estates (*Havana*) and in the modern city of Brasília 'swimming pools are a matter of fact' (*Dvě města*), Allende's Chile and Velasco-Alvarado's Peru are building modern flats for workers (*Viva Chile, El Condor Pasa*). Efforts at land reform promised to establish fair con-

ditions in the countryside (*Předehra*), while illiteracy is combated after the Sandinista victory in Nicaragua which meant a 'step towards a better society' under the motto '(r)evolution taught children to read and write.'<sup>39</sup> Whereas a positive treatment of Cuba and Allende's Chile comes less as a surprise, the fact that the military regime in Peru receive positive treatments in Czechoslovakia's propaganda is intriguing; as if a distinction is drawn between "good" and "bad" military regimes in Latin America: '(s)oldiers who swore the revolution' are equated to modernisers of the country, 'messengers of new era' who, for the first time in history, penetrate the Amazon on board a military boat carrying doctors and vaccines. These revolutionary soldiers are positive heroes: they 'desire to be the mythical condor that stands on guard of the Peruvian revolution.'<sup>40</sup> They are contrasts to the negative protagonists of history, the "old" Spanish and Creole soldiers who had controlled Latin America for centuries. Finally, Latin America's 'better societies of the future' are unanimously portrayed by the Czechoslovak film propaganda as racial democracies. Some of the films even explicitly deny existence of any racially-inspired inequalities (*Z Argentiny do Mexika, Dvě města*). As Šikl claims about Brazil, 'There are no concerns about races here. You meet Indians, blacks and whites.'<sup>41</sup>

The fifth theme gravitates around *Czechoslovakia's cooperation with Latin American countries*. Documentary film production depicts diverse types of economic assistance and cooperation with the region, ranging from geologic research (*Czechoslovak Geologists in Cuba, Expedice Cotopaxi 72, Expedice Ecuador*), massive energy projects (*Peruánské postře-hy, Kilowatty z Tieté*), industrial complexes (*Lihovar v Argentině*) to the exportation of machinery (*Československé motocykly v Guatemale, Peru 87*). Czechoslovakia's technological advancements are presented in almost millenarian terms, as agents of modernity and civilization. The image of this country as an industrial power is consistently reinforced by Czechoslovak internal propaganda over the four decades studied here. First, the "engineers" Hanzelka and Zikmund drive through Latin America in their Tatra car; later, there are the Czech anonymous engineers building energy plants in Latin America and overcoming natural hurdles with the help of the most advanced technologies: 'Bariri was not an end, however. It was the beginning of the invasion of Czech turbines to Brazil.'<sup>42</sup>

One aspect of Czechoslovakia's cooperation with the region was avoided in film propaganda, namely Czechoslovakia's arms sales to Latin America. Beyond technological cooperation, some of the films also documented the official diplomatic and cultural contacts among Czechoslovakia and countries of the region, such as the International Youth Festival in Havana (*Mládí světa v Havaně*), an important visit of the Czechoslovak Communist authorities to several countries of Latin America (*Pod Jihoamerickým nebem*), and the musical ensemble of the Czechoslovak Armed Forces tour to Cuba (*Havana-Praha*).

Sixth, *imaginary travel to exotic places* is thematically represented. The evidence stemming from the archival research reveals that a high number of Czechoslovak Cold War documentary films about Latin America focus on natural and cultural beauties of Latin America and its people, notwithstanding the official anti-entertainment cultural policy especially strong in the first decades of the Communist rule in Czechoslovakia. Some films offer tour of important sites and holidays (*Velikonoce v Mexiku, Z Argentiny do Mexika, Hrst kamínků z Brazílie, Po stopách starých Mayů, Quito, Město na sopce, Býčí zápasy, Cesta za ztraceným městem*). Latin America's flora and fauna are admired (*Ostrovů milionů ptáků, Želví ostrovy*) and most importantly, the unique habitat of the Amazon (i.e. *Lidé od velké řeky, Z Argentiny do Mexika, Lovci lebek, Za Kofány, barevnými indiány v pralesích Río Napo*). Though these documentary titles were conceived as "educational" and always contained some aspects of Communist-era ideology, they fulfilled the need for visually attractive entertainment for a Czechoslovak audience banned from international travel on their own.

Finally, it is important to note the *themes that speak by their absence*. One aspect of Czechoslovakia's cooperation with the region avoided by propaganda was, as noted, Czechoslovak arms sales to Latin America. Second, there are no references to the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. Third, the selective nature of the Czechoslovak communist propaganda is evident from the fact that it chose to be completely silent about the violent military regime in Argentina, an important trading partner of Czechoslovakia at the time: no documentary film about Argentina was produced in the 1970s or 1980s. To a lesser extent, a similar strategy of amnesia was employed with regards to the most important trade ally of Czechoslovakia, Brazil, headed by a repressive military government after 1964. This deliberate silence contrasts to the highly critical

treatment of Pinochet's regime in Chile.<sup>43</sup> Among other "silenced" issues belong Czechoslovak expatriates exiled in Latin America. These sizeable communities are ignored in the films with the sole exception being Hanzelka and Zikmund's portrayal from the early 1950s (*Z Argentiny do Mexika*).

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## Conclusion

Traditional historiography describes the Cold War events in Latin America as the direct outcome of superpower rivalry between the US and the USSR. Yet new archival evidence suggests a necessity to take a second look at the actions of minor players, such as Czechoslovakia. These may result in a nuanced, more complex story of Latin America's Cold War chapters.

Documentary films produced between 1948-1989 mirror the shifting imagination of Czechoslovakia's political and economic role in Latin America during the Cold War. As tools of internal propaganda, they were designed to justify new foreign-policy goals of the Communist regime before a wider public. This was achieved by creating a matching discourse of social and political developments in Latin America, and of Czechoslovakia's particular role in them. The analysis shows that the studied documentary films selectively employed a set of recurrent motives that were manipulating the reality by either highlighting some of the facts, or by ignoring them. In Ferro's terms, they were creating a parallel history about Czechoslovakia's mission in Latin America during the Cold War.

Between 1948-1958, Czechoslovak documentary titles portrayed Latin America as an exotic place suffering under the economic and ideological domination of the US. Though Hanzelka and Zikmund's films were conceived as a sort of road trip movies, their engaged commentary betrayed the Cold War logic and paid tribute to overall radicalisation of the political discourse in Czechoslovakia after 1948.<sup>44</sup> After Castro's 1959 assumption of power, the boom of professional documentary production focusing on Latin America went hand in hand with the crucial importance of Cuba for the Soviet bloc, and with the new mission of Czechoslovakia as "icebreaker" for the Socialist camp in Latin America. This research proves the link between the salient foreign-policy actions and the documentary film production. Beyond

Cuba, documentary propaganda focused on other crucial allies in the region, too: primarily Brazil, Mexico, Chile and Peru in the early 1970s, in the last decade of communist rule also Nicaragua. The semiotic analysis of these films put in evidence a highly pragmatic nature of the Czechoslovak communist propaganda, reflected through its selective treatment of the military regimes in the Southern Cone.

It may now be concluded that Czechoslovak documentary films concerning Latin America played a twofold role in Communist Czechoslovakia between 1948-1989: they indoctrinated the audience according to the official cultural policy line, yet they were also offering a visually attractive entertainment to the public deprived of the possibility to travel almost anywhere, not to mention Latin America. What the loud celebration of Czech turbines' invasion to Latin America oftentimes concealed, however, was the less publicised nature of the ideological and military cooperation with Latin America.

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## Notes

- 1 František Arlet (1972), *Kilowatt z Tieté*: 'Bariri však nebyla koncem, nýbrž začátkem invaze československých turbin do Brazílie,' Translation by author.
- 2 These were mainly in print media, the so-called "expert literature" as well as documentary films. For analysis of internal propaganda concerning Cuba in the print media and expert literature see: Hana Bortlová (2011), *Československo a Kuba v letech 1959-1962*, Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze, pp. 154-165. Only scant attention was paid to Czechoslovak documentary film production concerning Latin America see: Stanislav Kázecký (2004), 'Películas documentales checas con temática latinoamericana rodadas antes del año 1989,' *Ibero-Americana Pragensis*, xxxviii, pp. 175-179.
- 3 Marc Ferro (1988), *Cinema and History, Contemporary Approaches to Film and History*, Wayne State University Press.
- 4 Bortlová (2011), p. 34.
- 5 Due to a limited number of documentary titles made in Slovakia, this text focuses on Czech productions.
- 6 Knapík (2006), *V zajetí moci. Kulturní politika, její systém a aktéři*. Praha: Libri, pp. 87-89 and p. 279.
- 7 Josef Opatrný (2013), 'Czechoslovak-Latin American Relations 1945-1989:



- Their Broader Context,' *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 7:3.
- 8 Pavel Skopal (2012), 'Muži v sedle, v cirku a na létajících strojích. Dějiny filmové recepcce v českých zemích, 1945-1953,' in Feigelson and Kopal (2012), *Film a dějiny 3. Politická kamera, Film a stalinismus*, Prague: Casablanca-Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, p. 327.
  - 9 This image was enhanced by the fact that some of their projects were completed at the confiscated Dobříš Castle, the official Writers Union retreated from the proximity of Prague. Here, Hanzelka and Zikmund also enjoy the creative company of some of the left-leaning foreigners who found political exile in Czechoslovakia, such as Brazilian writer Jorge Amado and his wife Zélia Gattai.
  - 10 Skopal (2012), pp. 340-343.
  - 11 Kázecký (2004), pp. 175-179.
  - 12 Tulio Halperín Donghi (1993), *The Contemporary History of Latin America*, Duke UP, p. 293.
  - 13 Bortlová (2011), p. 53.
  - 14 Ibid, p. 53.
  - 15 Czechoslovakia's credit and know-how was, among others, instrumental in the construction of Cuban film laboratories, as well as the Cuban Film institute (ICAIC). See Bortlová (2011), p. 91.
  - 16 Opatrný (2013).
  - 17 Ibid.
  - 18 Michal Zourek, 'Political and Economic Relations between Czechoslovakia and the Military Regimes of the Southern Cone in the 1970s and 1980s,' *Central European Journal of International and Security Studies*, 7:3.
  - 19 A social and cultural awareness about Mexico was enhanced by some Mexican feature films screened in Czechoslovak cinemas in the 1950s and 1960s, such as *Pueblerina* (1949, directed by Fernández).
  - 20 Opatrný (2013).
  - 21 For a comparison see the analysis of the internal propaganda relating to Cuba between 1959-62 in Bortlová (2011), pp. 154-165.
  - 22 Chris Baker (2000), *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, London: Sage Publication, p. 11.
  - 23 Ronald Barthes (1967), *The Elements of Semiology*, London: Cape. Ronald Barthes (1972), *Mythologies*, London: Cape, Clifford Geertz (1997), *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books and Yuri Lotman (2001), *Universe of the Mind: A Semiotic Theory of Culture*, Indiana UP.
  - 24 Jaroslav Novotný (1953), *Z Argentiny do Mexika: 'V Banánových republikách Střední Ameriky platí jedno slovo ředitele této společnosti [United Fruit] více, než ústavní zákon.'* Translation by author.
  - 25 Bruno Šefranka (1961), *Havana: 'Kuba má nepřátele s třaskavinami made in USA.'* Translation by author.
  - 26 Ibid, 'Jejich plán bylo znovu se prostřílet ke znárodněným cementárnám svého otce.' Translation by author.
  - 27 Ibid, 'Nové zemědělství teď prolomilo monokulturu a pěstují vše možné.' Translation by author.

- 28 Bortlová (2011), p. 165. See also, Michal Špaňár (1996), *Karibská krize a její čs. Reflexe*, MA Thesis. FSV UK. Unpublished, pp. 57-81.
- 29 Jaroslav Šikl (1975), *El Condor Pasa*: 'strašlivé vyvražďování přinesli lidé podobní bílému indiánskému bohu.' Translation by author.
- 30 Ibid, 'Za peruánské zlato se stavil Madrid, flotily, Londýn.' Translation by author.
- 31 Novotný (1953), 'Evropané to byli, španělští conquistadoři, kteří vlastními rukama zardousili tuto kulturu i národy, jež ji tvořili.' Translation by author.
- 32 Ibid, 'Církev, kterou přivedla její katolická veličenstva.' Translation by author.
- 33 Vítězslav Bojanovský (1986) *Vulkán*: 'Stále ještě významný halas od kostelního oltáře.' Translation and emphasis by author.
- 34 Jaroslav Šikl (1964), *Dvě města*: 'Tomuto městu nežehná už Kristus, ale člověk.' Translation by author.
- 35 Novotný (1953a), 'Malí indiáni vedle bílých chlapců a míšenců.' Translation by author.
- 36 Bojanovský (1986) *Rama-Kay*: 'Poprvé od nelidského Somozova režimu žijí jak chtějí.' Translation by author.
- 37 Novotný (1953), notes that 'Jsou zmanipulovaní lékaři-kouzelníky. Ti jsou původci vraždění, neboť jsou dodnes neomezenými pány Šoarů.' Translation by author.
- 38 Ibid, 'Nemohou si koupit vlastní život, proto je Santa Isabel osadou mrtvých [...] Nemůžeme zapomenout, že kulturní národy mají ....povinnost vrátit k životu statisíce nešťastných, jako jsou lidé ze Santa Isabel.' Translation by author.
- 39 Bojanovský (1986), 'Jeden krok k lepší společnosti [...] Revoluce naučila děti číst a psát.' Translation by author.
- 40 Šikl (1975), 'Vojáci, kteří přísahali na revoluci [...] 'Poslové nové doby [...] Armáda touží být bájným kondorem bránícím peruánskou revoluci.' Translation is ours.
- 41 Šikl (1965), 'Starosti s rasami tu nemají, potkáte mezi nimi i indiány, černé, bílé.' Translation by author.
- 42 Arlet (1972) *Kilowatty z Tieté*: 'Bariri však nebyla koncem, nýbrž začátkem invaze československých turbin do Brazílie.' Translation by author.
- 43 General A. Pinochet is depicted by communist propaganda as the embodiment of the Latin American military dictatorships' cruelty. Opatrný (2013) and Zourek (2013).
- 44 It would be a mistake to see propaganda as a novelty introduced only after the communist takeover. Comparative research suggests a considerable measure of continuity before and after 1948. See Lucie Česálková (2012), 'Noví noví lidé. Budovatelská tematika v produkci Krátkého filmu v letech 1954-1954,' in Kristian Feigelson and Petr Kopal (eds) (2012), *Film a dějiny 3. Politická kamera, Film a stalinismus*, Prague: Casablanca-Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, p. 460.

# Arms for Arbenz

## Czechoslovakia's Involvement in the Cold War in Latin America

*Lukáš Perutka*

This article introduces an under-researched historic problem about the relationship between Czechoslovakia and Guatemala during the protracted Guatemalan Revolution (1944-1954). Czechoslovak relations with Guatemala were already established during the interwar period when the (relatively) small central European country became an important purchaser of Guatemalan coffee. Such commercial interests helped create official diplomatic channels sealed in 1936 with the signing of a commercial agreement that facilitated the Guatemalan purchase of Czechoslovak-made arms. Following WWII, bilateral relations were not renewed; however the new democratic regime of the President Arévalo retained the interest to do so. In the same spirit, Arévalo's successor, Jacobo Arbenz, sought to rehash his country's relationship to Czechoslovakia and managed to achieve that goal on the diplomatic level which resulted in the 1954 Czechoslovak arms deal. Unfortunately, this normalisation occurred at the time of mounting pressure from the US against Arbenz. So, the weapons purchased from Czechoslovakia played a significant role in the collapse of the democratic state in Guatemala and formed the basis of the US intervention pretext.

*Keywords: Cold War; Guatemalan Revolution, Czechoslovakia-Guatemala, United States-Guatemala, arms sales, Jacobo Arbenz*

### Introduction

The sale of arms from Czechoslovakia to the regime of Jacobo Arbenz, President of Guatemala, is one of the few examples when two small



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states played a certain and important role in the events of the Cold War. At first, it seemed to be an ordinary arms deal, not so much different from what Czechoslovakia had done during the interwar period. However, in the 1950's, world politics had diametrically changed and this trade played a decisive role in ending the Guatemalan Revolution, better called the Guatemalan Spring in 1954, and that end led to the fall of Arbenz himself.

### The Genesis of Relations between Czechoslovakia and Guatemala

In order to understand why both states decided to make such a deal a turn back to the interwar period is needed because it was then that the foundations for further cooperation were laid. In 1918, just before the end of WWI, Czechoslovakia succeeded and gained independence from the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The new central European republic was looking for new markets where it could buy commodities and sell its merchandise. The Czechoslovak government soon became interested in Latin America; among which, Guatemala and the entire Central America region, were key.

The first important act of the newfound Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Czechoslovakia was to establish a consulate in Mexico City at the end of 1922.<sup>1</sup> The consulate also retained authority for relations with Guatemala; however this was not sufficient for the Czechoslovak colony, which had formed there at beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To satisfy its consular needs and to supervise and arrange commercial trade, the Czechoslovak government contemplated establishing another representative office directly in Guatemala. They therefore welcomed the initiative of Rudolf Zrnovský, Czechoslovak businessman and resident of Guatemala for several years, who offered himself (1922) as a possible representative.<sup>2</sup> His effort was also supported by the consulate in Mexico City and the Consul General, Vladimír Smetana, in his letter to the MFA spoke of the economic importance of the representative offices in Latin America. Throughout all of 1922, Czechoslovakia exported to Mexico products to the value of 16 million (Kčs); in the first half of 1923 (with the established consulate) it had already reached some 12 million (Kčs). Towards Central America Czechoslovakia exported merchandise to the value of one million (Kčs) and in the first half of 1923 (without

representative offices there) it was a half million (Kčs). This implies that without official support, it was difficult to increase Czechoslovak exports.<sup>3</sup>

These arguments acted as an impulse for the MFA to create an honorary vice-consulate in Guatemala City, however Zrnovský was a quite controversial figure – he was involved in a failed colonisation project in Guatemala and was deemed unacceptable for some Czechoslovak emigrants. For these reasons he was not inaugurated in his position until late 1927.<sup>4</sup> While in office, his problems persisted and the Czechoslovak government decided to change the status of its representative office in Guatemala to honorary consulate and, as its head, appointed another and more renowned emigrant businessman, František Kraška, in 1930.<sup>5</sup>

The 1930's were a very important time in the relations between Czechoslovakia and Guatemala. Mutual commerce flourished; especially Czechoslovak importation of coffee and exportation of textiles, crystal and leather products. Unfortunately, in 1933 Hitler assumed power in Germany and he introduced a new economic approach towards the Latin American states. The system was called *Ausländer Sonderkonten für Inlandszahlungen* (ASKI), named after the virtual currency ASKI Marks. In a simplified way, the Germans paid for coffee in Guatemala with this virtual currency which the Guatemalans were able to use only in shops with German goods. The main benefit was that they could buy merchandise with a discount of 25%.<sup>6</sup> This system almost eliminated business competition from Europe and Guatemala maintained, apart from Germany, strong trade relations only with the US. For example, in 1934 Germany imported 44% of Guatemalan coffee, the US 22% and Czechoslovakia a mere 4.5%.<sup>7</sup>

This situation, and the lack of activity of the Czech government, were criticised in 1936 by the Czechoslovak Minister in Mexico City, Vlastimil Kybal, who published several articles about the difficulties of commercial trade in the Central America in various newspapers at home.<sup>8</sup> Thanks to his efforts Czechoslovakia sealed a new commercial treaty in October 1936 with Guatemala, which facilitated mutual trade and acquired similar benefits as the US.<sup>9</sup>

The change was swift and significant. Czechoslovakia once again became a key importer of Guatemalan coffee and a considerable exporter – the amount of Czechoslovak exports to Guatemala rose nine times in 1937 compared to 1935.<sup>10</sup> Many famous Czech companies had agents in

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Guatemala, for example the famous shoe company Baťa and the arms firm Zbrojovka from Brno. The agent of the latter was no one else but Czechoslovakia's Honorary Consul, František Kraška, and it is probable that he personally arranged the most important deals between the two countries in the interwar period. The Guatemalan government was interested in Czechoslovak arms for its army mainly because of their excellent reputation in Latin America. In 1936, Guatemala bought some 4000 rifles from Zbrojovka. These weapons were based on the Mauser system, called model 24.<sup>11</sup> One year later another 50 light machine guns ZB model 30 were purchased.<sup>12</sup>

Sadly, this commercial renaissance did not last more than two years because Czechoslovakia fell under German influence thanks to the Munich Agreements (30 September 1938) and later under German commandship when the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was created (16 March 1939). This meant the end of commercial activity between Czechoslovakia and Guatemala together with the severing of diplomatic relations. WWII signified profound changes in both countries, the official Czech government resided in London, and Guatemala suffered a revolution. In 1944, the old dictator, Jorge Ubico, who had governed the country from 1931, was deposed and substituted by a new democratic regime and a new president Juan José Arévalo.

It was the new Guatemalan president who was interested in the restoration of diplomatic and commercial relations with Czechoslovakia and he made some important courtesies to that end. For example, Guatemala still recognised the commercial treaty of 1936 even though it had not been ratified.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Czechoslovakia was not, at this time, capable of an appropriate response. At the end of WWII it did not maintain sufficient diplomatic capacities and in the years directly after the war, it suffered a coup d'état.<sup>14</sup> In February 1948, democracy was replaced by communism and Czechoslovakia attached itself to the USSR; the latter fully governed the foreign relations of the former. This implied that no direct diplomatic relations were established, no new commercial treaty was arranged, and some sporadic actions like the commercial mission of representatives Landa and Hermann in 1949 practically fell in vain.<sup>15</sup> That is why the restoration of the relations between Czechoslovakia and Guatemala had to wait for the new Guatemalan president Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán.

## Arbenz's Search for Arms

Jacobo Arbenz was an important revolutionary figure in Guatemala since 1944. In the government of Arévalo he acted as Defence Minister and was favourite to replace him in office. In the elections of 1950 he won 64% of the vote and entered office the next year.<sup>16</sup> His predecessor had started some important reforms and transformed the country into a democracy, a fact supported by the free and fair presidential elections in 1950. As president, Arbenz, it seemed, had two choices: to continue with modest reformism or to take more radical approach. He opted for the second choice and in his inaugural message he highlights themes like constructing an independent and diversified economy and agrarian reform.<sup>17</sup>

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Arbenz was not specific, but it was clear that his policy would be directed against the monopolies of three North American companies: La Empresa Eléctrica (which produced 80% of the electricity in Guatemala); International Railways of Central America (IRCA); and the United Fruit Company (UFCO – a real colossus company, the second largest owner of railways and singly the largest company in the world in the cultivation and exportation of bananas).<sup>18</sup> These companies each had disputes with the previous government of Arévalo, but this time the situation was far tenser and UFCO, for example, sponsored a campaign in the US media against Arbenz and his government. The companies were also supported (although indirectly) by the US Department of State, which observed Guatemala with growing anxiety. Their main concern was the question of communism and its influence in the country. There existed communist parties in Guatemala but they were not in Congress and when the official party was established (Partido Guatemalteco de Trabajo, PGT) in 1952, it had only 4 representatives out of 58 seats.<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, it was Arbenz who tolerated communist activities in Guatemala and he drew close friends and advisors from them. One of these was his closest political friend, José Manuel Fortuny, the secretary of PGT. Furthermore, many communists were employed in high-level positions in the civil service and educational bureaucracy.

Perhaps, counterfactually, the communist threat would not have been taken so seriously, but at the beginning of the 1950's the international ideological struggle was all-encompassing; states had to choose a side. The USSR gained atomic military power in 1949, the Korean

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War was on and the US was living through an era of mass hysteria and heightened fear of communism, intensified by McCarthyism. Consequently, the CIA prepared (1951) an operation against the Guatemalan leadership called PBFORTUNE (PB was a code for Guatemala and FORTUNE was an optimistic name for the operation).<sup>20</sup> This operation was eventually halted in 1952 by the State Department because President Harry Truman decided to not stand in the forthcoming election. The officials also did not want to end the Good Neighbour Policy which the US followed since the presidency of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. This resulted in a halt until a new president would be inaugurated in 1953.<sup>21</sup>

Luckily for the CIA – and their planned operation – the newly elected president was Dwight Eisenhower who had heavily criticised Truman's Administration for its "soft" approach to the communist threat. As Secretary of State he chose John Foster Dulles and, as head of the CIA he appointed his brother Allen. Both were supportive of the covert operation in Guatemala.<sup>22</sup> Final approval was issued in September 1953 when the CIA orchestrated a similar action in Iran against the Prime Minister Mohammad Mosaddegh. The new operation was called PBSUCCESS because it took the useful parts from the first operation.

Arbenz was not naive and knew, or at least suspected, a move against him from the US. He was not so sure about the form of such a move: it could be a direct assault (improbable), the US could use one of his regional adversaries like Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza or could authorise a covert operation.<sup>23</sup> It was clear however, that if the US were to opt for a direct military operation Arbenz would have to strengthen the Guatemalan armed forces. The condition of the Guatemalan army

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was, in fact, tragic. War materials and equipment were functional, but old and obsolete. The main problem was the lack of spare parts and ammunition. For example, Guatemala had only four planes and none



of them could fly. They lacked replacement parts. Guatemala's infantry was in need of ammunition and grenades. In 1953 soldiers had to dismantle cartridges that did not fit their rifles thanks to their calibre and had to file used cartridges.<sup>24</sup>

This poor condition of the Guatemalan army was the result of an embargo imposed by the US in 1947. The reason was Guatemala's hesitation about signing the Rio Treaty (Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance). It stated that an attack against one is to be considered as an attack against them all, known as the Hemispheric Defence Doctrine. For the US, it was *the* essential document against the spread of communism over the American continents. Guatemalans hesitated because of their claims over Belize. But, for the US, it was evidence of growing communism influence in the country. For this reason, the US not only refused to sell weapons to Guatemala but also blocked its efforts to buy them in Latin America and West Europe.<sup>25</sup>

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### *Enter Czechoslovakia*

In 1953, when Arbenz sensed an acute threat from the US and their allies, he was desperate to find a country to sell him sufficient military materials. He tested the states of Latin America (Mexico, Argentina) and Western Europe (Great Britain, Italy), but the US blockade was successful and Guatemala was refused support. This was the pivotal moment when he turned to the Eastern bloc and to one country in particular; an old trading partner that had sold arms to Guatemala in the past. This was, of course, Czechoslovakia.

There were several reasons for Arbenz to beseech Czechoslovakia for military materials and support:

First, as noted above, Guatemala had tense economic relations with Czechoslovakia in the interwar period. After WWII however, the situation changed and Czechoslovakia emerged as Guatemala's most significant commercial partner among the states in the Soviet orbit. In 1952, Guatemala exported to Czechoslovakia merchandise worth some 8.5 million (Kčs). In comparison, Hungary traded to the some of only 6 million (Kčs) while trade to Poland, China and the USSR was labelled as insignificant.<sup>26</sup> In 1953, Czechoslovakia exported to Guatemala goods to the value of 18.7 million (Kčs), and imported coffee to the value of 1.8 million (Kčs).<sup>27</sup> In short, Czechoslovakia was an important trading partner for Guatemala.

Second, the Czechoslovak military firm Zbrojovka had sold some arms to Guatemala in the past: rifles in 1936 and light machine guns in 1937. Thanks to the us embargo the Guatemalan army was forced to use these weapons in late 1953. It was only logical to ask the Czechoslovak government for ammunition.<sup>28</sup> Third, it is important that Czechoslovakia was not in NATO or under the influence of the us; therefore it was logical to assume that they would not be politically restrained in selling military materials to Guatemala.

Fourth, Czechoslovakia was well known among Guatemalan communist and personal friends of Arbenz like José Manuel Pellecer (Congressman) and José Manuel Fortuny. Both had visited Czechoslovakia and were called friends of Czechoslovakia. Fortuny's visit in Prague was more important; he visited the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and some syndicate organisations.<sup>29</sup> He made important contacts while there and he probably persuaded Arbenz to try to purchase ammunition from Czechoslovakia. It was also Fortuny who was dispatched by Arbenz to make such an enquiry.

Finally, there was one peculiar reason—Arbenz's lack of understanding of the larger context of foreign relations in the world of the 1950's. Sure, Arbenz was desperate but also very naive when he thought that purchasing arms from a country in the Soviet orbit would be tolerated by a us convulsing with fear from communism. He also miscalculated the reaction in Latin America when he thought that neighbouring states accept such a deal. Arbenz did not help himself. On the contrary, he produced arguments to his adversaries, who used the arms deal against him.

### *Arranging the Arms Deal*

Even when Arbenz had decided to purchase military materials from Czechoslovakia he could not be sure about the outcome. As indicated above, after wwii Czechoslovakia maintained a reserved position towards Guatemala. Arévalo had wanted to normalise diplomatic relations and arrange a new commercial treaty, however, Czechoslovakia did not respond to such efforts. Arbenz wanted the same because Czechoslovakia was an important ally for him in diversifying and ensuring the independence of Guatemala's economy, but he approached Czechoslovakia more intensively and often invited representatives

from the Czechoslovak mission in Mexico to Guatemala for dinners and discussions. Nevertheless, Czechoslovakia maintained its reserved position until mid-1953. It is legitimate to ask why.

Several explanations are apparent; first, the USSR did not fully endorse deeper Czechoslovak relations to Guatemala and Czechoslovak foreign relations were under heavy influence from Moscow. This is confirmed by the disgraceful absence of Czechoslovak representatives at the inauguration of Arbenz, despite being invited. The Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Relations cancelled his attendance on learning that the Soviet Ambassador has excused himself.<sup>30</sup> Also, it is now known that Czechoslovak representatives in Mexico consulted every move with their Soviet counterparts.<sup>31</sup> Thus, it is possible that the USSR under Stalin blocked the normalisation of the relations between Czechoslovakia and Guatemala. It may be only coincidence but the situation and the Czechoslovak posture towards Guatemala markedly changed after Stalin's death on 05 March 1953 and his Czechoslovak follower, Klement Gottwald, on 14 March 1953. This is in line with the revisionist Cold War historiography which suggested that Stalin had no intention to spread communism. He did so only in Eastern Europe to create a buffer zone and better protect the USSR from possible attack. He did not want to collaborate with the countries of the Third World and certainly not in Latin America because he did not want to provoke the US in their own "backyard."<sup>32</sup> This theory is also confirmed by Fortuny who observed larger flexibility of the USSR towards the Third World after the death of Stalin.<sup>33</sup>

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A second reason can be attributed to the February Revolution in Czechoslovakia. The overthrow of democracy and the emergence of the communist regime were accompanied by purges in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At the beginning there was a lack of properly skilled officials, which meant that the ministry and offices abroad may have been full of amateurs incapable of normalising relations with Guatemala. When the younger generation took over (for example the new general secretary of the communist party Antonín Novotný was inaugurated in 1953 and soon became very passionate about almost everything about Guatemala) the situation changed.

In 1953 there was a breakthrough in the relations between Czechoslovakia and Guatemala because the former – all of a sudden – normalised relations with Guatemala and together they planned a new, deeper economic relationship to be formalised with the formation of

a Czechoslovak Consulate in Guatemala City and a Guatemalan Mission to Prague. None of this was to bear fruit however, because Arbenz, surprised by the sudden change in Czechoslovak attitudes made the rushed decision to purchase arms from Czechoslovakia.

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There had existed some enquiries in the era of Arévalo and Arbenz, during the dinners with Czechoslovak representatives had often asked about the possible sale of weapons but it was in late 1953 when the Guatemalan president presented his first serious request. He sent Fortuny, his closest friend and a man known in the communist world to Mexico City to the Czechoslovak Mission. Fortuny came to Mexico in November and his first steps were to the Soviet Embassy. There he provided information about Arbenz's troubles with military material and his efforts to purchase weapons from Czechoslovakia. Soviet Ambassador Antipov recommended that he arrange things directly with the Czechoslovaks. Fortuny then went to the Czechoslovak Legation:

Fortuny informed me that Guatemala is endangered by an invasion from the ODECA [Organisation of Central American States] countries ... Arbenz believes in the Guatemalan army and relies on the people but there is lack of weapons. Guatemala bought arms right before the war [wwII] or directly after it in Czechoslovakia, mainly rifles that are the main armament of the Guatemalan army. But there is a shortage of ammunition to the extent that the army received an order not to use live cartridges during exercise ... Therefore, Arbenz is using Fortuny as a middle man in the effort to obtain arms from us.<sup>34</sup>

Fortuny was invited to Prague where he may present Arbenz's petition to the leading figures of the Czechoslovak government. He negotiated with Prime Minister Viliam Široký, President Antonín Zápotocký and with Minister of Defence Alexei Čepička.<sup>35</sup> The most important meeting was with Antonín Novotný, the new General Secretary of the Czechoslovak Communist Party (KSČ), on 14 November 1953:

(t)o the secretariat of the UV KSČ<sup>36</sup> came the General Secretary of the Guatemalan Labour Party comrade Manuel Fortuny. He was received by comrade Novotný in presence of comrade Baramová.<sup>37</sup> In the name of the Communist leadership and in the name of the President of the Guatemalan Republic, colonel Jakub Arvenz [sic] asked our party and government for a shipment of arms and ammunition for their army in the value

of approximately two to two and a half million dollars ... It is necessary to give c. Fortuny an answer if we agree and in the case we do, he will give us the list of needed goods and it will be sent here an official representative of the [Guatemalan] government, the Minister of Agriculture, mister Alfonso Martinez who will settle the details.<sup>38</sup>

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The Czechoslovaks did not give a straight answer to Fortuny because they had to consult this issue with the Soviets. Novotný then sent a letter to the Central Committee of the Soviet Union Communist Party:

Comr.[ade] J. M. Fortuny is in Prague expecting our answer, but we anticipate that such thing we can decide only on the base of a mutual agreement with you, therefore we ask you to adopt an attitude in this matter.<sup>39</sup>

Ultimately, the Czechoslovaks had two messages for Fortuny: they no longer possessed the ammunition he asked for, however they were willing to sell arms to Guatemala, so Arbenz should send Martínez to settle the details.

Alfonso Martínez was another close friend of Arbenz. He was not a member of the communist party, but Arbenz trusted him enough to send him to Prague to arrange the purchase of weapons. He spent twenty days in Prague in early 1954. Sadly, there are no records of his negotiations with the Czechoslovak government about the weapons except for this short notice:

The business negotiation in Prague was managed truly in the spirit of mutual understanding and friendship. A. M. [Alfonso Martínez] proclaimed that for the first time he does not have to look for catches in the propositions of the second party like during the negotiations with English, American, French or Italian companies. Despite of the geographical distance and difference of the regime he felt that he was among real friends. That he stated in both interviews with c. Široký and in the negotiations with c. Dvořák.<sup>40</sup>

Despite scant information about the talks themselves, the results are well known. The Czechoslovaks realised that they did not have the arms Fortuny had asked for, but came up with a solution. They decided to sell to Guatemala old German weapons that had been left in Czechoslovakia at the end of WWII and had been refurbished by the Czechoslovak army. The contents of the purchase were rifles, machine

guns, grenades and also heavy weapons such as anti-tank cannons, anti-aircraft cannons and mortars; everything with corresponding ammunition. In total, the Czechoslovaks sent some 2000 tonnes of arms<sup>41</sup> for an army of 12000 soldiers who should use them from 10 to 15 years in peacetime.<sup>42</sup>

### Weapons from Czechoslovakia as a Pretext for Invasion

As the Guatemalans were negotiating weapons from Czechoslovakia, the CIA and US State Department were carefully preparing their operation against Arbenz. Their first real test became the Pan-American Conference in Caracas. It was crucial that this conference approve the tabled anti-communist resolution, which could legitimise the operation in Guatemala. It was so important that even the Secretary of State Dulles travelled to Caracas in March and presented the resolution himself. In the end, it was approved, but with less enthusiasm that Dulles had anticipated. For John and Allen Dulles it was clear that operation PBSUCCESS needed tweaking in order to be more acceptable for Latin America publics. Sadly for Arbenz, it was he who provided this boost.

The Dulles brothers were, by April 1954, so desperate to prove to the public that Guatemala was a communist country that they decided to make a clandestine operation and plant some cases of weapons on the Central American coast. They also prepared a propaganda campaign to persuade the public that these arms came from a Soviet submarine.<sup>43</sup> However their intentions failed because the press was simply disinterested in this story.<sup>44</sup>

Therefore, when on 15 May 1954 a Swedish ship named *Alfhem* arrived at Puerto Barrios in Guatemala full of arms from Czechoslovakia it not only caused horrors but also relief for the Dulles brothers.<sup>45</sup> One CIA official called it a blessing in disguise.<sup>46</sup> On 16 May, Allen Dulles presided over a meeting of the Intelligence Advisory Committee where several officials from the State Department and the US Army were present and Dulles released his information about the arms and proclaimed that with so many weapons one can occupy the entirety of Central America up to the Panama Channel. A similar message was conveyed to the advisors of Eisenhower the next day. Unanimously, they supported Operation PBSUCCESS.<sup>47</sup>

John Dulles delivered the opinion of the State Department on 17 May. In the memorandum it was noted that the arms shipment was

part of a Soviet plan to conquer the Americas. He also exaggerated the quantity of the arms to imply that Guatemala could triple its army and conquer its neighbours.<sup>48</sup> The *Alfhem* incident also caused a great turmoil in the American press. Journalists began to write about the menace of communism in Guatemala and how the Guatemalan Army supported by the arms from the USSR could endanger the hemisphere, the Panama Canal and create a new Korea in America.<sup>49</sup> The *Washington Post* proclaimed that 'the threat of Communist imperialism is no longer academic; it has arrived.' The *New York Times* speculated that the communist weapons would travel on their way using 'secret jungle paths' to communist groups in other Central America countries. The same hysteric reactions appeared in the US Congress. Democratic congressman John McCormack argued that '(t)his cargo of arms is like an atom bomb planted in the rear of our backyard.' William C. Lantaff thought that if 'Paul Revere were living today, he would view the landing the Red arms in Guatemala as a signal to ride and warn the Americas of the present acute danger of Communist infiltration in Latin America.'<sup>50</sup> On 19 May Eisenhower delivered a speech where he stated that the arms could create a communist dictatorial regime in Guatemala.<sup>51</sup>

Things went from bad to worse for Arbenz as the other Latin American states piled on. On 19 May Nicaragua interrupted diplomatic relations with Guatemala. This was no surprise because the dictator, Somoza, was a regional ally of the US. Other reactions were more unexpected. Somoza organised a meeting of foreign ministers from Latin America to discuss the threat of communism in Guatemala. The first one who accepted was José Figueres, President of Costa Rica and, until then, a supporter of Arbenz. Another state, Cuba, mobilised its army, navy and police forces to face the communist threat. Haiti expelled two Guatemalan representatives. Costa Rica and Panama recalled their ambassadors from Guatemala – officially for 'consultations.'<sup>52</sup> Also Honduras, before the coming of *Alfhem* was reluctant to support the PBSUCCESS, signed a mutual security pact with the US.<sup>53</sup>

Mexico changed its mind. It was one of the two states that did not support the resolution against Guatemala at Caracas. However President Ruiz Cortines, in an interview with US Ambassador White, expressed his disillusionment about the Guatemalan purchase of arms:

The President seemed very much impressed at the furtive way the shipment had been made and observed that if Guatema-

la could not get any arms from the United States or Mexico or another countries and needed arms for its own defence, it could have bought the armament in perfectly normal and above-board way but doing it as they had had naturally caused one to feel that the transaction was not just normal, proper one.<sup>54</sup>

When White told the President about the extent of the military material brought to Guatemala, Cortines noted that such big transport is even more suspicious.<sup>55</sup>

The arms shipment from Czechoslovakia provided the us with a much needed pretext for direct military actions in and against Guatemala. This shipment was used as evidence that Guatemala was a communist country and it assisted the us to legitimise their campaign in the eyes of Latin America governments. Consequently, the CIA gave the green light to a group of Guatemalan rebels in exile to invade their homeland. Between 17 and 18 June, rebel commander, Castillo Armas, supported by the us travelled from Honduras to Guatemala with 150 guerrilla fighters. After ten days of fighting the Guatemalan army had lost the will to fight and the deeply depressed Arbenz resigned to his post without consulting his cabinet.<sup>56</sup>

## Conclusion

The so-called Guatemalan Revolution presented one of the few examples of Czechoslovakia's direct involvement in Cold War Latin America. It was the military material shipped from Czechoslovakia that contributed to the end of the democratic experiment in Guatemala. It is true that it was made possible only thanks to the shift of the foreign policy of the USSR following the death of Stalin and the Soviet communist leadership approval, but it was left to the Czechoslovak government to arrange the deal. It was also the common commercial history between Czechoslovakia and Guatemala and the good name of Czechoslovak weapons in Latin America that attracted Guatemalan President Arbenz when he was seeking arms from beyond the US' sphere of influence.

The arms shipment from Czechoslovakia was a tragic decision for Arbenz as he became the architect of his own demise. His perpetual fear of US intervention and his naive approach to international rela-



tions during the Cold War forced him to pursue such a purchase; a purchase that was, in the end, used by the us – in a typical negative feedback cycle – as evidence of the communist danger in Guatemala. It also affected his position between the Latin America countries. Even when he tried to explain that Guatemala could buy arms elsewhere, the governments in Latin America found the quantity and the secret manner in which the arms were obtained deeply suspicious. Ultimately, nobody protested against the guerrilla invasion sponsored by the us and Arbenz found himself in international isolation, a point that continues to plague Guatemala's regional and international position today.

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# Czech Tractors, Cuban Oranges

## Economic Relations between Socialist Czechoslovakia and Revolutionary Cuba

*Hana V. Bortlová*

This work deals with the economic relations between Cuba and socialist Czechoslovakia from the early years of the Cuban Revolution until the fall of the communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). This work suggests that economic relations constituted the backbone of the Czechoslovakia's policy towards Cuba and divides such engagement into three, distinctive, periods: 1. the "euphoric period" (1959 until the missile crisis in 1962); 2. The period between the aftermath of the missile crisis and the Prague Spring (1968); and, 3. the period of "normalised relations," (the post-1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia until early 1990). The work is primarily based on Czech archival documents such as records of Czechoslovakia's communist leadership (Czechoslovak Communist Party Central Committee Archives), the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade, and the Civil Intelligence Service.

*Keywords: Cold War, International Relations, Economics, Czechoslovakia, Latin America, Cuba*

### Introduction

In the three decades which followed after 1959 – the year Fidel Castro assumed power in Cuba – Czechoslovakia acted as an important conduit of Soviet influence on this Caribbean island; it served as a virtual gatekeeper since, unlike the other countries of the Soviet Bloc, Czechoslovakia could boast comprehensive diplomatic, economic and cultur-



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mobile device

al contacts that had been made with Cuba even before WWII. Initially, Czechoslovak goods were exported together with the Soviet's communist ideology, though turned into essential parts of the so-called "international aid" provided to Cuba by the Soviet bloc aid which mainly consisted of industrial equipment and weaponry. Czechoslovakia also provided Cuba with military experts, technicians and scientists. These economic relations constituted the backbone of Czechoslovak policy towards Cuba. This work divides and assesses them in three periods.

The first period is identified as "euphoric" since it followed the euphoria of the 1959 rise of Castro and lasted until the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, when such euphoria waned. Significantly, this period saw the commencement of the substantial importation of Czechoslovak weapons, and the first deployments of Czechoslovak "asesores" (advisors) in various sectors of the Cuban economy and administration. The second period lasted from 1962, re: after the Missile Crisis, until 1968 when the Prague Spring occurred. When compared to the early 1960s, economic relations with Cuba declined during this period; the original euphoria was eclipsed by Prague's dissatisfaction with Cuba's incapability to meet its business obligations while Czechoslovakia's reformist tendencies – evident, in the economic field, since 1964 – became more apparent in their mutual relations. Czechoslovakia's economic experts were dissatisfied with the orientation of the country's foreign trade and highlighted the disadvantageous trade relations with certain countries, including Cuba, while suggesting that it would be useful to efficiently distinguish between "real" priorities and politically motivated "international assistance." Naturally, Cuba cooled towards Czechoslovakia, supported the 1968 Soviet-led, Warsaw Pact invasion of the country while restricting imports from Czechoslovakia – which was overtaken by the GDR.

The final period is termed: "normalised relations," and lasted from late 1969 to early 1990. Relations between post-1968 Czechoslovakia and Cuba, were slowly returning to their pre-1968 levels which resulted in the extension of the existing agreements on cooperation in economic, scientific, educational and cultural relations. The accession of Cuba into the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in 1972 greatly enhanced economic relations as well as Cuba became COMECON's supplier of some raw materials (nickel) and sugar. Tropical fruits (re: oranges), deeply rooted in the "memory of taste" of many

Czech and Slovak generations, also represented a significant part of the importation lists. Czechoslovakia's exports to Cuba did not experience major changes compared to the 1960s. By the beginning of the 1970s, thousands of Cuban "*gastarbeiters*" (guest-workers) had moved to Czechoslovakia and entered key sectors such as the automobile industry, engineering, and textile manufacturing. A more gradual transformation of Czechoslovakia's relationship to Cuba occurred in the mid-1980s as a result of Gorbachev's *perestroika*, which Castro watched with growing distrust since it represented ideological and economic transformations. After 1989, Czechoslovakia's and (later) the Czech Republic's relationship to Cuba may be depicted as nearing hostile and political changes in the Cold War's aftermath affected diplomatic relations and seriously impacted the economic links with the island.<sup>1</sup>

Czech  
Tractors,  
Cuban  
Oranges

This work seeks to provide greater understanding to the aforementioned periods as a means of grasping the variables which lead to economic and political harmonisation. The case of Czechoslovakia and Cuba during the Cold War will certainly assist in painting a more complete picture of how intra-communist engagements worked. This text is largely based on Czech archival documents – records of the Czechoslovak Communist Party Central Committee Archives, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), Ministry of Foreign Trade (MFT) and Civil Intelligence Service – and, as a result, will only focus on the “euphoric period” since this period seems to be best referenced and cross-referenced in the archives. This is not to suggest that the other periods are not reflected well, they are, however, the main thrust of this work's enquiry has led to an abundance of archival information for the first period and hence focus is paid to it. In light of further information, it is hoped that the other two periods may be more thoroughly examined.

In order to adequately depict the circumstances that led to, and the results of, the first period of Czechoslovakia's relations to communist Cuba, this article proceeds as follows: first it outlines the state of both Cuba's and Czechoslovakia's economies during the initial process of rapprochement, including the limitations with which both countries entered into the cooperation. This work then describes the characteristic features of this cooperation and its development during the first half of the 1960s. Finally, this work deploys “special cases” to reflect on the weaknesses, political links and impacts of Czechoslovakia's trade relationship to Cuba. It should be noted that the research undertaken

for this article deliberately omits investigation into the trade in weapons between Czechoslovakia and Cuba since that industry is not considered as part of “normal trade” and should be discussed in a separate text.<sup>2</sup>

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## Assessing the Economic Situation in Cuba and Czechoslovakia in the Early Cold War Years

### *A Snapshot of Czechoslovakia's Economy, Post-1948*

Since entering the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (COMECON) in January 1949, Czechoslovakia's economy was reoriented to the USSR, and its satellites, and forced to fulfil the “recommendations” (a.k.a. “orders”) issued by Moscow. Czechoslovakia was disadvantaged in COMECON because, compared to other members, it was highly developed in economic and social terms, and following the logic of proletarian internationalism, was designated to assist other countries in the bloc with economic development and industrialisation. Thus, beginning in 1949, Czechoslovakia's economy focused on the development of heavy industry, which is expensive and dependent on imported raw materials and its traditional sectors (glass, food, textile industry) were inhibited. While emphasis was placed on the growth of the means of production (factories, machinery, equipment), the production and quality of consumer goods; the internal market did not reflect the dynamics of supply and demand. At the same time, foreign trade was monopolised by the state and the supreme authority over it was the MFT.

Within the framework of the ‘coordinated action in trade policy towards capitalist states,’ the importation of goods from the West was limited to commodities deficit among the COMECON countries and exported merchandise could not have been under-produced in the other countries of the Council. According to the COMECON guidelines, Czechoslovakia was also to provide other members (free of charge) with patents, licenses and technical documentation. It was not all negative however since the Western embargo allowed Czechoslovakia to develop and maintain a *de facto* monopoly on the supply of equipment to the COMECON countries, even if the quality was low.

Foreign trade was performed exclusively by the registered Foreign Trade Enterprises (Podniky zahraničního obchodu), which were estab-



lished and managed directly by the MFT; each of which had its own merchandise specialisation. The enterprises most actively involved in Czechoslovakia's exports to Cuba in the studied period were Motokov, Technoexport, Strojexport (machinery and equipment) and Ompopol (arms exports, omitted from further discussion).

Hana V.  
Bortlová

### *A Snapshot of Cuba's Economy, Post-1959*

The transformation of Cuba's economy after Castro's assumption of power was no less radical than Czechoslovakia's after 1948; its market economy morphed into a centrally planned and hyper-bureaucratically organised system. Experiments with a mixed economy failed and the Cuban government nationalised most of the means of production in 1960. The centralisation of economic management was meant to facilitate economic planning and accelerate growth. Never before in Cuba's history had the state shouldered such a dominant role in the management of the economy – though the transformation was entrusted to incompetent people who made serious mistakes and caused huge economic losses. Cuba was particularly hard hit by some radical experiments, such as free transport and telephone services and generous social benefits (etc). Cuba's economic deficiency was intertwined with Guevara's policy of eliminating material work incentives and replacing them with moral incentives.<sup>3</sup> The lack of coordination across the economic system shook the foundations of Cuba's economy and led to a shortage of basic foodstuff in the market and later to the introduction of a rationing system (1962). Also, the foreign capital in the country – three-quarters of which was American – was severely hit as a consequence of the nationalisation of US sugar factories, banks, oil refineries and other large industrial companies, later followed by the nationalisation of housing, light manufacturing, transportation, services, education and health care. Soon after that, businesses owned by Cubans were struck too; resulting in the retardation of non-functioning or malfunctioning services.

During the first half of 1959, it was still unclear what the planned transformation of the Cuban economy would look like. Castro's attitude to private foreign investments and economic aid from the West was sceptical but not altogether dismissive. A major breakthrough occurred at the turn of 1959 and 1960. In February 1960, the first econom-

ic agreement with the USSR was signed. It included a loan of \$100 million (USD) to spawn industrialisation and economic development, and an agreement to provide technical assistance. Moscow also committed to buying Cuban sugar destined for the US market while supplying oil, wheat, iron and consumer goods. An economic agreement with China and some Eastern European countries, including Czechoslovakia, followed.

Relations between Cuba and the US, obviously, suffered an acute deterioration and tensions escalated in the summer of 1960 when an open economic war erupted. The US banned the export of goods to Cuba (except food and medicine) and initiated an embargo, which contributed to the paralytic situation facing Cuba's economy by causing critical shortages of spare parts for machinery and equipment. The sense of economic despair was accentuated by aborted revolutionary economic experiments – such as rapid industrialisation – which added “insult to injury” and further undermined the national economy and the national standard of living. There was virtually no knowledge of economic management; the country lacked experts and was unprepared for a centrally managed economic life. Economic development was, therefore, formulated by Soviet and East European experts.

The nationalisation of foreign trade and the rupture of traditional economic ties had fatal consequences for an economy that had traditionally been based on exports. Although new business relations were established with the USSR, the Soviet satellites and China (in 1961 the share of the USSR in the Cuban foreign trade was reaching 50%), new partnerships did not reflect in foreign exchange profit. Cuba desperately lacked hard currency and its foreign trade began to suffer from a passive trade balance. At the same time, Cuba's debt to both socialist and capitalist countries kept growing. In 1962 a rationing system was introduced for most consumer goods.

Following the Cuban Missile Crisis and the subsequent cooling of relations with the USSR, Cuba turned to China politically – with hopes of economic assistance. China could not compete with the USSR in their ability to provide economic assistance to Cuba, however and further economic declines left Cuba few options but to return to the USSR with requests for aid.<sup>4</sup> Cuba gave-up on diversifying its economy and, in accordance with Soviet needs and requirements, it launched a new era of massive sugar production and exports to COMECON countries.

## Economic Relations between Cuba and Czechoslovakia

After the USSR, Czechoslovakia boasted the largest share of Cuba's economy between 1959-1962 and was acknowledged as Cuba's third most important trading partner in the 'socialist camp' (after the USSR and China). Support provided for Cuba was politically motivated and reflected Soviet interests in installing and consolidating pro-Soviet regimes in the proverbial "backyard" of the US. Part of the strategy was to offer Cuba a more generous economic assistance package than China to drive the island to Moscow in the midst of the Soviet-Chinese split.

*Czech  
Tractors,  
Cuban  
Oranges*

While Soviet exports consisted, primarily, of commodities (re: petroleum) and China mainly exported foodstuffs (re: rice), Czechoslovakia could offer machinery and equipment, transport vehicles, military equipment and weapons, capital equipment and consumer goods. By offering its traditional exports, absent in other Soviet-bloc countries, Czechoslovakia gained a privileged position in Cuba. Already in 1959, trade with the island grew rapidly.<sup>5</sup> In summer 1959, a provisional Czechoslovak Business Office was opened in Havana. A sharp increase in the commercial exchange followed in mid-1960 after the Czechoslovak Embassy in Havana had been established and the first economic agreements signed. Between 1960 and 1961, the trade turnover increased more than fourfold; Czechoslovakia's exports increased by 300% and Cuba's imports by some 2300%. In 1961, Czechoslovakia's exports to Cuba accounted for 42.2% of total exports to Latin America while Cuba's represented some 40% of total Czechoslovak imports from the South American continent.<sup>6</sup>

The abovementioned economic agreement signed in June 1960 constituted the basis for mutual trade exchanges. It contained a loan of \$20 million (USD) at 2.5% interest, an agreement of technical assistance and a commercial agreement. The quantity of goods was not determined. The signatories calculated that contracts would be renewed annually and only minor changes to the commodity lists would be made. Attached to the agreement was *List A*, Czechoslovakia's goods for export to Cuba and *List B*, Cuban goods for export to Czechoslovakia. From the archives it is clear that Czechoslovakia was interested in importing iron ore, nickel oxide, electrolytic copper and copper concentrate, manganese ore, raw cow hides, cocoa, coffee, tobacco, tropical fruit and juices. The list of Czechoslovak goods for export to Cuba was more extensive and it contained, in particular, plant and mining

equipment, equipment for the manufacture of machinery, motors and engines, pumps and compressors, specialized equipment, consumer goods, chemical raw materials and food.<sup>7</sup>

Economic assistance to Cuba was further extended in October 1960, when Ernesto Guevara's delegation visited Czechoslovakia. In accordance with a Directive given by the Politburo, virtually all Cuban requirements were met: the extension of a long-term credit by an additional \$20 million (USD), the shortened delivery times for capital equipment supplied by Czechoslovakia to Cuba, providing hundreds of college scholarships to young Cubans (etc). The treaty about enhanced economic assistance to Cuba was signed on 28 October 1960 as an additional protocol to the June agreement, and 'given its extraordinary political importance,' its implementation was to be secured 'at the cost of exceptional measures, if needed.'<sup>8</sup>

The most important part of the contract was the credit extension, which represented some \$40 million (USD or 290 million CZK). After the USSR and China, this was the third largest loan to the country (the USSR provided 100 million USD and China 60 million USD). The loan was intended for the construction of a tractor and automobile industry in Cuba. Furthermore, the Cubans were promised technical and material assistance for the nickel plants in Nicaro and Moa. Czechoslovakia also agreed to shorten delivery times in three contracted units (a plant for the production of screws, a plant for the production of locks and a spades and shovels factory) and to supply six steam power plants with a total capacity of 270-275 MW by 1966.<sup>9</sup> Supplies of manganese, chromium and iron-ore and copper concentrates, which were the only requirements of Czechoslovakia, were conditioned on further consultations in Moscow.<sup>10</sup> The only one of Guevara's request which remained temporarily unfulfilled was the establishment of direct flights between Prague and Havana.<sup>11</sup> Although Czechoslovakia almost immediately sent a group of transport experts to Cuba, the line could not be launched earlier than in February 1962 (initially the aircraft with capacity of 80 passengers flew twice a week). Czechoslovak Airlines' (CSA) route from Prague to Havana was the first airline connecting Central Europe and the Caribbean and the first CSA transatlantic route ever.

Czechoslovakia envisaged that the expansion of economic contacts with Cuba would bring certain benefits. In the first meetings, representatives demonstrated an interest in the importation of tropical

fruit, cow hides, corded silk, tobacco or coffee, and, most importantly, of ore metals (nickel, copper, manganese, and chromium), necessary for domestic heavy industries. That is also why Czechoslovakia did not hesitate to invest considerable amounts of money into the development of mining and ore processing in Cuba and provided the know-how by sending experts to Cuba and receiving Cubans for training in Prague, supplied mining equipment, etc. Contrary to expectations however, the aid was not reflected in the increase of supplies of these materials because Cuba preferred to export them to Western markets which paid in hard currency and the amount supplied to Czechoslovakia was below the expectations of the MFT and in contrast to the signed contracts. Even in the case of sugar Cuba failed to comply with the agreed volume of supplies, which eventually represented the main export item to Czechoslovakia. In this way, the proposal made by the Castro and Guevara to a Czechoslovakian business delegation to Havana in summer 1961 can only be described as extravagant. Consider that the archives suggest that

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Bortlová*

it would be appropriate that Czechoslovakia reconsiders its sugar production. They claimed that (...) it would be preferable for Czechoslovakia to buy sugar in Cuba and thus contribute to economically complement each other. They recommended not to increase the sowing area of beet sugar and to use the remaining soil for cultivation of other crops.<sup>12</sup>

Regarding coffee and cocoa beans, Cuba supplied them only in 1960 and 1961; the same with furs and leathers though, in 1960, raw cow-hides constituted some 22% of all Cuban exports to Czechoslovakia. Supplies of fruit, tobacco and tobacco products fluctuated considerably during the 1960s.

Czechoslovakia's exports to Cuba, on the other hand, corresponded to the demands of Cuba's economy, consisting in two thirds of machinery, equipment and vehicles (especially cars and buses, agricultural vehicles such as tractors, energy and electro-technical equipment). An important item of export was equipment for complete businesses (the so-called capital equipment), financed from long-term loans. Raw materials, semi-manufactured goods and consumer products accounted for about 20% in the total volume of exports. Food products accounted for the smallest share of exports.

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When compared to products from other Eastern European countries and China, Czechoslovakia's were successfully brought to market; though they were often defective and downright poor quality. Goods arriving to Cuba were often damaged, spare machinery parts and equipment were incompatible or of very poor quality, and entry-in-to-service problems proliferated. What became a 'traumatic experience' was the supply of Czechoslovak buses; from some 400 vehicles delivered to Cuba in 1961 (in a situation where the total number of buses on the island was around 4000), one third was out of service by 1962

The Czechoslovak party was not able to deliver the necessary spare parts in time, especially the brake lining assemblies. In 1962 the Motokov [a Foreign Trade Enterprise] did not fulfil the contract conditions, not delivering spare parts for more than 920,000 Cuban pesos – which equals to 6.5 million crowns.<sup>13</sup>

Supplies of capital equipment were not free of complaints either. Technical documentation was often delivered late, which prevented Cuba from entering the devices into operation. During his visit to Czechoslovakia in September 1962, Guevara complained that

in technical issues Cuba used to enjoy a far better situation in the past [...] the technical standards were uniform, American, and the spare parts were uniform, while now, each country of the Socialist bloc applies its own standards. The technology offered by the countries of the Socialist camp often lags behind the world average.<sup>14</sup>

The substandard quality of delivered goods and repeated complaints troubled Czechoslovakia's embassy in Havana, where the Cuban leadership usually turned to with their criticism. The embassy feared that Cuba's dissatisfaction with imported goods would impact political relations to Czechoslovakia and other Soviet bloc countries. These fears were shared by MFA which noted that

The name of Czechoslovakia still has a good sound in Cuba but we must admit that our prestige on the island has suffered some damage [...]. When dealing with a difficult traffic situation, the Cuban comrades were placing high expectations precisely on us. So far Czechoslovakia has delivered 450 buses. As to 25 September, 130 of them were decommissioned because of lack of spare parts and dozens more will be decommissioned in a matter of days. The question of spare parts [...] also causes

political damage and harms the cause of socialism in Cuba [...] The lack of spare parts for machines shipped from CSR may have bad influence on the Cuban opinion on Czechoslovakia. In one of the shoe factories the work is done with old American machines. In each hall there is one Czech machine Svit but none of them is working. One is lacking iron pegs (the machines are incompatible with other than ours or Polish) and another has a defect that the Cubans cannot fix.<sup>15</sup>

*Czech  
Tractors,  
Cuban  
Oranges*

Prague was incapable of delivering quality goods, not even at the cost of 'exceptional measures.' Apart from that, the Czechs, too, were trying to export their quality production to those countries which paid in a freely convertible currency. From the moment Cuba economically entered the socialist camp, Czechoslovakia started delivering goods that could not be sold elsewhere and the delivery times lengthened considerably, too.

The deepening economic problems, the persistent overestimation of its export possibilities and the imbalance of its imports and exports made Cuba heavily indebted to Czechoslovakia. As a loyal ally of Moscow, Prague had no choice but to face the debt issue with 'highly political approach.' Occasionally, the country implemented 'improvised imports' of whatever the Cuban economy was able to produce and offer, regardless of Czechoslovakia's import needs.

In the second half of 1962, two factors marked mutual trade: first, the economic problems of Czechoslovakia itself, which were making "generosity" towards Cuba increasingly difficult and, second, was a certain irritation or distrust towards the entire Soviet bloc, which prevailed among Cubans as one of the consequences of the October 1962 crisis. During Czechoslovakia-Cuba negotiations on trade exchanges for 1963, held in November and December 1962, both delegations faced serious difficulties regarding the possibility of meeting each other's requirements. While the former wanted to deal with the growing Cuban deficit, Cuba asked Czechoslovakia to authorise the outstanding balance of about \$20 million (USD), to promptly supply the goods corresponding to the Cuban import needs and to place a full contingent of Cuban sugar on Czechoslovakia's market. The requirement not to re-export the Cuban sugar to third countries was particularly difficult for Czechoslovakia because re-export was the only convenient way to dispose of the unwanted merchandise. Cuba also presented other re-

quirements with which Prague finally complied. From the end of 1962 however, most business negotiations with Cuba were marked by a certain tension and most of the outlined problems persisted in later years.

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### *Industrial Capital Equipment*

An important part of the economic relationship was capital equipment. During the first two weeks following the Czechoslovakia-Cuba economic agreement had been signed (in June 1960), supplies of Czechoslovak capital equipment worth 24 million crowns were contracted.<sup>16</sup> At first, the export of capital equipment to Cuba was part of Czechoslovakia's participation in the industrialisation of developing countries struggling for "national liberation" or countries "heading towards socialism." Later, it became part of Czechoslovakia's participation in the economic development of the socialist states and was funded by long-term governmental loans. The equipment was mainly allocated to the sugar, dairy, metal, textile and footwear industries, to mining and processing of minerals. There were considerable investments in Cuba's energy sector as well. The first deliveries of Francis turbines for hydroelectric power plants, made in *čKD Blansko*, occurred shortly after the victory of the revolution.<sup>17</sup> In the course of the 1960s, Czechoslovakia supplied equipment for the Cuban power plants at Tallapiedra (Havana), Hanabanilla (R. León) and Rio Yara, Punta de Martillo, Regla (Havana), H. Pavón (Santiago de Cuba) Nuevitas (Diez de Octubre), Cienfuegos - O 'Bourke (C. M. Céspedes), Parellada, among others.<sup>18</sup>

Cuba's leaders expressed interest in Czechoslovakia's capital equipment and complete plant equipment already in 1959. Expressing interest, however, did not always lead to contracting a supply, and negotiations were not free of complications. A classic scenario was that in interviews with Czechoslovak representatives, Castro or Guevara personally expressed interest in, for example, a munitions factory. However, no-one provided further specifications. While the Czechoslovak party was hesitating whether this was a signal for developing a concrete offer and kept waiting rather than taking the initiative, other countries responded promptly and left Czechoslovakia behind. While interpreting this as a political failure, Prague also had to acknowledge its lack of flexibility when responding to Cuban demands:

If the Cuban official representatives show interest in capital equipment, complete equipment or other construction, we



cannot expect the inexperienced Cuban officials to provide our Foreign Trade Enterprises with supporting documentation for the implementation of projects. We must ourselves take the initiative and after developing a project, submit the budget and, in case of emergency even send an expert to finalise the project on the spot. For example, in July 1959 negotiations with our trade mission, Fidel Castro expressed interest in building tractors factories. Now, six months later, Czechoslovakia still did not submit any proposal. According to the latest information, Yugoslavs in cooperation with an Italian company submitted a bid.<sup>19</sup>

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In defence of the Czechoslovak passivity, however, it is to be noted that the Cubans were reluctant to pay for project proposals and for bid submissions, pointing out that in the case of Czechoslovakia this should be part of international aid (contrary to Western countries, which were naturally charging for their proposals).

Nonetheless, Czechoslovakia operationalised numerous establishments in Cuba in the first half of the 1960s: a locks and padlocks factory in Cárdenas, put into operation in 1961; a pencil factory in Batabanó, 1963; a plant for the production of screws, bolts and nuts in Santiago de Cuba, 1963; a plant for the production of spark plugs in Sagua la Grande, 1964, estimated capacity of production: 2 million pieces/year; a plant for the production of picks, spades and shovels in Guantánamo, 1961 and 1963, 325,000 pieces/year; a plant for the production of cutlery in Santiago de Cuba, 1964; a plant for the production of *ball-bearings* in Santiago de Cuba, 1964; the footwear factory 'Nguyen-Van-Troi' in Havana, 1965; a bicycle factory in Caibarán, 1961-1965, 20,000 pieces/year; a plant for production and assembly of refrigerators, stoves and domestic appliances INPUD in Santa Clara, 1964, 40,000 pieces/year; a diesel engines and compressors factory in Cienfuegos, 1966, 3,300 pieces/year; an arms factory in Cienfuegos, approximately 1965; service stations in Havana, approximately 1965; centres for apprenticeship (*centros de aprendizaje*), approximately 1965; ICAIC film laboratories, approximately 1965; transformer stations in Manzanillo, Bayamo, Artemisa, Cárdenas, Pinar del Río, approximately 1965; a cement factory in Guayo, approximately 1965.<sup>20</sup> Although the construction of some establishments had begun in 1960 and 1961, because of significant delays in the equipment supplies, most did not begin operations before the mid-1960s.

Together with investment projects was the so-called technical assistance, i.e. the presence of experts who carried out installation work on the supplied equipment. The installation of equipment and the ac-tuation of Czech experts among Cubans were accompanied by some difficulties. The experts reported and complained about “poor work-ing morale” or the lack of competent Cuban workers, anarchy in the organisation of work, etc. They also drew attention to the insufficient maintenance of the delivered equipment (e.g. power plant blocks). Af-ter they had completed the plant construction and finished the start-up operations, the experts returned home and Cubans usually did not ask for a follow-up technical assistance; mostly for financial reasons. The Czechoslovak Embassy, reported at the end of 1965 that

After a few months we can say that the complete dissolution of technical assistance has serious consequences on the produc-tion and productivity of these establishments, the capacity of which is used from 10% to 30%. In three establishments – Sa-gua la Grande, Cárdenas (locks factory) and Guantánamo – the production stopped completely. The machinery is often not properly maintained and various necessary components are not ordered in time. Our production methods, our machinery and equipment, and thus all our help is often irresponsibly and demagogically criticised.<sup>21</sup>

It is not accurate however, that Cuba’s criticism was always ‘dema-gogic and irresponsible.’ Contrarily, it was often justified. The Cubans complained about the low quality of the equipment, its frequent defec-tiveness, time delays in supplying (etc) and after visiting the island, the General Director of the Czechoslovak National Bank, Karel Podlaha, reported that

Establishment managers as well as common workers are often disappointed by the low technical level of the means of pro-duction from the socialist countries, compared to the Ameri-can ones or those from West Germany which they know from their own experience [...].<sup>22</sup>

### *The Credit Policy and Conclusion*

In accordance with the policy of socialist internationalism, Czechoslo-vakia granted Cuba long-term loans with low interest rate (around 2%).

Similar to what was happening in other developing countries however, it did not have many guarantees that Cuba would ever be able to pay them back. Czechoslovakia's government loans can be divided, according to their purpose, into three groups: consolidation loans, investment loans (intended for capital equipment), and a very particular category of loans granted for the supply of "special materials" (i.e. weapons), where various discounts, rebates and write-offs were often provided. Apart from the government loans that were politically motivated, favourable and safe, Cuba could also use company loans, though these were regulated by far stricter rules – a company, unlike the state, could be blacklisted.

*Czech  
Tractors,  
Cuban  
Oranges*

In order to illustrate this, it is necessary to show how the first Czechoslovak government loan (1960) was used. The 290 million crowns (\$40 million USD) granted to Havana was originally intended for the construction of the automotive industry. The credit could cover the import of capital equipment and corresponding machinery from Czechoslovakia.<sup>23</sup> In autumn 1960, Cuba's idea of building its own car industry was submitted for elaboration to a Czech expert group. The result was a megalomaniac project 'AUTOMOTRIZ-Santiago de Cuba,' which calculated that by the end of 1965, Czechoslovakia would have built in Cuba various provisional assembly plants for tractors and cars, as well as a factory for stationary engines (15,000 pieces/year), motorcycles, scooters (10,000 pieces/year), tractors (15,000 pieces/year) and five-tonne trucks (5,000 pieces/year). Additionally, in 1966, production of Škoda cars was to be started (20,000 pieces/year).<sup>24</sup> The authors of the project counted with the presence of hundreds of workers from Czechoslovakia: 564 were to arrive by 1962 and nearly a thousand workers by 1963.<sup>25</sup>

The weak points of the AUTOMOTRIZ project were immediately evident and the unrealistic plans had to be corrected: in the first place because Czechoslovakia was not able to deliver the supplies on time or guarantee their quality. By the end of 1961, it was clear that the project was piling up delays and that the costs would be significantly higher, notwithstanding that after the invasion of the anti-Castro forces in the Bay of Pigs, Cuba used part of the credit to purchase Czech and Soviet military equipment. Also, communications were deteriorating and none, in fact, coordinated the project. In mid-1962, José Estrada, whom Guevara had made responsible for the tractor and automotive industry, arrived in Czechoslovakia. He complained to the Central Commit-

tee of the Communist Party about the delays in deliveries and about the non-compliance with the construction schedule:

[The delays] are not meeting the needs of the national economy of Cuba. The promises that were given by the Czechoslovak party are not being fulfilled and the negotiations on the construction of tractor industry have more commercial character than character of a friendly help.<sup>26</sup>

Although a “political coordinator” was sent to Cuba following Estrada’s complaints, on 23 October 1962 the Politburo already ordered the Minister of Foreign Trade, Krajčíř, ‘to discuss with Cubans the cancellation of the car industry construction in the previously proposed scale.’<sup>27</sup> At the end of 1962, the project was reduced to a simple tractor assembly plant and in the following years completely abandoned by both parties. The remaining loan was then mostly used on purchases of Czechoslovak power plant facilities.

In the first half of the 1960s, the Czechoslovak government granted Cuba loans worth a total of nearly 1.2 billion Czechoslovak crowns (by 1966, Cuba only paid back around 280 million crowns).<sup>28</sup> Non-quantifiable are the government loans intended for the purchase of weapons. It is possible that in December 1962, the Cuban debt for “special deliveries” accounted for about \$46 million (USD).<sup>29</sup>

Although by 1964 some experts had begun to criticise the disadvantageous credit policy to Cuba, the reform-seeking voices were silenced after August 1968. Along with the “normalisation” of its foreign relations, Czechoslovakia had to reconsider, among other things, its attitude towards the Cuban leaderships’ requests for loans. More government loans were then again generously provided from the beginning of the 1970s, when Castro – after he had approved the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia as an act of defence of socialism – personally visited Czechoslovakia for the very first time (June 1972). Castro’s visit not only reaffirmed close political contacts and marked the culmination of the propagandistic campaign on mutual friendship and understanding, but also launched other two decades of intensive economic relations.

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## Notes

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*Czech  
Tractors,  
Cuban  
Oranges*

# Czechoslovakia and Brazil 1945–1989

## Diplomats, Businessmen, Spies and Guerrilheiros

*Matyáš Pelant*

This work summarises political, economic and security relations between Czechoslovakia and Brazil from 1945 to 1989. During this period Brazil adopted different approaches towards the Eastern bloc. In this context, despite some difficulties, Czechoslovakia not only maintained diplomatic relations with Brazil, but succeeded in enhancing them gradually. This work answers the following questions: why was the partnership stable despite acute ideological divergences? What major obstacles plagued their relations? Was Czechoslovakia active in the fight against the military regime due to its international commitments within the Eastern bloc? The results suggest that two major facts were decisive for the stable position of Czechoslovakia in Brazil: a strong tradition of bilateral relations and that both sides saw economic advantages in keeping the mutual trade flows. Czechoslovakia was involved in some propaganda and intelligence activities which were seen as hostile by the Brazilian government; though the former was thoughtful enough to avoid major incidents. This research is based on unpublished documents from Czech archives.



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*Keywords: Brazil, Czechoslovakia, diplomatic relations, mutual trade, intelligence activities, Cold War*

### Introduction

This work presents a historical narrative for the unfolding of Czechoslovak-Brazil relations over the expansive period of the Cold War. While



this work is not intended to engage in debates surrounding the wider Cold War context, it takes for granted that the Cold War had, essentially, constructed two blocs – a “Western” and an “Eastern” – and that these acted as sources of polarity with few alternative power sources for the better part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From this initial assumption, this work seeks to understand the perseverance of Czechoslovak-Brazil relations despite being located on different sides of the Cold War. Since their relations were turbulent in some decades and smooth in others, this work addresses the complexity of their economic and diplomatic relations through analyses conducted chronologically; from the formative until the concluding years of the Cold War.

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### **From Ally to Enemy? (1945–1948)**

Brazil recognised Czechoslovakia on 28 December 1918 and their diplomatic missions opened in June 1920. Since then, Czechoslovakia has maintained its relations to Brazil uninterrupted – with the exception of three years during wwII, 15 March 1939 until September 1942. Prior to wwII, both countries retained stable political and trade relations and many Czechoslovak firms were successful in Brazil, such as Jawa, Baťa and Škoda Plzeň (in 1937 its bureau and its trading branch Omnipol Brasileira were opened in Rio de Janeiro). Czechoslovak arms and agriculture machinery products were also known in Brazil.

During wwII, Brazil eventually joined the Allies and restored diplomatic relations with the Czechoslovak government in exile in London in September 1942 and the bonds of their friendship were strengthened by the tragedies unfolding in Europe and Brazil’s deep sense of sympathy. For instance, in 1944 the town of Santo Antônio do Capivari in the Rio de Janeiro state was renamed Lidice to commemorate the second anniversary of the Lidice massacre. Relations between Czechoslovakia and Brazil continued into the immediate post-wwII period and a new trade cooperation agreement was signed in 1946. However, the clouds of international partition were gathering and it did not take long time before problems linked to the rise of Iron Curtain appeared. The Czechoslovak rejection of Marshall Plan aid coupled with Brazil’s rendering of the the Brazilian Communist Party illegal and Brazil’s severing of diplomatic relations to the USSR (1947) complicated relations. And, the Czechoslovak performance at the Paris Peace Conference (1946) caused certain disappointment in the Brazilian Ministry of For-

eign Affairs (Itamaraty),<sup>1</sup> although (then) Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs Raul Fernandes was declared his sympathies to Edvard Beneš whom he knew

personally in Geneva during the League of Nations era.<sup>2</sup> According to Fernandes, the Czechoslovak delegation did not react to the Brazilian proposal of becoming a mediator together with Canada ‘while Canada was honoured.’<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Czechoslovakia’s voting with the USSR at the Conference reinforced the belief that the country had, effectively, become a satellite of Moscow. It was not only the Conference that strained relations with Brazil. As a reaction to the journey of Czechoslovak politicians to Moscow and the refusal of Marshall Plan aid (1947), the Czechoslovak legation alerted Prague that ‘(o)ur expansion in trade and cultural areas is being slowed down by the development of world politics that pushes us to the opposite coalition to which Brazil belongs.’<sup>4</sup> Czechoslovak diplomats proposed a solution to overcome the country’s political situation through the application of a sound trade policy, i. e. increasing Czechoslovak export of goods Brazil wanted. This became the defining formula for the relations between Czechoslovakia and Brazil over the following years.

### **Alienation and Rapprochement (1948–1955)**

The situation facing Czechoslovakia’s engagements in Brazil, between 1948-1951, was uncertain: several campaigns against socialist countries took place in the media and in the US Congress and there was evident US pressure to sever diplomatic relations to these countries (i.e. Czechoslovakia and Poland, other communist countries had only trade representations in Brazil at that time). Czechoslovak diplomats experienced serious obstacles in their daily work, such as difficulties in obtaining entry visas to Brazil and the repeated retention of the coveted diplomatic pouch. Czechoslovakia was seen by Brazil as ‘an ally from the last war [that] has become a potential adversary in the next war.’<sup>5</sup> At the same time, Czechoslovak diplomats noted that Brazil was interested in possible deliveries of complete industrial facilities – shoe and textile machinery, energy sector – and that Brazil was a strategic source of raw materials for Czechoslovak industry, notably iron ore and coffee.<sup>6</sup> Czechoslovakia represented an important alternative market for Brazil in case of sales difficulties with its traditional partners as well as source

of important technologies for its industrialisation, evidenced by the cessation of Brazil's rhetorical attacks against Czechoslovakia with the former's economic troubles and its need to sell coffee to new markets.

The death of the first Czechoslovak Communist President, Klement Gottwald (13 April 1953) had symbolic significance for Czechoslovak-Brazilian relations and the Brazilian government reacted protocolary in much the same way as with the case of death of British King George VI. The conclusion of Czechoslovak diplomacy was that Brazil wanted to continue in mutual relations despite activities of Brazilian communists in Czechoslovakia. In 1954 a new trade agreement was signed.

Czechoslovakia was gradually strengthening its cooperation with the Brazilian communist party since WWII and Czechoslovak diplomats held regular consultations with the iconic leader of Brazilian communists, Júlio Prestes. On 11 May 1948, three months after the coup in Prague, the presidium of the Czechoslovak communist party had, on its agenda, information about the situation of their Brazilian comrades submitted by novelist Jorge Amado. Between 1950-1952, Amado lived with his family in Dobříš, near Prague. According to the memoirs of Amado's wife, Zélia Gattai, the couple was confronted with the political show trials in Czechoslovakia in the 1950's; they touched home when Amado's close friends were affected. When Clementis and Geminder received capital punishment during the Slánský process, Amado was particularly alarmed. The Slánský affair so shocked Amado that he eventually left the Communist party.<sup>7</sup> One bridge – between communist parties – in a world increasingly polarised was, therefore, damaged even before it could properly function. This, however, did not detract from the overall purpose of either Brazil or Czechoslovakia which both sought ways to maintain economic-tied relations in the cracks exposed in the bipolar standoff.

*Czecho-  
slovakia and  
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### *The Kubitschek Era (1955–1961)*

With the election of Juscelino Kubitschek as Brazilian President (1955) Czechoslovak diplomats informed Prague that his appointment offered better perspectives for enhancing trade relations and political and cultural cooperation. Czechoslovakia wanted to participate in Kubitschek's development projects and, until the conclusion of his

mandate, succeeded in bolstering trade cooperation: in 1955-1956 trade volume registered a record of about \$42 million (USD), numbers not surpassed until the 1970's (see Annex). During this period, Czechoslovakia mainly imported iron ore, cocoa, coffee, leather, oil and seeds while exporting ready machines, malt, consumer articles, hops and chemicals. Czechoslovak supplies of industrial facilities were still modest.

In 1959, Kubitschek's wife Sarah and his daughters visited Czechoslovakia; an important goodwill mission that contributed to the 1960 signing of a new trade agreement and the reopening of the Czechoslovak consulate in São Paulo after a 21 year closure, while Brazil's diplomatic mission was elevated to an embassy in October 1960. Such confidence building measures were topped off by the visit of Brazilian Vice President Goulart to Czechoslovakia in December 1960.

The Czechoslovak Embassy often noted that Kubitschek publically referred to his Czech origins – his maternal grandfather came from South Bohemia – and Czechoslovakia saw in Kubitschek a way to enhance their access to Brazilian decision-making. However, such access such not be confused with alignment and it is clear that Kubitschek's foreign policy was directed at the US; the chief political and economic ally of Brazil.<sup>8</sup> More important for Czechoslovakia was Kubitschek's vice president, later president, João Goulart, who accepted the invitation of Czechoslovakia to visit the country in 1956. Throughout the Cold War period, Goulart was the Brazilian politician with the greatest interest in Czechoslovakia; in his functions of Vice President and President he – according to the archives – worked at enriching bilateral relations and actively consulted Czechoslovak diplomats.

In February 1959, the Czechoslovak MFA prepared a more complex policy approach towards Latin America and, accordingly, Brazil was the Latin American country with which Czechoslovakia had the most developed relations. The strategy notes that due to growing nationalism in Brazil, especially in the army, there were groups with a more cautious attitude towards the US and Czechoslovakia should, therefore, focus on military circles. The strategy also recommended targeting national bourgeoisie and working with their refusal of supranational monopolies.<sup>9</sup> The more open stance of Brazil to the Eastern bloc was pragmatic and partly caused by Brazilian fears of the integration of Western Europe which was regarded as a danger since it could de-

crease capital flows to Brazil by increasing investments to Africa which was competing with Brazil over many tropical products.

At the same time, Czechoslovakia carefully analysed the Brazilian position on the Cuban revolution. Kubitschek met with Cuba's new establishment. It was a "U-turn" in Brazil's policy towards Cuba. Czechoslovak diplomats assessed that this step was caused by the strong public movement in favour of Cuban revolution in Brazil.

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On the intelligence front, the Czechoslovak secret services revealed some information about active collaborators of the CIA among Brazilian diplomats. Czechoslovak agent codenamed "WILLI" worked in Itamaraty's cypher department. According to WILLI's reports Brazilian Ambassador to Cuba and later Minister of Foreign Affairs, Vasco Leitão da Cunha, worked for the CIA. He was given tasks by the US Embassy in Rio de Janeiro through the Political Department of Itamaraty. This information was promptly submitted to the Cuban leadership. The Czechoslovak resident in Havana met Fidel Castro on 09 November 1960 at midnight. The Attaché of the Cuban Embassy in Prague also maintained contact with Cunha and was uncovered by WILLI and warned by Cunha himself not to return to Cuba.<sup>10</sup>

The findings of Czechoslovak intelligence on Goulart's visit to Prague at the beginning of December 1960 that the Vice-President 'liked a lot our plum brandy that he had been ordering quite often into his hotel room' might have not been so pertinent.<sup>11</sup> Far more interesting were records of the presidium of the Czechoslovak communist party where it was noted that on a special request of Goulart an extra meeting between the Brazilian Vice-President and Prime Minister Široký was held without the presence of the representatives of Brazilian Embassy and Itamaraty. Goulart did not want to discuss some issues in front of members of Itamaraty, i.e., as a report quotes him as called it a 'reactionary institution.' In a private conversation with Široký, Goulart stressed that Brazil needed the support of socialist countries and that Czechoslovakia could act as a bridge between Brazil and Moscow.<sup>12</sup>

## Independence in Foreign Policy: Close Partners? (1961–1964)

*Independent Foreign Policy* (PEI) brought radical change to Brazil's foreign policy and impacted on Brazil's relations to socialist countries.

Besides some ideological swaying were pragmatic motives, mainly the expansion of Brazil to new markets.<sup>13</sup> The Brazilian government proclaimed that it wanted to make up to 40% of its foreign trade volume with the Eastern bloc. President Quadros established relations with Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, re-established diplomatic relations with the USSR (November 1961), established relations with China, supported Cuba and organised the so-called Dantas trade mission to Eastern Europe.

If looking at the bilateral relations between Czechoslovakia and Brazil in this period they were quite intense. In February 1961, a mission led by Deputy Foreign Minister, Jiří Hájek, visited Brazil (it was his third trip to Brazil in the period 1959-1961), in May 1961 the Dantas trade mission visited Prague and signed protocols on economic, scientific and technological cooperation. In March 1962, Minister of Education, Kahuda, visited Brazil and signed an Agreement on Cultural cooperation (never entered into force because of the 1964 coup) and in August 1963 a Czechoslovak consulate opened in Recife. In January 1964, the first meeting of the joint committee – as stipulated by the 1960 agreement – took place and an agreement on scientific cooperation was signed (though also never entered into force).

On 14 March 1961, a special envoy of Quadros's Ambassador João Dantas visited Czechoslovak Ambassador Kuchválek and officially announced the intention of Brazil to acquire, from Czechoslovakia, supplies of complete industrial facilities in an amount of 100 million (USD) per year with a 12-year credit that would go beyond the valid trade agreement. Dantas mission went to Eastern Europe at the end of April 1961 and came back at the beginning of June. It visited Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Romania, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Albania.

The Czechoslovak Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade, David and Krajčíř, submitted to the presidium of the communist party (27 April 1961) the position of Dantas' mission with a rather cautious stance. There were speculations that this initiative could be a manoeuvre how to 'frighten the us and convince them to provide a loan to Brazil.' There was also the fear that the high demands of Brazilians on credit and the consequent debt of socialist countries would serve as proof that these countries were not able to fulfil their commitments.

Between 15 and 19 May 1961 Dantas' mission visited Prague and two protocols were signed: on technological and scientific cooperation

(the financing of joint activities and the intention to provide credits to technological cooperation) and a protocol on economic cooperation. In this document both sides committed to a total trade volume for the 1961-1965 period that would reach \$500 million (USD) – it only reached some \$144 million (USD) in those years. Emphasis was paid to the Czechoslovak supply of complete industrial facilities. For this purpose a joint committee of both governments was proposed to convene, though did not manage to until February 1964, a point that may help to explain the trade shortfall. The protocol noted that Czechoslovakia would supply Brazil with complete industrial facilities to the amount of \$60 million (USD) until the end of 1966. This was later reevaluated to \$25-30 million (USD) and also explains the trade shortfall since industrial facilities made up about 40% of the total volume of Czechoslovakia's exports to Brazil. Among the principal products were equipment for steam and hydroelectric power plants, textiles, shoe and leather manufacturing machinery and cereal mills.

According to an official Itamaraty document released after the mission, the total amount of contracts during Dantas' mission was estimated to reach some \$5 billion USD; an impossible figure. The document stressed that this was a way for Brazil to guarantee the sales of its traditional commodities (coffee, cotton, and cacao) in exchange for the supply of coal, fuel, chemicals, agriculture machinery, zinc and lead.<sup>14</sup>

Despite such efforts, the trade volume between Czechoslovakia and Brazil actually decreased owing to the ideological conflict that infused foreign policy orientations among the Brazilian decision-making elite. Notably, tensions-cum-paralysis emerged between the preferences of Brazil's presidents such as Quadros and Goulart and those of the Itamaraty and security forces which were very reluctant to move closer to the socialist camp. From the assessment of Czechoslovakia's intelligence community the anticommunist mood was growing in Brazil's military intelligence and in the context of *PEI* it is interesting that Itamaraty was not willing to hire so-called 'progressive cadres,' those that were deemed to be left-oriented.<sup>15</sup>

Yet, at the time, Dantas himself 'believed in his protocols' and expended much energy attempting to implement them. This did not stop them from unravelling however and Dantas was left in political limbo by domestic (f)actors in Brazil. In 1963 Dantas clearly assigned blame to Brazil's military circles for obstructing his efforts.<sup>16</sup> At the end of

the *PEI* era, when Prestes met Czechoslovak President Novotný, the latter complained that Dantas' mission had literally brought nothing. According to Prestes' the mission had a demagogic character and ministries were sabotaging Goulart's orders.<sup>17</sup>

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In 1962, the Permanent Inter-Ministerial Committee for Cooperation with Socialist Countries (*COLESTE*) was created and this organ became the legacy of the *PEI* and later played an important part when Brazil's relations to socialist – and post-socialist – states began to intensify in the late 1960's and early 1970's.<sup>18</sup> According to Dantas' address to Brazil's Congress, ideology did not drive the country closer to the socialist bloc; it was the national project of development and the fight to end poverty.<sup>19</sup> However, the new strategy of Czechoslovakia to Latin America was ideologically fired and Prague maintained that the renewal of relations between Brazil and the USSR was a victory for the 'Brazilian anti-national bourgeoisie that was close to *latifundistas* and strong groups of national bourgeoisie.'<sup>20</sup> Some research material claims that the 'working-class and agriculture' was being established in Brazil.

There were indications that such a victory would be swift; in October 1963 consultations between Czechoslovakia and the USSR were held on orientating the socialist states in Latin America. The USSR projected high hopes on Brazil, as a country that had the potential to strengthen Soviet influence in the region and even tilt the balance of influence away from Washington and to Moscow. Czechoslovakia was the facilitator and according to records of Soviet diplomats, Czechoslovakia was the point guard for them in Brazil because it was deemed as more experienced in Brazilian affairs than the USSR.

The *PEI* had, from its inception, major political and institutional limitations and, owing to the regime change in Brazil, it turned out to be an episode that had a very limited impact on Prague-Brasília relations; a point reflected in the turbulence of the subsequent decade.

### An Uncertain Decade, 1964–1974

The regime change in Brazil was a quick affair and produced immediate repercussions for Brazil and its international relations. On 31 March 1964 Brazil's military government expelled a Czechoslovak press agency correspondent, declared *persona non-grata* Czechoslovak diplomat Kvita – a.k.a (intelligence officer) Peterka – and bullets were



fired against the Czechoslovak consulate in São Paulo. To put it lightly, Brazil adopted a more suspicious position towards Czechoslovakia. All official cultural and scientific cooperation was put on hold until the mid-1980's.

In foreign policy, Brazil's new administration developed the concept of the 'Correction of the Path' and the previous 'neutrality tendencies' in the formative years of the Cold War were abandoned. At the same time, the economy opened more to foreign capital and demonstrably followed the US foreign policy line. On 13 May 1964, as a result of the Cuban Missile Crisis, Brazil broke diplomatic relations with Cuba and clearly demonstrated where it was situated in the ideological struggle; the Western bloc. Interestingly, from 1964 until 1986 the Embassy of Czechoslovakia represented Cuban interests in Brazil.

Despite such turbulence, the Czechoslovak government did not hesitate to recognise Brazil's new regime and the Embassy in Rio received instructions to formally acknowledge the new president, i.e. to confirm respective verbal note of the Itamaraty that informed about the change and 'given the constitutionality of the change of regime do not undertake any protests at international or non-governmental organisations.'<sup>21</sup>

In May 1964, the Director of the Latin American Department of the Czechoslovak MFA travelled to Brazil for dialogue, which produced a positive outcome for both parties. According to Ježek, the Itamaraty appreciated the patience of Czechoslovakia in solving the provocations of Brazil's security forces' behaviour against Czechoslovak missions and to press propaganda campaigns. Minister Leitão da Cunha supported the conclusions of the joint committee from January 1964 and assured that there would be no more obstacles from the Brazilian side; again the pragmatic approach prevailed and the economic interests of both parties was certainly more important than political posturing. The reported conversation between the Czechoslovak Consul, Hádek, with General Lira Tavares, Commander of Brazil's 4<sup>th</sup> Army illustrates well the attitude of the Brazilian Army and political elites to Czechoslovakia. Apparently, Tavares showed Hádek his cigarette case which was embossed with a picture of the Prague Castle. Hádek asked whether Tavares was not afraid to 'have in his pocket an object with the image of the seat of the Presidential Office of a "Red" government?' Tavares tersely replied that '(w)e have nothing against Czechoslovakia; just do not import here your ideology.'<sup>22</sup>

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Efforts to focus primarily on trade – importing goods, not ideology – became the standard governing Czechoslovak-Brazilian relations, but, as demonstrated below, Czechoslovakia could not escape its international commitments in the Cold War. By 1965, the second meeting of the Czechoslovak-Brazilian joint committee on economic cooperation occurred and the Brazilian government confirmed its interest to carry on with a “business as usual” approach to trade relations and in 1966 Czechoslovakia delivered complete industrial facilities – such as a hydroelectric power plant in Bariri (São Paulo state, 3 turbines by 48,7 MW), in construction were hydroelectric power plants in Cachoeira Dourada (the State of Goiás, 2 x 55 MW) and Ibitinga (São Paulo state, 3 x 45 MW) and a thermoelectric power plant in Porto Alegre (3 x 8 MW). There was also a cement plant in Pará with a capacity of 500 t/ 24 h and a contract was signed to double its capacity. Some logging industry facilities were delivered to the Amazonas states and shoe factories to the state of Bahía.

The situation was a bit schizophrenic for the Czechoslovak government. On one hand there was a great interest to sell to Brazil Czechoslovak traditional machinery products, including complete industrial facilities that required a certain level of cooperation with Brazilian federal and state governments. Brazil was a strategic source of iron ore for Czechoslovak industry. For this a certain degree of diplomatic relations had to be maintained. On the other hand, the military authoritative government was a defined adversary of Czechoslovakia’s communist regime. Consider the main tasks of the Czechoslovak intelligence services for Brazil, which set the following goals (as of May 1966):

1. To monitor the activities of the opposition and provide active assistance to “progressive groups” in order to defeat the government and avoid the victory of “ultra reaction,”
2. To monitor the probability of a further “far-right wing coup,” and
3. To provoke moods against the US and support “neutralist tendencies,” with a focus on the “national bourgeoisie.”

These goals must be measured according to the main foreign policy priorities of Czechoslovakia which were to:

1. help improve relations with Cuba and “neutralise” hostile actions against Cuba,
2. exploit conflicts between the Brazilian government and the US, and
3. monitor efforts of the US to impose, through Brazil, its interests in the UN and the OAS.<sup>23</sup>

Opposition groups surrounding former president Goulart that fled to Uruguay were one of the main targets of the work of Czechoslovak intelligence in Uruguay.<sup>24</sup> Czechoslovak intelligence did not assume that, given the circumstances, bilateral relations between Czechoslovakia and Brazil could improve, but believed that mutual trade would grow. One goal of the secret services was to try to avoid leakage of intelligence activities that could harm their mutual relationship and eventually lead to the breaking-off of relations.<sup>25</sup>

Brazil's counter-espionage unit (CSN) considered Czechoslovak intelligence service as seconded only to Soviet. Accordingly, Brazil re-

*Opposition groups surrounding former president Goulart that fled to Uruguay were one of the main targets of the work of Czechoslovak intelligence in Uruguay.*

garded the Czechoslovak Embassy as a well-organised centre of espionage that was working in favour of communist subversion and had reliable collaborators among journalists, students in the Congress and in the unions.<sup>26</sup> When investigating the activities of one of the first groups of the *guerilhas* that fought against the Brazilian government in Caparaó in the second half of 1967, Brazilian authorities discovered that the Czechoslovak government was directly involved. And, Czechoslovakia accepted Brazilian emigrants that arrived to Prague through Cuba where they underwent intensive training. Czechoslovak security forces provided them with false documents and financial support to get back to Brazil where they began to provide Czechoslovakia, and hence the wider Eastern bloc, with intelligence. This was part of a joint operation of Czechoslovakia and Cuba called *Manuel*.<sup>27</sup>

On 27 September 1967 Itamaraty summoned the Czechoslovak Ambassador and gave him a secret verbal note that complained about these activities stressing that 'you can deny all this, but we have the proof.' Czechoslovakia instructed its Ambassador, Kocman, not to handle the requested written reply to the Brazilian government, but to orally inform them that the Czechoslovak government could not verify the identities and intentions of everybody going to and coming

from Czechoslovakia. In a report prepared for Novotný this event was described as a provocation prepared by Brazil. However, the archives from the Intelligence Directorate, confirms that support to Caparáo *guerilha* was part of operation *Manuel*. Czechoslovak intelligence officer Svatoň added that he had no doubts that Brazilians had in their hands absolutely convincing proof.<sup>28</sup> Brazilian communist warned the Embassy that some Czechoslovak diplomats might be extradited, though this did not occur however, as a precaution, Prague ordered its diplomats to restrict journeys to the interior of Brazil for some time.

Detailed information about operation *Manuel* likely reached Brazil through the renowned Brazilian agent in Prague, Mauro Santanaya, who was working at the Portuguese Language Department of Radio Prague Foreign Broadcasting. In July 1967, Russians alerted Czechoslovak intelligence that Santayana had informed the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pinto, about the training of *guerilheiros* in Prague. Pinto is said to have been upset by the news that *guerilhas* active in Latin America were supported both by China and Moscow, whereas the assumption had been that only China was active.<sup>29</sup> This involvement complicated the Czechoslovak position in Brazil and put their relations at risk. Apparently, supporting 'national salvation struggle' was higher on the Czechoslovak priority list than trade. Tomek quotes the report of the head of the Intelligence Directorate, Josef Houska (17 November 1967):

Our participation in Operation MANUEL is a part of the support to national salvation movements and it is done according to the conclusions of the 13<sup>th</sup> Czechoslovak communist party convention. We also have to take into account that our eventual refusal to help to our Cuban friends would have a negative effect on them and would not solve the problem. Our relatively qualified help would be replaced by less qualified measures applied by our Cuban friends and besides this we would lose any control over this operation.<sup>30</sup>

### *Change in the Air? The 1968 Prague Spring*

Given the tense state of bilateral affairs, it seemed that only a tectonic shift could get Brazil and Czechoslovakia back to the negotiating table. Prague Spring was the trigger and the series of demonstrations that gathered in frequency, stamina and demands profoundly impacted

Czechoslovakia's foreign affairs and provoked a form of *détente* with Brazil. Despite the Warsaw Pact ordered information ban, the Czechoslovak Ambassador to Brazil, Kocman, organised a press conference to report on political developments in Czechoslovakia. The MFA did not approve because 'changes leading to democratisation in Czechoslovakia would not bring any modifications to foreign policy.'<sup>31</sup> In other words, the veil of where Czechoslovak foreign policy was actually made was removed.

Kocman repeatedly informed Prague that Brazil was monitoring the Prague Spring very closely particularly the nature of changes facing Czechoslovakia and the possibility of coexistence of political and economic reforms with the existing communist system. Some questions emerged, such as: to what extent can a country belonging to the Eastern bloc have different internal policies. Kocman's response fully reflected the spirit of the Prague Spring and he is reported to have said that the 'dynamics of internal politics gives us a great possibility to execute Czechoslovak foreign policy and strengthen the authority of [Czechoslovak] Embassy [in Brazil].' Kocman asked Prague to send him information about reforms and excerpts of speeches that he could use in contacts with his Brazilian partners.

The adequate dissemination of information about potential reforms in Czechoslovakia did not transpire. The Warsaw Pact and Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia (August 1968) was condemned at the UN Security Council, then being presided over by a Brazilian diplomat, Araújo Castro.<sup>32</sup> The Czechoslovak Embassy reported to Prague that propagandic attacks against Czechoslovakia had become less frequent after January 1968 in an evident effort to support 'so called democratisation.' According to the Embassy, it was 'only [the] wrong interpretation of the intentions of the Czechoslovak communist party.'<sup>33</sup> Unsurprisingly, after August 1968 Brazil was more reserved to its Central European partner. The media referred more often to subversive activities of Czechoslovakia against the Brazilian government on the Prague-Havana-Brazil axis.

Things became more and more complicated and the Itamaraty deployed salami tactics to restrict Czechoslovak activities in 1969 and 1970. For instance, the Brazilian consent to open a branch of the Czechoslovak Commercial Bank (čSOB) in Rio de Janeiro was revoked, permission was not provided to open up a representative office of Czechoslovak Airlines in Sao Paulo, participation on trade fairs and

cultural activities was denied and the Itamaraty refused to celebrate, or even mark, the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the opening of diplomatic representations between Brazil and Czechoslovakia.

Despite such a negative political atmosphere, an important agreement in the area of cultural cooperation managed to be squeezed through. On 16 July 1960, an agreement between Prague Quadrennial and Biennale of São Paulo was concluded.<sup>34</sup> In São Paulo the biennial works of Czech artists such as Jiří Trnka, František Troester (1959) and Josef Svoboda was honoured repeatedly (1961, 1963, 1965). It was precisely this success of Czechoslovak scenography in São Paulo which inspired the foundation of the Prague Quadrennial in 1967 where Brazilians participated regularly. But it did not help the Czechoslovak position in Brazil, a position that was further eroded when a member of Brazil's communist opposition, José Duarte, who was arrested in August 1969, confessed that he got received a forged Brazilian passport from a Czechoslovak citizen through Cuban diplomats and Czechoslovak intermediaries in Prague. At the end of October 1969, the Czechoslovak Counterintelligence Directorate (II) reported a conversation with Mauro Santanaya where he claimed that Brazil knew that, at that time, there were about twenty Brazilians in Prague trained in Cuba that were to be sent to Brazil via Madrid. Santanaya added that he was not personally against what was going on, but he said that it should be done in a smarter way so that whole operation could not be so easily spotted. In his opinion, the Czechoslovak government should consider that there were groups in the Brazilian Army that were trying to carry out a process of democratisation and that activities of terrorist groups like that could hamper their efforts.<sup>35</sup>

On Saturday, 12 September 1970, at 2135h a bomb exploded next to the main entrance of the Czechoslovak Embassy in Rio (a bomb was previously found at the Czechoslovak Embassy in autumn 1969). Radical right-wing movements were suspected of having carried out the attack. But this bomb attack was the last, significant incident that affected the relations between Brazil and Czechoslovakia. In April 1971 the Czechoslovak Embassy moved to Brasília and in September 1971 the residence of Czechoslovak intelligence was closed in Brazil.

In the years 1972-1973 Brazil was gradually opening to the socialist bloc. Based on the exchange of visits on the ministerial level – the Brazilian Minister of Energy Leite and Czechoslovakia's Foreign Trade

Minister Barčák – negotiations on a barter (parallel) operation of Brazilian iron ore for Czechoslovak supplies of power plants were initiated. According to the Czechoslovak Ambassador to Brazil, the visit of Leite was approved directly by the Brazilian President and Brazil had a key interest in completing this deal. Then, in October 1973, the Joint Committee on Trade and Economic Cooperation met after six years and, in the middle of 1973, Czechoslovak affiliation Škoda do Brasil was opened to work exclusively on the construction of power plants. The appointment of a prominent Brazilian diplomat, José Sete Camara, to Ambassador in Prague (October 1972) was also seen as a positive sign. Camara was considered one of ‘the most able members of Brazilian diplomatic corps’ and he promoted economic cooperation and tried to avoid any political exchange of views. He is said to have contributed to the improvement of the overall visa situation of Czechoslovakia with Brazil.

### 1974–1989: Without Ideology?

The Doctrine of Responsible Pragmatism of Geisel’s Administration confirmed the previous trend of trade links opening with the Eastern bloc. There was a radical change of attitudes of the Itamaraty towards socialist countries. For example, in reaction to political actions of Brazilian politician José Bonifácio against communist countries, the Itamaraty reacted in an article in the daily newspaper *Estado de São Paulo* criticising these activities and suggesting that such attacks were pointless and harmful for Brazilian contacts with the Socialist bloc. The main argument was that Brazil was maintaining neither political nor cultural relations with the Eastern bloc, but was building trade relations instead. The article went on to note that those markets were crucial for Brazil and stressed that trade could not be subordinated to ideology and that such campaigns against socialist countries would harm diplomacy and serve only as ‘useless ‘hunts for witches.’<sup>36</sup>

At that time, Czechoslovakia was in the midst of constructing the third hydroelectric power plant in São Paulo state (Promissão), had delivered weaving mills to Pernambuco, logging industry machines to Amazonas and 30 wheat mills to Minas Gerais. Brazilian importation to Czechoslovakia was growing rapidly, thanks to the purchase of coffee and feed material besides iron ore supplies. Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Trade, Barčák, commented on the situation by stressing that

Thanks to the positive and calm attitude of Brazilian authorities, despite some ideological and political divergences, the needed prerequisites for development of mutual trade relations were met and trends of discrimination from the past were overcome.<sup>37</sup>

This statement is illustrated by the statistics and this chart shows the steep rise in the volume of trade between 1974-1988.

The situation report on Czechoslovak activities in Latin America submitted in September 1981 to the Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs notes that Brazil has ceased to be a mere instrument of US foreign policy, both regionally and globally, and was by far the most important trading partner of Czechoslovakia in the region. But when setting the priorities for Czechoslovakia, Brazil appeared in the 5<sup>th</sup> rank together with Mexico, Argentina and Venezuela. Cuba, Nicaragua, Grenada and general support to national salvation movements and revolutionary forces were top priorities.<sup>38</sup>

Politically, the Czechoslovak MFA seemed to have given up a little in building a comprehensive political relationship with Brazil; it ceded more space to the Ministry of Foreign Trade. This is illustrated by worker flows and in 1983 out of some 33 Czechoslovaks dispatched to Brazil by the state only 6 worked for the MFA and the rest was in trade area with 11 from the Ministry of Foreign Trade, 10 from state enterprises for foreign trade and 6 from affiliations (Omnipol Brasileira and Skoda Brasileira).

In 1983, the Czechoslovak Foreign Intelligence Service proposed to renew its residence in Brazil.<sup>39</sup> The starting point was different from Czechoslovak intelligence activities in the 1960's and 1970's since Brazil was not primarily an enemy, but could become a base for the work of Czechoslovak secret service against the US. The study entitled: *Brazil as an Operational Area for Czechoslovak Intelligence* stressed that Brazil

	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1983	1984
CZ exports	31,3	46,6	29,7	69,2	42,4	21,7	26,5	33,3	16,5	12,6
CZ imports	21,7	23,6	102,8	127,0	131,4	139,2	163,1	221,0	104,1	70,0



was gaining economic, political and security importance with an impact on a strategic area of the South Atlantic. Consider that

Czechoslovakia wanted to profit from the fact that the US positions in Brazil were weakening and that, according to this analysis, Brazil did not want to act as the US *gendarme* in Latin America and did not want to automatically confront the Eastern bloc.

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The report added that Brazil was offering favourable conditions for Czechoslovakia's economic expansion because 'the time when big multinationals had priority in the South American markets is gone.'<sup>40</sup>

In June 1984, the premier visit of a Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Affairs to Brazil occurred. And, in 1985, with the end of the military regime in Brazil, relations became even more intense, although still largely focused on trade. Between 1985 and 1986 four Czechoslovak Ministers visited Brazil (the Ministers of Foreign Trade, Energy, Industry and Finance). The main goal was to boost trade cooperation with an eye on metallurgy projects. Then, in July 1985, an agreement on scientific cooperation was signed and negotiations on cultural agreement were initiated. In May 1987, the Prime Minister of Czechoslovakia, Lubomír Štrougal, visited Brazil and a new economic cooperation agreement was signed and set the main directions of economic cooperation until 2000. Both sides committed to increase trade volumes to \$1 billion (USD) by 2000.

After the changes in 1985, the Brazilian communist party was not legal, but communist leader – including Prestes – returned from exile; those that had not returned following the 1979 amnesty. The Czechoslovak communist party noted divisions in the Brazilian communist movement and their weak influence as a 'lack of experience and revolutionary courage' of the new leadership of Giocondo Dias.<sup>41</sup> A few months after the visit of the Brazilian Minister of Foreign Affairs to

Prague (April 1989), where he signed a cultural agreement, democratisation caught up with the Czechoslovak communist government and, in December 1989, the Czechoslovak resident in Brasília had to look for the right answer to the question of one of his contacts as to who Václav Havel was.

1985	1986	1987	1988
33,2	45,1	25,7	28,9
68,9	34,5	65,2	74,9

## Conclusion

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The relationship between Brazil and Czechoslovakia were rendered intensely complicated since they belonged to different, and competing, ideological camps during the Cold War. Throughout the entire period (1945-1989), Brazil occupied a key place in the strategic orientation of the Czechoslovak MFA, Ministry of Foreign Trade, the Czechoslovak Communist party and the intelligence services towards Latin America. While each of these institutions maintained a slightly different objective, trade was the centrepiece of Czechoslovak-Brazilian relations. Czechoslovakia sold its machinery products and Brazil was an important source of strategic raw materials, such as iron ore, coffee and other agricultural commodities.

There was a certain discrepancy in Czechoslovakia's foreign policy as it sought to maintain strong bilateral relations and tried to strengthen its political representation since stable diplomatic relations were *conditio sine qua non* for trade. However, Czechoslovakia was forced to fulfil the goals of Soviet foreign policy in Brazil and this created very complicated situations. Brazil did not share same interests, in fact not even in the period of *Independent Foreign Policy*, where the discourse was more open towards Eastern bloc, but in reality caution reined.

The close relationship between the Czechoslovak communist party and Brazilian communists and the former's role as the latter's link to Moscow, activities of international organisations acting from Prague, intelligence activities and even direct actions against the Brazilian government that supported opposition politically and in practical terms during the military regime in Brazil made a rather explosive cocktail. It is surprising that it did not detonate and there were not more severe diplomatic clashes such as the extradition of diplomats or the severing of diplomatic relations. Czechoslovakia showed some skill when manoeuvring between support for trade and to opposition groups, but ultimately the patience of Brazil determined the depth of relations, probably due to the pre-war tradition of diplomatic and economic ties. For Brazilians, Czechoslovakia represented an alternative market for their traditional export commodities and offered interesting technologies needed for the development of Brazilian industry such as equipment for textile and shoes factories, cement and power plants. That the bilateral framework for economic cooperation was kept updated – 1946, 1950, 1954, 1960, 1977 and 1987 – speaks volumes since in other

areas the result was very modest. In short, despite the trials and tribulations that sometimes frayed their bilateral relations, Czechoslovakia and Brazil learned from each other and managed to weather the storms to the extent that both states can now enjoy a relationship free of Cold War manipulations and pursue their interests together as part of the community of democracies.

Czecho-  
slovakia and  
Brazil

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Annex: Trade volume Brazil-Czechoslovakia 1950-1988  
(in millions of USD)

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# Political and Economic Relations between Czechoslovakia and the Military Regimes of the Southern Cone in the 1970s and 1980s

*Michal Zourek*

Based on unpublished archival documents, this work analyses the relations between Czechoslovakia and the military regimes in Argentina (1976–1983), Uruguay (1973–1985) and Chile (1973–1989). Besides Czechoslovakia, attention is also devoted to the Soviet Union which had a significant influence on Czechoslovakia's foreign policy during this period. The first section discusses the reasons why Moscow adopted completely different policies towards these seemingly similar governments. Other sections are then dedicated to political relations Czechoslovakia maintained to the aforementioned countries. The final section assesses the economic relations between Czechoslovakia and the military regimes of the Southern Cone states.

*Keywords: International Relations, Military Regimes, Southern Cone, Czechoslovakia, Soviet Union*



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## Introduction

The installation of military regimes in Latin American during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a part of a complex process which should be understood in the context of Cold War tensions between the proverbial “East” and “West.” Influenced by the success of the Cu-

ban Revolution in the 1960s, the US launched a fierce offensive on the American continent against the advances of the USSR-led bloc which would include both, more or less, acceptable or reasonable measures within the capitalist framework and resorted to organised violence. By the military regimes of the Southern Cone in the 1970s and 1980s this work understands the governments in Uruguay from 1973–1985, Chile from 1973–1989 and Argentina from 1976–1983. The ideological backbone of these governments was the North American “National Security Doctrine” which stated that the army was obliged to intervene if there was a threat by an internal enemy. The involvement of army officers in politics by means of coups d’état which were motivated by the elimination of the left-wing subversion and the establishment of political and economic stability resulted in “state terrorism” and the implementation of new socioeconomic models.

Although there was a certain degree of resemblance among the military regimes in Chile, Uruguay and Argentina, the ideologically antagonistic countries of the Eastern bloc made distinctions between them. How is it possible that in Eastern Europe General Augusto Pinochet was presented as the “bloodiest” dictator of Latin America, while the crimes of the Argentine military junta, which claimed considerably more victims, were practically ignored? Why did the countries of the Eastern bloc maintain relations with Uruguay if they labelled the ruling civil-military regime as a ‘fascist civil-military dictatorship,’ often adding that ‘in essence, it is not different from the fascist dictatorship in Chile?’ These questions will be answered in the first part of this work which analyses Moscow’s interests in the stated countries. The subsequent sections, based on archival materials, analyses the example of Czechoslovakia, i.e. political and economic relations of this country with the military governments of the Southern Cone.

## **Soviet Interests:**

### **Reasons for Maintaining or Suspending Relations**

From its very beginnings, the USSR perceived Latin America as a sphere of US influence and its interests in the region reflected this and were limited. However, relatively more attention was paid to the Southern Cone countries which traditionally belonged to more socially and economically developed countries in the region. Argentina showed great

economic potential, Chile had the most robust communist party on the continent and Uruguay was of strategic importance for the USSR.

Throughout the 1960s, relations with Argentina were tense, though an easing of tensions began in the early 1970s at roughly the same time that the USSR's attention focused on developments in Chile, where, following the election of Salvador Allende (1970 [1973]), the two countries enjoyed close relations. Despite scepticism of the so-called "Chilean experiment" caused by divisions within the government coalition as well as by the pressure of domestic and foreign opposition, Chile became – after Cuba – the most significant political (not economic) partner of the Eastern bloc in Latin America. This resulted in a number of bilateral contracts and cultural agreements being signed though many remained confined to the paper they were printed on and did not materialise into functioning engagements. The same could be said of the financial aid granted by the Eastern bloc to Allende's government; it was minimal and therefore insufficient.

Uruguay was, from the mid-1950s, in the midst of a severe economic crisis which later transformed into political paralysis. On 27 June 1973 Uruguayan Armed Forces seized power, although (then) President Juan María Bordaberry officially remained in office. Both chambers of parliament and trade unions were dissolved and members of the left-wing were violently persecuted. Despite this, the USSR did not suspend relations and renouncing its positions in the country and acted in the same pragmatic manner as it did in the case of Brazil, nine years previously.

## On Chile

On 11 September 1973, soon after the coup d'état in Uruguay, the allied government of Allende in Chile was overthrown. Ten days later (21 September 1973), the USSR suspended diplomatic relations with Chile as did the other countries of the Eastern bloc with the sole exception of Romania.<sup>1</sup> The suspension of relations was not a clear-cut decision for the Soviet leadership which, over the following ten days, faced a fundamental dilemma since the Minister of External Relations, Andrei Gromyko, and his staff, opposed such a suspension. However, several ideologues from the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the USSR held a different opinion and Mikhail Suslov and Boris



Ponomarev advocated a full diplomatic freeze emphasising that Chile was not of significant economic or strategic importance to the USSR.<sup>2</sup> And there was the much propaganda value for the USSR in the Chilean coup. Indeed, Allende's death as a communist "martyr," followed by severe anti-left repressions, coupled with the US's explicit role helped garnish international support for the USSR while diverting attention away from the violation of human rights in the USSR itself and did much to rehabilitate the USSR's public image following the 1968 Warsaw Pact intervention in Czechoslovakia.

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Soon afterwards, a massive campaign was launched in the communist countries, which presented Augusto Pinochet as an exponent of modern fascism supported by the US. This propaganda campaign proved to be extremely successful as human rights abuse in Chile drew more attention of the international press than regimes with undoubtedly more victims. Thus, Pinochet was often regarded as the most brutal dictator of Latin America, despite the fact that this reputation was to a great extent unjustified and exaggerated.

In the Machiavellian thinking of communist propaganda it was necessary to create an antipole to Pinochet; Allende was presented as a murdered martyr and became one of the most popular left-wing icons in Latin America as well as in leftist circles in Western Europe. A similar fate awaited songwriter Victor Jara and a few days following the Chilean coup he was murdered at the National Stadium and his death evoked a strong response among artists. As Allende was a representative of a socialist party, Moscow sought to create a secondary heroic cult of a communist leader, who could be better identified with its ideology. Luis Corvalán, a general secretary of the communist party, who was following the coup imprisoned on the Dawson Island in the Strait of Magellan together with several former ministers of Allende's government, seemed to be a perfect choice. The image of Corvalán as a martyr and a symbol of resistance were created on the basis of exaggeration of his moral qualities and vivid depiction of his detention.

## On Argentina

At the time of Allende's fall, the attention of Moscow had already been focused on Argentina, where in the spring of 1973 Peronists, after almost two decades, resumed power. Argentina together with Brazil

showed the greatest potential for the development of relations, and in the mid-1970s, the USSR became the greatest purchaser of Argentine goods. The USSR followed the escalating political radicalisation and deepening economic crisis with growing tension and was aware that any possibility of intervening in the course of events was faint. In the given situation, a military intervention against the non-functional government seemed inevitable.

The military coup of 24 March 1976 was well-received as the group around Jorge Rafael Videla was in Moscow regarded as a “democratic wing” protecting the polity against the spread of fascism which could lead to “another Chile.”<sup>3</sup> This is also confirmed by an analysis of possible prospects of mutual relations drawn up by the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs in September 1976 where it was noted that

It can be assumed that if General Videla and his government stay in power, the current level of relations will be kept. However, its deterioration cannot be ruled out, should a violent coup by right-wing or fascist forces occur in the country, as the influence of these forces on the overall development of the country is evident.<sup>4</sup>

The military government in Argentina declared war on subversion framed in terms of the national security doctrine and named it the National Reorganisation Process. Unlike the junta in Chile, the aim of this government was not the elimination of the Communist party, but of radical left-wing groups, with whose ideas the USSR did not identify. The main reasons of the tolerant or even friendly approach of the USSR to the Argentine government lay in its economic and strategic orientation. In line with the government, Soviet analysts also firmly refused the comparison with the Chilean coup and, by contrast, pointed out its legitimacy in tackling the serious economic situation of the country and suppressing far-right *and* far-left groups. On 03 April Moscow, followed by other states of the Eastern bloc, recognised the new Argentine government. Castro’s Cuba – at that time under heavy Soviet influence – followed this example and, for the first time, recognised a Latin American right-wing military government. The junta in Argentina thus maintained diplomatic relations with all socialist countries with the exception of North Korea.

## Czechoslovakia's Relations to the Southern Cone States

### *Czechoslovakia and Chile*

Czechoslovakia broke off diplomatic relations with Chile two weeks after the coup, on 25 September 1973. Following the Soviet example, Czechoslovakia launched a massive campaign denouncing the events in Chile. Besides the activities in support of Luis Corvalán, Czechoslovakia was also the co-author of the motions for resolutions concerning the restoration of human rights and the request for the liberation of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Clodomir Almeyda. Both resolutions were approved by the UN General Assembly on 6 November 1974.<sup>5</sup> Centres of solidarity with Chile were established at all Czechoslovak universities and telegrams protesting against the military government as well as calling for the support of prominent figures were sent.<sup>6</sup> The International Conference of Solidarity, held in Paris in June 1974 and chaired by Francois Mitterand, contributed to the establishment of the most important organisation in support of Chile: the Czechoslovak Committee for the Defence of the Chilean People's Rights. The committee appointed Ján Marko, a deputy and former Minister of Foreign Affairs, as the first president.<sup>7</sup> In addition to promotional activities (lectures, exhibitions, leaflets), the committee cooperated closely with the Czechoslovak Radio and the Czechoslovak News Agency. Since September 1973, Radio Praga broadcasted a programme called *Chile Acusa y advierte* (Chile Accuses and Warns) for 5–15 minutes daily.<sup>8</sup> Other radio programmes were broadcasted to Chile from Moscow, Berlin and Havana.

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Songs were a particularly popular form of propaganda at the time. Czechoslovak music propaganda is mainly associated with the Festival of Political Song in Sokolov, which was held annually from 1973 to 1988. The second edition took place less than a half year after the Chilean coup and was strongly associated with this event; it was called "Solidarity with Chile" and a guitar with a clenched fist became the symbol of the festival.<sup>9</sup>

In January 1975, Hortensia Allende, widow of the former president living in exile in Mexico, during her visit of Prague complained that Czechoslovakia had accepted only a small number of Chilean exiles.<sup>10</sup> The leader of Chilean socialists, Carlos Altamirano, also criticised the

attitude of Czechoslovakia at a conference held in Berlin in February 1974. He said that Czechoslovakia, unlike other socialist countries, provided Chile only with verbal aid.<sup>11</sup> It was true that in the first days following the coup that Czechoslovakia's diplomatic mission in Santiago did not grant many requests for asylum. Any potential applicant had to receive a recommendation by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Chile, which then had to be approved by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. Other requests had no chance of success. However, this decision also depended on Moscow. Czechoslovakia, where many Latin American students expressed their support for the reform movement known as the Prague Spring and denounced the invasion by the Warsaw Pact armies in August 1968 (so did the leadership of the Socialist Party of Chile), was not regarded as a suitable destination by the Soviets.

Nevertheless, Czechoslovakia later accepted several Chilean communists who worked in international organisations seated in Prague. The most prominent members of the Communist Party of Chile resided in Moscow. However, if they were dismissed from the Central Committee, a new job was proposed to them in another country. Prague seemed to be an ideal choice in this respect, because it seated numerous international left-wing organisations. José Oyarce, a former Minister of Finance and Economy in Allende's government, moved from Moscow to Prague to become a coordinator of the PCH's activities in Czechoslovakia.<sup>12</sup> Another example is Luis Figueros, who worked there at the secretariat of the World Federation of Trade Unions.<sup>13</sup> Mireya Baltra, who in 1972 replaced Oyarce as a minister in Allende's government, also worked in this organisation. In 1975 she settled in Prague, where she promoted world solidarity with Chile. After nine years, she moved to Cuba and returned to her home country in secrecy in 1987.<sup>14</sup> Czechoslovakia was the destination of Chilean artists as well, such as the dancer Gastón Baltra and songwriter and poet Osvaldo "Gitano" Rodríguez.

Czechoslovakia's policy towards Chile was not limited to expressing solidarity and using the coup for propaganda purposes only. The claims made by Carlos Altamirano that Prague provided Chile, unlike other socialist countries, only with a verbal aid, are not accurate especially in view of the activities of the Czechoslovak secret services (Altamirano was not aware of them). In fact, Czechoslovakia granted

the request of the GDR and in cooperation with its *rezidentura* carried out activities in support of Chilean communists. The main reason of the East German involvement in the country was the personal interest of the chief state and party official Erich Honecker in the fate of the persecuted opposition. His daughter Sonia married Leandro Yañez, a close friend of Carlos Altamirano, the general secretary of the Chilean Socialist Party and the leader of its radical wing.<sup>15</sup> The primary task of the East German intelligence service was to ensure communication between the members of the Communist Party of Chile (underground) and Europe. Their work did not have an entirely intelligence character, it resembled more of an international support. The materials which the GDR received from Chile were passed on to the head of the international department of the PCCH and then were sent to the Central Committee of the party in Moscow.<sup>16</sup>

Under *Operation Andromeda*, three Czechoslovak agents worked in Chile from 1975, issuing false passports. In the event that East German agents were expelled, they were supposed to assume their roles. However, this never happened and Czechoslovak agents never engaged in direct cooperation. After 1977, Chilean communists began to return to their homeland and the party leadership requested that material support was focused on the internal conflict.<sup>17</sup> The East German intelligence service thus ceased to be the only communications channel and its importance gradually diminished. Under the mutual agreement of February 1980, *Operation Andromeda* was concluded by the end of the year after five years and the Czechoslovak *rezidentura* was liquidated.

In the late 1970s, the attention of USSR shifted to events which had more geopolitical importance (Iran, Afghanistan) or prestige (the Olympic Games in Moscow). The gradual decline in the significance of the Chilean issue meant that the country practically disappeared from Czechoslovakia's official documents. More attention is focused on Chile only in 1988 in connection with its democratisation. Following Pinochet's 1988 referendum defeat political tensions significantly eased.

### *Czechoslovakia and Uruguay*

After the civil-military government came to power in June 1973, Prague assigned the Czechoslovak embassy with the task of

maintaining and, as circumstances allow, expanding the relations with the current and new officials. Contact with the progressive opposition, mainly the Communist Party of Uruguay, should be cultivated in order not to interfere with and threaten the position of the Czechoslovak diplomatic mission.<sup>18</sup>

Government officials in Uruguay did not officially act against any socialist country and there were no provocative or hostile actions in mutual relations. This task was performed, instead, by the mass media, which published a long string of negative articles about Czechoslovakia such as mysterious weapons caches of Czechoslovak origin. Czechoslovak media coverage of Uruguay displayed similar tendencies.<sup>19</sup>

In an effort to eliminate subversion, the civil-military government turned Uruguay into a country with the highest number of prisoners, per capita, in Latin America. In a short time, several public buildings, old steamers and the stadium El Cilindro in Montevideo, which hosted the 1967 basketball world cup, were rebranded as prisons. Left-wing party officials were jailed as well, including the founder of Frente Amplio Líber Seregni and the general secretary of the Communist Party Rodney Arismendi. Both were released after a few months. While Seregni remained in Uruguay and was later arrested again, Arismendi went into exile in Moscow. In connection to their pardon, chargé d'affaires Kouřil attempted to evaluate the development of mutual relations:

The overall policy of the Uruguayan government towards the diplomatic mission may be characterised by seeking not to develop any contacts with the exception of economic contacts and only those which bring one-sided advantages to Uruguay or those which are necessary for the economy. In the oncoming period, the relations towards the diplomatic mission are expected to remain at the present level if no significant change occurs on the domestic political scene. After the events in Chile, the dictatorship is probably afraid of any steps which could lead to its isolation on an international level. This is indicated, among others, by the release of General Seregni and Arismendi, facilitated by a huge international campaign.<sup>20</sup>

In August 1975, Arismendi visited Czechoslovakia with his wife for a three-week medicinal treatment. During the dictatorship, many of his articles were published in the *Rudé právo* newspaper. For example, the

25 October 1975 issue includes an in-depth interview about the politics, culture and human rights violation in Uruguay:

Bordaberry had no scruples about repeating the Hitlerian extreme and ordered to burn and destroy unwanted books and records. Thousands of books were destroyed, not only political ones, but also fundamental works of national and world philosophy. Over forty lorries full of books gathered at one place to dispose of the books. Traditional cultural institutes which cooperated with socialist countries were closed and their employees arrested. (...) The prison guards use brutal torture. They attach electric wires to the prisoners' genitalia, nose, the most sensitive parts of human body, immerse their heads into dirty, foul-smelling water, torture sons in front of their fathers, fathers in front of their sons.<sup>21</sup>

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Arismendi also refers to a decree on Marxist subversion issued on 6 June 1975 which prohibited the dissemination of 'subversive Marxist materials.' This regulation also applied to shipments of printed material from socialist countries and seized material was burnt in bulk. The bulletin of the Czechoslovak Embassy which was, until then, later distributed to Argentina and Bolivia ceased to be published and the diplomatic mission in Lima assumed responsibility for its publication.<sup>22</sup>

As in the case of Chile, Czechoslovakia and other countries of the Eastern bloc became one of the major critics of human rights violation in Uruguay. Various organisations, such as the Central Trade Union Council, the Czechoslovak Women's Union, the Czechoslovak Union of Anti-fascist Resistance Fighters, the Czechoslovak Committee of Solidarity with the Nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America and the Czechoslovak Red Cross, sent protest telegrams to Uruguay on a regular basis. The anniversary of the coup was commemorated on 26 July. On 13 December 1976, on the occasion of Liber Seregni's birthday, the Central Committee of the National Front issued a declaration which strongly denounced the 'terror and persecution of progressive and democratic forces in Uruguay and demanded an immediate release of general Liber Seregni and all other Uruguayan patriots held in prison.' The protests of the World Federation of Trade Unions and other international organisations based in Prague were presented in Uruguay as 'the protests of Prague' to create the impression that this is the opinion of Czechoslovak government officials which in this way intervened in

the internal affairs of the country. This is epitomised in the declaration of President Bordaberry from 2 March 1975, which appeared in all Uruguayan media.<sup>23</sup>

In the late 1970s, tensions partly eased. As in the case of Argentina, such a thaw was caused by the deterioration of relations with the US which generated increased interest of Uruguay in East European markets. From January 1978, the Czechoslovak Embassy could again publish its monthly bulletin *Czechoslovaquia actual* (approximately 130 copies), which became the only means of national promotion.<sup>24</sup> In February 1980, after a seven years absence, an ambassador was appointed as the head of the Uruguayan diplomatic mission in Prague. The commercial exchange increased, particularly Uruguayan exports to Czechoslovakia. This was reflected in the visit of Deputy Minister of Foreign Trade, Jaroslav Jakubec, in June 1982, which included the signing of a commercial agreement. This was the only visit at the highest level during the civil-military government.<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, members of the Uruguayan opposition continued to visit Czechoslovakia. In May 1980, a delegation of the Broad Front headed by Hugo Villar visited Czechoslovakia and Rodney Arismendi paid an official visit three years later when President Gustáv Husák awarded him with the Order of Friendship on the occasion of his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>26</sup>

### *Czechoslovakia and Argentina*

Human rights violations, which became a major foreign political topic of US President Jimmy Carter's administration, presented a serious obstacle at efforts to improve relations between Argentina and the US. The EEC countries also reduced their economic cooperation and joined the campaign pointing out the brutal methods of the Argentine government. Relations with Brazil were already cold mainly due to the Brazilian-Paraguayan agreement to build the Itaipu Dam. The protracted border disputes seriously deteriorated the relations with Chile. Argentina was facing international isolation and the situation called for a change in viewing the Eastern bloc.

The junta, which proclaimed itself as "pro-Western" and "anti-communist," was virtually forced to maintain and extend economic relations with socialist countries. These countries, in return, ignored the violations of human rights. At the time of rising pressures from the



West on the Argentine government, Moscow acted in its support and impeded sending a special investigation committee to Argentina. The Soviet Union was certainly aware of its own shortcomings in the human rights department. On the other hand, it is important to consider the massive propaganda campaign led by the USSR in support of the left wing in Chile and to a lesser extent also in Uruguay.

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Czechoslovak-Argentine relations were, in this period, limited almost exclusively to the economic area. Political relations were practically non-existent, with the exception of foreign ministers meeting at UN sessions. Although the Argentine government was not opposed to relations with leading government officials of the socialist countries, it strove to avoid publicity. The general rule was to publish only news agency reports taken from Western sources. Cultural programmes and sporting events constituted exceptions.<sup>27</sup> The Czechoslovak Embassy described the mutual relation many times as “correct.” The 1977 reports, for example, stated that the ‘attitude of Videla’s government to Czechoslovakia remained correct and our diplomatic mission did not encounter any provocation or discrimination by the authorities throughout the year<sup>28</sup> [and that] This correctness of the military government, which can be characterised as moderate right-wing, is motivated mainly by Argentina’s commercial interests.’<sup>29</sup> A 1979 report states that ‘mutual relations are correct and it is possible to say that to a certain extent more favourable than towards some other countries of the socialist camp.’<sup>30</sup>

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan (1979) created a serious foreign policy dilemma: the Argentine government originally intended to support the North American proposal of trade embargo in exchange for abandoning the campaign which criticised human rights violation and lifting the embargo on weapon imports and granting credit.<sup>31</sup> Although Argentina denounced the Soviet intervention at the UN and joined the boycott of the Olympic Games in Moscow, when Washington refused to back its proposal, it took advantage of the situation. In July 1980, Argentina signed an agreement with the USSR on the purchase of 22.5 million tonnes of grain over the next five years. The following year, the parties agreed on an increase in the imports of Argentine meat to 100,000 tonnes. Carter’s grain embargo was thus paralysed by the Argentine policy.<sup>32</sup>

*Moscow was well informed about the possibility of the invasion. Despite verbal support, the USSR acted cautiously in the diplomatic sphere and its primary effort was to avoid any direct intervention in the conflict.*

1981 saw significant changes in the Argentine junta. In March Videla was replaced by Roberto Viola and in December Leopoldo Galtieri was appointed the Head of State. The new government decided to solve the decades-long conflict with the UK over the Falkland Islands. The acquisition of the islands was supposed to restore public support which was lost due to the extreme inflation, sharp decrease in real wages and political repressions. On 02 April, Argentina launched a military invasion of the islands. The next day, the UN adopted a resolution urging Argentina to withdraw its troops. The United Kingdom received support of the majority of European countries and on 16 April the EEC imposed economic sanctions on Argentina. On 04 June, the UN called for a truce. Nine states, including Poland and the USSR, voted in favour of the armistice which would imply *de facto* Argentinian retention of the islands. However, the UK's veto power ensured that the initiative did not have a chance of succeeding.<sup>33</sup> The result of the two-month conflict was the restoration of British administration over the islands.

Moscow was well informed about the possibility of the invasion. Despite verbal support, the USSR acted cautiously in the diplomatic sphere and its primary effort was to avoid any direct intervention in the conflict. This is also evidenced in the above-mentioned UN vote of 03 April when the USSR, despite its veto power, abstained. Confronting the UK could have had far-reaching political and economic impacts and Argentina, despite its support during the Afghan war, was simply not worth the trouble. Therefore, the USSR never confirmed having provided the Argentines with satellite images of the region and offering them the purchase of sophisticated weapons (including missiles and aircrafts).<sup>34</sup>

In spite of the limited practical support, a massive propaganda campaign was conducted in the Eastern bloc. From May 1982 until the late 1980s, the documents of the Czechoslovak Ministry of Foreign Affairs

on this issue always used the following sentence in the introduction: 'In compliance with the Soviet policy, Czechoslovakia considers the Malvinas dispute as a colonial anachronism and treats it as part of the complex issue of decolonisation as enshrined in the UN declaration of 1960 and other UN decisions.' Czechoslovak media covered the issue extensively. No other foreign event attracted more media attention in spring 1982. During the culminating events (22 May–2 June) the war appeared on the front page of the most important broadsheet *Rudé právo* every day. Between April and June, more than one third of the front pages of this newspaper were dedicated to this issue. The articles were clearly biased in favour of Argentina. The UK was labelled as an aggressor which was supported by the US.

It is interesting to observe the development of the name of the islands. In Czechoslovakia the Falklands was an established name which was used in maps and encyclopaedias, therefore it was commonly used at the beginning of the conflict. From mid-April, the *Rudé právo* newspaper began to use the Argentine equivalent in brackets after the British name – the Falklands (Malvinas). From late April, the name Malvinas came first – the Malvinas (Falklands) and in May the British name slowly started to disappear. Similarly, the name of the capital city underwent various changes. The original Port Stanley was replaced by Port Stanley (Puerto Argentino) and finally by Puerto Argentino. While on the maps from 08 April and 01 May the two main islands are labelled as West Falkland and East Falkland, on 25 May they are already labelled as Gran Malvina and Soledad. The *Rudé právo* newspaper strictly used the name Malvinas even when it referred to the UK government declarations. For example, a caricature published on 28 June, when the outcome of the war was already decided, depicts the UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher at a reading desk with the caption 'The Prime Minister of the UK Government on an extraordinary session of the UN on disarmament: *I am sorry for the delay of my peace speech. I was held up by waging war on the Malvinas.*'<sup>35</sup>

The approach of socialist countries to the resolution of the conflict was also an impulse to the improvement of mutual political relations.<sup>36</sup> Argentine President Reynaldo Bignone, who replaced Galtieri on 01 July due to the lost war, thanked the Czechoslovak President, Gustav Husák, for supporting the resolution on the Malvinas discussed in the UN. By their approach the Eastern bloc countries achieved that the an-

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ti-communist campaign in Argentine media eased and the Argentine public even warmed.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, the attitude of the us which during the war supported the UK side clearly showed their interest in the fall of the military regime and the formation of a new government which would act in line with their global intentions. For the junta, unsuccessful both in terms of politics and economy, this lost war was the final blow which triggered its transition towards democracy.

### Economic Relations between Czechoslovakia and the Southern Cone

The following table dedicated to the commercial exchange between Czechoslovakia and Latin America (with the exception of socialist Cuba) from 1975–1981 reveals that anti-communist military regimes were major commercial partners of Czechoslovakia, i.e. Brazil (1964–1985) and Argentina (1976–1983). Other significant partners in this period were countries with authoritarian military governments in power; Bolivia, Ecuador (until 1979), Peru (until 1980) and Uruguay.

In contrast, Chile serves as an example of a country with which Czechoslovakia suspended all commercial exchanges when the mil-

Table 1.  
Commercial exchange between Czechoslovakia and Latin America in 1975–1981 (in millions of USD)<sup>38</sup>

<i>State (region)</i>	<i>Cz. export</i>	<i>Cz. import</i>	<i>Turnover</i>	<i>Cz. balance</i>
Argentina	233.1	237.0	470.1	-3.9
Bolivia	49.1	77.3	126.4	-28.2
Brazil	246.7	950.6	1,197.3	-703.9
Ecuador	40.0	70.3	110.3	-30.3
Chile	5.2	1.8	7.0	3.4
Colombia	42.5	90.0	132.5	-47.5
Mexico	113.3	60.5	173.8	52.8
Paraguay	6.7	2.4	9.1	4.3
Peru	66.5	141.7	208.2	-75.2
Uruguay	35.7	70.0	105.7	-34.3
Venezuela	121.2	27.3	148.5	93.9
Central America	39.4	84.8	124.2	-45.4
Caribbean	22.7	2.4	25.1	20.3
Latin America	1,022.1	1,816.1	2,838.2	-794.0

itary regime came to power (17 May 1974).<sup>39</sup> However, it may be remembered that Chile was never an important Latin American business partner of the Eastern bloc, therefore this gesture did not have serious consequences. In 1974, Czechoslovak exports decreased by more than 80%, yet it exceeded \$3,5 million (USD).<sup>40</sup> The majority of deals were concluded during the first half-year, that is before the government regulation banning trade with Chile. In later years, the reduction of Czechoslovak exports was even more dramatic. Czechoslovak-Chilean commercial exchanges were, until the late 1980's, minimal.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, the Eastern bloc countries sought to keep minimum commercial contacts as a pretext to maintain their representatives in the country.<sup>42</sup> As the Chilean military government was interested in establishing business contacts with communist countries, except for the USSR and Cuba, the Czechoslovak affiliate TRACO did not encounter any serious problems with Chilean authorities and could continue its work in the country.

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A different example is Uruguay, where commercial exchanges substantially increased. The civil-military government could not afford to lose its markets in the socialist countries and strove to maintain correct relations. This situation is described in the 1975 report of the Czechoslovak embassy in Montevideo:

The countries of the socialist camp are important potential markets for Uruguay, as confirmed by the relatively large number of purchases in some of them in 1974, the USSR and Czechoslovakia in particular. Nevertheless, the Bordaberry government understands the trade with these countries completely unilaterally. It strives to sell a maximum amount of goods without creating conditions for the export of the countries of the socialist camp in return. Although it does not place obstacles of utterly discriminatory nature in the way, the technical-administrative barriers remain (difficulties with currency exchange, delays with obtaining visa etc).<sup>43</sup>

Uruguay continued to be an interesting business partner for Czechoslovakia, which aimed to maintain the relations due to favourable purchases of wool and leather. On the basis of a 1970 agreement, a Czechoslovak-Uruguayan affiliate Kara-Sur specialising in sheepskin processing started to operate in September 1973. Another Czechoslovak project in Uruguay was the assembly of Babetta and Jawa 350 mo-

<i>Year</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Turnover</i>	<i>Balance</i>
1973	0.9	8.3	9.2	-7.4
1974	1.7	11.7	13.4	-10.0
1975	1.7	6.6	8.3	-4.9
1976	1.7	6.7	8.4	-5.0
1977	2.7	10.5	13.2	-7.8
1978	1.4	9.6	11.0	-8.2
1979	4.4	8.6	13.0	-4.2
1980	15.1	12.3	27.4	2.8
1981	9.3	15.5	24.7	-6.2
1982	1.0	9.1	10.1	-8.1
1983	0.4	12.1	12.5	-11.7
1984	0.5	15.6	16.1	-15.1
1985	0.5	18.0	18.5	-17.5

Table 2.  
Commercial exchange between Czechoslovakia and Uruguay in 1973–1985 (in millions of USD)<sup>46</sup>

torcycles launched in 1974, 1975 respectively. The advertising notice about their Czechoslovak origin was due to political reasons only used for the first time in 1978.

The majority of Uruguayan imports to the Eastern bloc comprised of raw wool. The USSR, Czechoslovakia and the GDR were, besides the UK, the greatest importers of this material. In 1977, Czechoslovakia was the third greatest importer.<sup>44</sup> In the first half of 1979, Czechoslovakia began exporting tractors to Uruguay, which had been prohibited until then. Between 1979–1981 they became the main export article and contributed to the increase in Czechoslovak exports. In 1980, Czechoslovakia even achieved a positive trade balance. Nevertheless, the following year the imports of tractors were suspended by the Uruguayan government. In June 1982, a trade agreement was signed between the two countries which replaced the 1955 agreement.<sup>45</sup> In the 1980s, Uruguayan exports to Czechoslovakia reached relatively high figures; In 1981, the Uruguayan Banco de la República granted a credit of \$4.5 million (USD) to Czechoslovakia to encourage exports. In 1984, Czechoslovakia surpassed the USSR and became the greatest importer of Uruguayan wool purchasing approximately 27% of Uruguayan wool exports.

Under the Peronist government in Argentina (1973–1976), a number

of significant documents were signed which held promise for future cooperation. Minister José Ber Gelbard, in particular, advocated the orientation at the socialist markets. In spring 1975, the President issued decrees on the import of Czechoslovak energy facilities.<sup>47</sup> Czechoslovakia won contracts for the thermal power stations La Plata 2x22MW amounting to \$3.2 million (USD), Rio Turbio 2x50MW amounting to \$8.7 million (USD) and the hydroelectric power station Los Reyunos 2x112MW amounting to \$13.1 million (USD). Other new contracts included the thermal power station Güemes-Salta 1x25 MW amounting to \$8.3 million (USD) and the hydroelectric power station Agua del Toro 2x65MW, received by the foreign trade organisation Škodaexport in an international competition in 1975. The contract for the hydroelectric power station Alicurá amounting to \$27 million (USD), initially granted to Czechoslovakia, became the subject of protracted negotiations. In case of realisation it would have been the greatest Czechoslovak power plant exported to Latin America.<sup>48</sup>

The military government sought to limit economic relations with socialist countries to the bare minimum. Therefore, the Minister of the Economy, José Martínez de Hoz, attempted to challenge the validity of the documents concluded with the Eastern bloc stating that they were not ratified by Congress. As a result, the Czechoslovak contract for the Alicurá power plant was cancelled<sup>49</sup> and Argentina's plan of energy development was postponed. Nonetheless, the loss of support by the West and the negative economic situation of the country did not allow Argentina to sever its ties with the Eastern European market. In 1977, several contracts concluded during the Peronist government were executed and the Czechoslovak trade with Argentina reached a favourable trade balance after many years. Thanks to the imports of machinery the affiliate Škoda Platense achieved an exceptional position.

In 1978, machinery accounted for approximately 95% of Czechoslovak exports and almost 100% of purchases comprised raw materials. Argentinian exports consisted mainly of feed, raw wool, half-tanned leather and vegetable oils. Argentina tried to diversify its exports to socialist countries with other traditional export articles, which had lost access to West European markets (tobacco, fruit, wine). Czechoslovakia thus became the leading purchaser of lemons.<sup>50</sup> The improvement of mutual relations was confirmed on 13 December 1978 when the

Czechoslovak Minister of Foreign Trade, Andrej Barčák, and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Carlos Washington Pastor, signed an agreement on economic and scientific-technical cooperation. In November 1980, an interbank credit agreement was signed between the Czechoslovak Commercial Bank and the National Bank for Development in Argentina, under which Argentina was granted a credit of \$5 million (USD) for the purchase of Czechoslovak machinery and Banco Central provided Czechoslovakia with a \$20 million (USD) credit for the purchase of Argentinian consumer goods. In February 1982, the validity of the credit agreement was extended for other two years.<sup>51</sup>

The 1981 turnover ranked Argentina first in the commercial exchange between Czechoslovakia and Latin America due to the purchases of industrial facilities (with more than an 88% share of the Škodaexport organisation of foreign trade). Czechoslovakia continued to participate in the Argentine power industry, nevertheless, the impact of the economic crisis, high debt which required reducing investments and the war with the UK resulted in a drop in the commercial exchange after 1982. A number of contracts for Czechoslovak articles were cancelled. A soaring inflation (500% devaluation of peso against dollar) was greatly increasing the cost of Czechoslovak exports. The repercussions of the critical economic situation are described in the report of the Czechoslovak trade department:

The structure, form and organisation of the current representation through Škoda Platense and the extent of the costs associated with running the trade activities of the affiliate under the current economic situation in Argentina lead only to an increase in expenses and losses without guaranteeing any solution of the situation by means of the affiliate's own resources.<sup>52</sup>

Trade with Argentina had mainly strategic importance for the countries of the Eastern bloc and its benefit was to be seen in the long term.

In October 1983, a Czechoslovak government delegation headed by the Minister of Foreign Trade, Bohumil Urban, visited Argentina. Its main objective was to push through the construction of the power station Luján de Cuyo IV before the civil government came to power. The negotiations were successful and in accordance with the agreement Czechoslovakia was supposed to have a \$60 million (USD) share in the construction of the industrial facility valued at some \$120 million



<i>Year</i>	<i>Export</i>	<i>Import</i>	<i>Turnover</i>	<i>Balance</i>
1974	10.1	21.0	31.1	-10.9
1975	9.1	14.9	24.0	-5.8
1976	7.4	18.7	26.1	-11.3
1977	25.3	24.4	49.7	0.9
1978	36.0	37.9	73.9	-1.9
1979	26.3	49.5	75.8	-23.2
1980	30.5	44.1	74.6	-13.6
1981	98.6	47.7	146.3	50.9
1982	36.3	34.1	70.4	2.2
1983	14.9	28.5	43.4	-13.6
1984	7.5	92.8	100.3	-85.3
1985	4.2	57.9	62.1	-53.7

(USD).<sup>53</sup> During the delegation's visit, the power station Luján de Cuyo III 125 MW was put into operation. At the official commissioning of the plant the Argentinian Energy Minister highlighted the role of Czechoslovakia as a significant economic partner and praised the Czechoslovak political stance during the Falklands conflict. Urban then mentioned that in order to increase exports to Argentina it is necessary to increase imports.<sup>54</sup>

The participation of socialist countries in Argentina's commercial exchange was approximately one third in 1983. Argentina was mainly interested in purchasing technologies, machinery for the food industry, petrochemical industry, gas pipelines and hydraulic structures.<sup>55</sup> Due to its high debt, the country maintained compensatory relations after 1983. Between 1981-1984 three thermal power stations and two hydroelectric power stations constructed with the participation of Czechoslovakia were commissioned. Czechoslovakia also earned a reputation for competence in textile and metalworking machinery.

## Conclusion

The foreign policy of the USSR and other Eastern bloc countries, was distinct towards the various military regimes and was guided by entirely pragmatic interests. As Chile was not of much significant economic

Table 3.  
Commercial exchange between Czechoslovakia and Argentina in 1974-1985 (in millions of USD)<sup>56</sup>

or strategic importance, Moscow could resort to a political gesture and suspend relations with the Pinochet's regime. Other countries, with the exception of Romania, followed this decision. Events in Chile were then used as a powerful propaganda tool by the communist regimes. As regards to Uruguay, despite the campaign pointing out human rights violations, Eastern bloc countries maintained active economic relations with the military regime. The importance of Uruguay lay primarily in the favourable purchases of leather and wool. Closest relations were maintained with the military government of Argentina; the East European public remained largely unaware of the massive human rights violations that occurred there. Due to the economic crisis and the loss of the us and West European support, the anti-communist government in Argentina was forced not only to maintain relations with the Eastern Bloc, but paradoxically extend them as well. Therefore, Czechoslovak-Argentine economic relations developed immensely, particularly thanks to the imports of Czechoslovak energy facilities.

The way, in which the authoritarian regimes were for many years presented to the Czechoslovak public, contributed to the difficulties of an objective analysis after 1989. The crimes of the Argentine military junta, as well as of other Latin American governments characterised by brutal repressions, are still partly overshadowed by the controversial figure of Augusto Pinochet who is seen as their symbol. On the other hand, several right-wing groups in the Czech Republic and other post-communist countries started to acknowledge him as a president who had saved his country from communism and view the repressions of the military government as a necessary evil or regrettable mistakes representing an indispensable part of the fight against communism.

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# National Security Intelligence

Loch Johnson, Polity, 2012

*Reviewed by Andrei Alexandru Babadac*

Loch K. Johnson's *National Security Intelligence* explores the evolution of the us's intelligence community from the first days of the Cold War until the present. Johnson's main argument holds that when national leaders take decisions, the quality of information before them may significantly determine policy successes or failures. Researchers engaged in intelligence studies focus on such information: where it comes from, its accuracy, how it is deployed and what might be done to improve its reliability and timeliness. Intelligence communities are essential ingredients in the pursuit of national interests and Johnson keenly observes the important role played by such communities for states' national security. The book's added-value gravitates around the sheer concentration of information drawn on coupled with Johnson's specialised expertise and his ability of transmitting this expertise in a captivating, professional and clear manner.

In terms of mapping this text, it commences with an exploration of the relationship between intelligence work and national security. It then turns to problems associated to data collection and analysis. Thirdly, covert operations are examined, followed by an evaluation of counterintelligence. The last two chapters deal with the relationship between the secrecy of intelligence work and democratic institutions. Additionally, Johnson presents another key dimension of how intelligence communities interacts with democratic institutions to safeguard national interests.

The book is centred on the actual debate of the intelligence work such as covert action (chapter 3) and counterintelligence (chapter 4). These two chapters benefit from the author's expertise in what con-



cerns how the two subjects are dealt in the United States' national security apparatus. It should be mentioned that Johnson discusses the entire volume from a theoretical perspective modelled on the US national security system. Due to the nature of the intelligence work, details and transparent empirical information is scant; the work is largely anecdotal though explanations are very detailed and provide readers a thorough understanding of the field.

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This book adequately contributes to the introduction in the study of intelligence as a vital component of national security, for students and entry-level researchers. It benefits of a clear structure and layout and an accessible language. Its innovation lies in Johnson's combining of theoretical approaches and practical usages in explaining the work of the US intelligence apparatus. Above all, the book highlights the vital role of institutions – foundations, committees, university departments, government agencies – in shaping disciplines and intellectual frameworks of which intelligence is key.

# Demobilizing Irregular Forces

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9780745648859

Eric Y. Shibuya, Polity, 2012

*Reviewed by Yehonatan Cohen*

The cessation of hostilities does not necessarily mean the return to security for civilians and former combatants. Without a concerted programme to build trust among warring factions and disarm and enfranchise former combatants, risks of a resurgence of violence remain high. Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) seeks to achieve these goals and stabilise post-conflict societies while providing an environment conducive to long-term peace. Yet, despite the obvious importance of DDR, it is often neglected or improperly implemented.

In *Demobilizing Irregular Forces*, Shibuya aims to conceptually introduce readers to the DDR process and provide insight into the essential factors of a successful DDR programme. Drawing on real world examples from South America, Asia and Africa, Shibuya emphasises the cultural and psychological aspects of DDR, while categorically rejecting a uniform 'one size fits all.' approach.

In the first two chapters Shibuya provides a useful introduction to the history and evolution of DDR with the first chapter situating DDR within the larger framework of peacebuilding. To avoid confusion, effort is expended on ensuring that key terminology is defined. Despite arguing that DDR process is a "symbiotic" and "holistic" process, Shibuya organises the subsequent chapters around each component part of the DDR process in isolation.

The third chapter addresses disarmament. Shibuya argues that disarmament is the most visible element of the DDR process and indicates that the confiscation or surrender of weapons provides the public with a tangible sense that 'something is being done.' Consequently, it is especially alluring to politicians and is often over emphasised in

DDR programmes. However, disarmament faces a number of tactical challenges, including the proper stockpiling and destruction of surrendered weapons. Shibuya also addresses the psychological (developing trust amongst the parties) and cultural (domestic gun culture) aspects of disarmament, which are often undervalued in the implementation of DDR programmes.

The fourth chapter addresses demobilisation which Shibuya considers the true heart of the DDR process. The demobilisation process includes the discharge of active combatants and initial phases of reintegration of former combatants into society. Shibuya argues that demobilisation has an acutely psychological component, namely the reduction in the psychological state of combat. In accordance with Shibuya's thesis – that psychological and cultural aspects of DDR are paramount to fostering peace and reconciliation in post-conflict societies – the proper demobilisation sets the psychological framework for successful DDR. Shibuya also raises concerns about the unique social and cultural challenges faced by children and female combatants, an issue which is often ignored or undervalued.

The fifth chapter addresses reintegration and while demobilisation sets the stage for DDR, Shibuya argues that the fate of a DDR programme lies squarely on its ability to achieve reintegration. Reintegration is the phase where combatants are transitioned back into society and is a multifaceted transition which includes economic, social and political factors. For Shibuya, the psychological factors in this phase are of great import. Moreover, Shibuya argues that reintegration requires a psychological shift not only by combatants, but by the society to which the combatants are returning. Therefore, Shibuya argues that successful reintegration programs must incorporate both tangible elements (e.g. non-violent economic opportunities for former combatants) and intangible elements (e.g. efforts to address the psychological impacts of reintegration).

In his conclusion, Shibuya returns to his point of departure that 'social context and psychological shifts will *always* trump bureaucratic and technocratic processes' in successful DDR programmes. Accordingly, Shibuya concludes that DDR may have a general framework, but that such a framework must remain flexible. Indeed, effective DDR programmes require a tailored response to the unique circumstances of the specific post-conflict society at issue. Despite the allure of focus-

ing on tangible elements such as weapons collection and reintegration programs, the absence of emphasis on more intangible elements such as cultural and psychological factors and a DDR is unlikely to truly be successful.

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In *Demobilizing Irregular Forces*, Shibuya provides a fresh look at the DDR process; emphasising psychological and cultural underpinnings of successful DDR programmes. Succinct and easy to understand, this book is excellent for novices and security studies students. More advanced readers may also find value in Shibuya's focus on the cultural and social elements of DDR which are often undervalued in the implementation of DDR programsme.

# From Solidarity to Martial Law: The Polish Crisis of 1980–1981, A Documentary History

Andrzej Paczkowski and Malcolm Byrne,  
Central European University Press,  
New York, 2007

*Reviewed by Teodora-Maria Daghie*

The volume by Andrzej Paczkowski and Malcolm Byrne (eds) is part of the National Security Archive Cold War Reader edited by CEU University Press in 2007. It presents a series of 95 documents, portraying a central moment in the contemporary Polish history; the time between the foundation of the Solidarity Trade Union and imposition of martial law in 1980-1981. Through extensive use of first hand materials, this work presents a detailed image of Polish society in those turbulent moments when the when the world, and Poland with it, was changing. The editors try to describe this period from a variety of national and political perspectives. The documents extracted from Polish and Soviet archives are very important for understanding that period as they were never meant to be publicly available; rendering them more interesting for research. In general, the collection is diverse and tries to cover every aspect of the events and, to a great extent, succeeds in doing so. The volume manages to achieve its goal of representing a great collection of varied sources, compiled from virtually all the important national archives available in any language, as the editors suggest in the foreword (p. xvii). The main topic is clearly defined through the

foreword and introduction and nonetheless the book is divided into six parts: the birth of Solidarity, fraternal assistance, from crisis to crisis, searches for a Polish solution, final preparations and crackdown.

Each section follows a similar structure and is comprised of approximately 15 key documents that aim to give the reader an all-inclusive image of the events. Sections flow smoothly and treat events comprehensively and systematically. As the main goal of this volume is to grant access to fundamental sources on this tempestuous period, the work motivates researchers to undertake deeper analyses rather than simply annotate the facts. The core argument behind this approach is the will of the editors to provide academics an inclusive starting point for understanding the moments that marked the end of the communist regime in Poland. Benefiting from minimum inputs from the editors, the reader can truly develop their own views through analysis of primary sources. Consequently, this volume represents an excellent combination of the flow of first-hand information and freedom of thought in respect to the opportunity given to the reader to make their own judgments. Nonetheless, this makes the volume dedicated to trained readers and researchers, moving it away from amateurs and enthusiasts.

It is difficult to make an assessment in what concerns the argumentation behind the volume as little was said of the selection process of the documents compiled. The excessive amount of data makes it difficult to read and grasp an overall perspective. On the other hand, the volume remains decently balanced; however there is a lack of even a brief critical component in respect to each of the six parts. This would have maintained the impartiality of the volume.

The outstanding selection of the texts fulfils the goal stated by the editors in the first pages of the volume, in the spirit of the saying of Walesa that added a brief personal perspective of the events. The volume clearly fulfils its documentary role of providing access to primary sources needed for further analysis on the first days of “Solidarity” and the fall of communism in Poland.

The most important characteristic of the volume is the approach adopted by the editors that refrained from adopting a particular side to the analysis; they chose instead to let readers make their own mind by facilitating the examination of primary sources. In a polarised political world, Paczowski and Byrne (eds) take a daring approach contrary to

contemporary fashion: they promote free thinking and try to enable the reader to form his/her own judgment about the events that shaped the early 1980s in Poland by infusing their work with first hand materials without offering commentaries. Their approach is not necessarily unique but daring and deserves credit for giving the reader the chance of a freer examination, in the absence of an authorised opinion.

*Book Reviews*

This volume is a comprehensive source of primary documents and is a required title for any researcher dealing with the evolution of Poland's Solidarity movement in the early 1980's. The editors cover the most important moments and arguments of those days, making a true contribution to the research of Poland's last days of communism. Given the political direction of his work, it will remain relevant for years to come in the areas of political science and international relations as well as European studies, comparative government and totalitarian studies.

# The Bush Leadership, The Power of Ideas and the War on Terror

ISBN:  
9781409447153

David B. MacDonald, Dirk Nabers and  
Robert G. Patman, Ashgate, 2012,

*Reviewed by Dylan Kissane*

More than a decade since the 11 September terrorist attacks and the literature surrounding the War on Terror (WOT) has significantly evolved. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks came a flurry of hastily written volumes attempting to answer questions as to why the attacks occurred and who is responsible for them. These were closely trailed by texts speculating on the most effective – and ethical – responses to the attacks and later, particularly with the glaring coalition failures in Iraq, questions emerged related to where US strategy had gone wrong – assuming it had. And, significantly, academia had been blind-sighted and popular media eclipsed its analytical prowess in the attempt to make sense of the changing international relations environment.

Yet, as the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century drew to a close, academic treatments of the post-11 September world gained ground as realists, liberal thinkers and constructivists churned out theoretical and empirical explorations of the lead-up to and fighting of the WOT. Such a wide assortment of literature included critiques of the war, strategic orientations developed and deployed by the various actors involved in the conflict, the foreign policy decisions and implications taken by all sides. MacDonald, Nabers and Patman's (eds) work entitled: *The Bush Leadership, The Power of Ideas and the War on Terror* falls into this most recent turn and presents a solidly constructivist account of the WOT which includes an assessment of the strategy deployed by the Bush Ad-



ministration and the specific impact of Bush's leadership. This work delivers on its initial promise to explain why key ideas in American grand strategy 'failed to get' in a world increasingly dissimilar to that in which the ideas first emerged.

The volume consists of nine chapters from various contributors bookended by an introduction and a conclusion authored by the three editors. The chapters are not sewn together, but rather explore different elements and perspectives of the Bush Administration's WOT. Some chapters stand alone, while others, such as Houghton's and Rubin's, find common ground. The inclusion of David and Richard Ned Lebow's chapter that traces the US-Mexico relationship since well before the 2001 attacks, and the impact of post-9/11 foreign policy unilateralism on that relationship, serves as a reminder that the WOT produced effects well beyond Afghanistan, Iraq and the wider Middle East, though the lack of any sustained focus on Asia-Pacific limits the book.

The authors successfully link the ideas, grand strategy and leadership of the Bush Administration to the failure of parts of American war plans, particularly with regards to Iraq. MacDonald's chapter on the (mis)use of WWII analogies by the Bush administration with regards to Iraq is compelling; the clear differences between the Munich Accords and Nazism and Saddam's Iraq are clearly made. Rubin also touches on the power of ideas and Iraq, though in the context of the American-Iranian relationship. He argues that the concept of 'rogue state,' which so enamoured the Bush foreign policy team, blinded them to the obvious strategic congruencies with Iran. The reader is convinced that the constructivist notion that ideas and individual leadership matters a great deal in international politics is valid, though as a more realist-leaning scholar, I could not completely accept that all failures attributed to leadership were not more likely classical geostrategic or geopolitical errors that other great powers have made before.

If there is a weakness in the book it is perhaps Kitchen's contribution entitled 'Bush's Legacy and Obama's Conception of American Leadership.' While clearly explaining the impact of both the Clinton and Bush Administrations on US foreign policy, it seems to forgive the Obama Administration's foreign policy blunders – such as the "reset button" with Russia or the late turn to the Pacific; a region Bush spent much time focused on during his campaign and in the pre-9/11 period of his presidency – while unacademically condemning the Bush Adminis-

tration for 'stupidity' in foreign policy making (p. 146). The volume is tightly written, well-argued and serves as a valuable contribution to the latest wave of scholarship emerging from a WOT that remains, in real terms, a victory unsung.

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# Globalization and the Environment: Capitalism, Ecology and Power

Peter Newell, Polity Press 2012,

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9780745647234

*Reviewed by Kacper Szulecki*

Global environmental deterioration is commonly acknowledged and yet, 'despite rapid advances in human development, economic progress and [...] technology,' as well as the existence of a vast institutional setup for governing the environment, things 'appear to be getting worse' (p. 1). Why is that? The nexus of socio-economic and political conditions commonly termed "capitalism" is to blame; argues Peter Newell. Is 'the very idea of sustainable development in a context of globalization an oxymoron?' (p. 3).

Although slightly inconclusive and set on a priori judgments, this is definitely a distinguished and an important book. It puts together a wide array of problems, juggles an impressive amount of empirical evidence, and brings many significant theoretical insights, the last aspect perhaps the most important strength of the volume.

Before conducting the empirical analysis, Newell prepares the theoretical groundwork in the first three chapters. Having made the general introduction, he moves on to a 'political ecology of globalization' (Chapter 2). This chapter tackles both the 'benefits of resource extraction' and the 'burdens of human-induced environmental change' (p. 17), and their global distribution according to not only space/geography, but also class, race and gender. Newell thus attempts 'to "read" ecologically and socially' the organisation of the global political economy. In order to do that, he commences with a much needed calibration of the concepts, like *globalisation*. This section also provides a literature review on the various aspects of nature-economy interactions that in-

clude energy policy and climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as the continuing 'marketisation of environmental governance' (p. 26).

After a brief introduction into the theoretical tradition of political ecology, Newell moves provides a meticulous analysis of environmental governance itself (Chapter 3). His approach to the institutional setup explicitly labelled "environmental" is rather sceptical. Are these 'existing structures of global environmental governance' – he asks – 'capable of re-shaping the global economy and steering it onto more sustainable footing' or rather 'their role is simply to advance and deepen existing forms of capitalist globalization?' (p. 17). While Newell's reply is not unequivocal, he seems pessimistic about the degree of impact these "regimes" may have, and at the same time, emphasises that environmental governance is far from being solely the domain of environmental institutions. He is explicitly critical of the dominant regime-theory approach to global environmental governance, focused on institutions and law, depicting it (so bluntly that it becomes a caricature) as just 'global attempts to construct law around specific trans-border effects of production' (p. 19). In the face of an apparent lack of a sound approach to global environmental governance either in IR or its International Political Economy (IPE) sibling, Newell proposes his own; a *critical political economy*. Borrowing from the Gramscian tradition, he indicates the possibly malign role that the idea of "sustainable development" can play. A 'sustainable development *historic bloc*' (p. 45), is said to distance global capitalism from the sources of environmental problems, not allowing the inherent connection between capitalism and the environmental crisis to be addressed.

In this work, environmental governance institutions are the result of power relations rather than independent variables in the policy process; and non-environmental regimes such as trade and finance are 'critical to the possibilities of effective environmental governance' (p. 46). A serious and valuable analysis of globalisation and the environment must then not only adopt a broader focus on environmental governance, but a broader notion of governance as such. However, while Newell emphasises the need to include private/market actors and civil society organisations beyond IOS, he firmly echoes Ken Conca's insistence on the centrality of states as the site of legitimacy and political power (p. 51).

With the theoretical foundations in place, Newell moves to his empirical analysis (Chapters 4-6). Newell takes on the grand, yet obscure, concepts of “globalisation” and “capitalism,” dissecting them into more tangible parts. *Trade, production* and *finance* are subsequently analysed in terms of their *political ecologies, governance* (who governs, what is governed and further – what remains un-governed?), and the sources and engines of their political *contestation*. Although early in the book Newell acknowledges the ‘exponential increase in mass consumption’ (p. 24) as a factor impacting on the global environment, he does not address this issue in the form of a separate case study. While part of it falls under production, part under trade, the different drivers of individual consumption with both their material and cultural rooting, constitute a visible lacuna in the overall analysis. One supposes that their omission is due to the structure-oriented historical materialist (or Marxist) theoretical lens, treating consumerism as merely a “superstructure” on a particular material base.

The sections on respective political ecologies are challenging, as the author attempts – in only a handful of pages – to leap from the typical micro-focus of existing political ecological writings to his critical global perspective. He succeeds in making these passages both highly readable and theoretically grounded. Newell’s take on the governance of trade, production and finance certainly expands the mainstream IR approach and provides a fascinating argument on the way formally non-environmental institutions such as the WTO and the World Bank, as well as private investors and transnational corporations influence the core of environmental policy. Finally, the sections on contestation combine insights from civil society and social movements’ studies with the literatures on political economy and governance.

The latter sections form the book’s conclusions. These however – when Newell insists that ‘civil society will be key’ to the reform of global governance (p. 150) – come across as somewhat naïve, especially in light of the entire, pessimistic and strongly materialist, argument of Newell’s work. Perhaps more interesting is the attempt to answer the book’s driving question: why are things not getting better, but worse? Newell points at the entrenched interests of powerful economic actors and the general difficulty of reforming an overarching system like capitalism from within (p. 147). This point was perhaps expected; knowing the intellectual tradition with which the author is affiliated, but *Glo-*

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*balization and the Environment* provides a coherent argument against many of the “powers that be;” one that will not be easy to dismiss. Finally, Newell’s theoretical framework, which gathers insights from a number of earlier articles, should definitely be of interest to students and scholars of environmental politics and is likely to influence a large body of work in the near future.



