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Source: Latin American Perspectives, Vol. 12, No. 4, State and Military in Latin America (Autumn, 1985), pp. 7-40
Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.
Stable URL: http://www.jstor.org/stable/2633892
Accessed: 18/01/2011 12:50

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The Militarization of the State in Latin America

by

Michael Lowy and Eder Sader*
Translated by Stephen Gorman

Military dictatorships have been a characteristic feature of Latin America’s political history since the time of the military caudillos (Bolívar, San Martín, O’Higgins, and others) who led the processes of national emancipation at the beginning of the nineteenth century. Since that epoch, military dictators have been one of the resources utilized by the dominant classes to impose order during times of crisis.

After independence, military regimes constituted the means of finishing off the remnants of colonialism. Later these regimes were the means for repressing the “plebeian” tendencies within the emancipation movements that threatened the oligarchic society. Ultimately they were the means for imposing the formation of national states in the face of the separatist tendencies of the oligarchy’s most backward fractions. With establishment of the new order, the caudillos gave way to more stable political systems that better represented the oligarchy as a whole (Halperin Donghi, 1969).

In this century, as the primary export economies of many countries began to display symptoms of profound crisis and as the social struggles that this provoked became more violent, military regimes became an instrument for safeguarding established interests. It was no longer a matter of imposing a new order but of defending and maintaining the

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LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 47, Vol. 12 No. 4, Fall 1985 7-40
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existing one, and therefore military tyrannies became the norm in the most backward regions. When the process of urbanization provoked a broadening of the bases of political power, it was often from the ranks of the military that the leaders of an antioligarchic movement emerged, as with the tenentes (a civilian-military opposition movement) of Brazil in the 1920s, Marmaduke Grove in Chile in 1932, and Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala in 1944.

By the end of World War II these changes had been consolidated, in general during the 1930s, and under the impact of the democratic ideology that had contributed to the victory over the Nazis, the number of military dictatorships had diminished notably. The North American sociologist Edwin Lieuwin (1964a: 8) counted no more than seven governments out of twenty in the region ruled by military officers in 1947.

Nevertheless, during the last twenty years or so, there has been an unprecedented multiplication of military regimes, a progressive elimination of “representative democracies,” and a massive influx of members of the officer corps into the political arena. Together with countries frequently governed by their militaries (such as Bolivia and the Central American republics), some nations with long civilian traditions have been affected as well. Brazil, in whose history there had never been a military regime in the strict sense of the term (the Estado Novo of Getulio Vargas, 1937-1945, was not a military dictatorship, properly speaking) has now been governed by its military for more than twenty years; and Chile and Uruguay, with democratic parliamentary traditions of a European type (or of a European inclination), also found themselves subjected to militarized power.

Military power can be defined as a form of state in which the military hierarchy (the highest and intermediate levels of the officer corps) occupies the central positions in the political realm—that is, it controls the essential government posts and the top offices within the state apparatus (ministries, directorships of large state enterprises, and key administrative positions). Given this definition, it can be said that the overwhelming majority of the population of the continent lives today under a military regime.

What precisely is meant by the militarization of the state, or the politicization of the army? According to Lieuwin, we must disabuse ourselves of the myth that the armed forces in Latin America constitute an essentially military institution: “That this is an error becomes evident when we examine its real functions. There are two—and only two—legal military functions for an armed forces organization,
namely, to defend the nation from external aggression and to defend the government by preserving internal order” (Lieuwin, 1964b: 95). But according to Lieuwin, the Latin American armed forces confront no external enemies and, rather than defending constitutional governments, have tended with considerable frequency to overthrow them. From our perspective, however, this distinction is not very meaningful: Defending a government and overthrowing one are both political acts. It is impossible to call the intervention of the army to defend a “constitutional” government apolitical and purely military when it is repressive (e.g., the events of Tlatelolco in Mexico in 1968) or when it occurs during a democratic uprising (e.g., the “constitutionalist” insurrection in the Dominican Republic of 1965).

The militarization of the state is not simply the transition from the purely military to the political, but the overwhelming of the state apparatus as a whole by the armed forces—in essence the “colonization” of the majority of state and state-related structures (at the apex of the pyramid) by the military and the partial or total fusion of the repressive apparatuses with other apparatuses of the system of political domination.

This militarization may be open and explicit but may also take more indirect, “subterranean” forms in which the armed forces do not occupy the front line in the political sense. They do not govern directly, but exercise rather tight control over the formal holders of power or increasingly occupy state structures, as in the administration of certain “vital” regions, the “unlimited” extension of military justice, and so forth. Such has been the case in Colombia.

Generally, military regimes and civilian dictatorships are designated by the concept of “states of exception.” This terminology seems very questionable in the sense that it implicitly considers the “constitutionalist” state (formal) democratic or parliamentary, as the norm, and the military state as the exception. The history of Latin America from its independence until the twentieth century, and overall in the last twenty years (this is also valid for Asia, Africa, and southern Europe) tends to suggest the contrary hypothesis: that the norm is the civilian or military dictatorship, the exception the representative and constitutional regime. Some social scientists recognize this difficulty and try to avoid it through use of the concept of “state of permanent exception,” but this seems to me a terminological contradiction: if the exception is permanent, it ceases to be an exception.

Beyond the terminological discrepancy, there is a deeper problem here: that the exercise of power by the dominant classes in
Latin America (and elsewhere) requires the constant and habitual (not exceptional) utilization of coercion as the principal form of domination.

Gramsci (1975: 165) defines the state as a “hegemony armored by coercion,” understanding hegemony as the totality of the structures and institutions capable of creating social consensus around the dominant class.

These structures, the “ideological apparatuses” (school, church, political parties, press, radio, etc.), by themselves could never guarantee the domination of the ruling class; they always require the presence of an “ultimate guarantee” of the social order in the form of instruments of coercion, the “repressive apparatuses” (army, police, paramilitary forces, etc.). But to the extent that the equilibrium between the two structures is disturbed and the focus of power shifts clearly toward the repressive apparatuses, it is possible to speak of a “predominantly coercive state,” a provisional term that I prefer to the equivocal concept of a state of exception.

In Latin America, the explosive character of social contradictions has constantly provoked shifts of this type. In the past twenty years however, a new historical stage can be discerned that is characterized by the extension of predominantly coercive states over most of the continent as a consequence of a profound crisis of hegemony. The ideological apparatuses, incapable of skillfully performing their functions as generators of consensus, have found themselves displaced by or absorbed within the repressive apparatuses, in particular the armed forces. Schools, universities, the church, and political parties have experienced an increasingly intense crisis and encountered increasing difficulties in propagating the ideology of the established order. The most notable exception is Mexico, where the overall complex of apparatuses responsible for propagating the official ideology of the Mexican Revolution, dominated by the Partido Revolucionaria Institucional (the Institutional Revolutionary Party—PRI), has been able to guarantee the adherence (or neutralization) of the popular classes, making recourse to the massive use of coercive instruments (as seen in 1968) infrequent.

It is important to emphasize that the militarization of the state has not meant the exclusive use of coercion as a form of domination; not only have the ideological apparatuses continued to fulfill their role but the army has itself performed an ideological role in transmitting a number of themes that vary with the conjuncture: economic de-
velopment, national unity, defense against subversion, and so on. In reality, it is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of the military regime and the predominantly coercive state: they do not always coincide. There have been military regimes in which coercion played no more important a role than in a so-called constitutional state (Peru under the government of Velasco Alvarado), and, in contrast, there are examples of civilian regimes based almost exclusively on repression and terror (Haiti).

To comprehend the conduct of the military in power, it is essential to emphasize that the military as a unit is neither a class nor a "caste" and that its political practice cannot be entirely explained in terms of the social origins of its members. Thus the predominance of the agrarian bourgeoisie in the hierarchy of the navy and the petty-bourgeois composition of the army—to give an example prominent in Latin America—may at times help in understanding differences in conduct and even conflicts among different branches of the armed forces. But "the unity of the armed forces," beyond the myth, refers to a concrete phenomenon: the fact that members of the military belong to a single social category. A social category is a group defined by its relations with extra-economic instances of the social structure, ideological (intellectuals, students) or political (bureaucracy, military). Therefore, just as there is a certain unity in the conduct of students independent of their social origins, there is in every social category a certain extra-class community determined by their common relations with the ideological and political apparatuses. Therefore, the military, as the leading group of the coercive apparatus of the state, constitutes a relatively homogeneous social category whose conduct is broadly defined by this specific determination. From this results a relative autonomy of the militarized state with respect to the dominant classes, although it is always in the last instance the guardian of the order established by these classes. This autonomy is broader in the state form called "Bonapartist" in which the military presents itself in the political arena as an arbitrator among the various classes, and narrower in regimes in which, through the mediation of a military-industrial complex or by the cooptation of the generals within administrative councils, there is a true social fusion of military and entrepreneurs (e.g., Brazil).

In consequence, the petty-bourgeois social origin of the majority of the professional sectors of Latin American armies, contrary to the usual analysis of North American military sociology, is not a decisive
factor except when the military apparatus enters into crisis and the artificial unity of the barracks gives way to conflicts among social classes that spread throughout the institution.

**FACTORS IN THE MILITARIZATION OF LATIN AMERICAN REGIMES**

Behind this tendency toward the militarization of the Latin American state lies a profound modification of social relations. On the one hand, the capitalist development achieved in the most important countries in the 1950s and 1960s required new forms of capital accumulation. On the other hand, after the Cuban Revolution political struggles entered a new phase of confrontation, with new objectives, new alliances, and new forms of expression.

It goes without saying that there is in practice no strict separation between economic and political factors. The transition to a new model of capitalist accumulation was not a purely economic phenomenon. The new conditions of exploitation of the labor force brought with them new political factors related to its realization. New relations among classes became necessary. But the model of accumulation that took shape was the result of these new social relations, established according to the capacity of each class, stratum, or class fraction to impose its interests. The distinction between political and economic factors here is not intended to establish a clear separation of the two levels, as this would be contrary to their essence. In emphasizing the specificity of the two kinds of factors, my purpose is to clarify the particular conditions of each situation.

The state, in its role as the center of power in society, is the dominant expression of established social relations. As a reflection of the current stage of capital accumulation and the relations between the different forces in the class struggle, the state is simultaneously the instrument of the dominant social classes for consolidating or modifying a mode of accumulation and their instrument for consolidating or modifying the equilibrium of the existing social forces. For this reason, the state, class struggle, and the accumulation of capital mutually penetrate each other on all levels. Each of these phenomena appears within the context of the others, the whole constituting what we call the “social formation.”
What are the causes of this tendency toward the militarization of the state in Latin America since the beginning of the 1960s?

It is evident that the Cuban Revolution is one of the decisive historical events for understanding this evolution. The Cuban Revolution profoundly affected the traditional systems of domination by setting in motion or intensifying a crisis of hegemony without precedent on the continent. All of the ideological apparatuses—schools, the church, political parties—were affected in varying degrees according to the country and the period. The crisis took diverse forms: extreme radicalization of student movements, the appearance of a revolutionary Christian current in certain sectors of the clergy, factional splits within the various traditional "populist" parties, such as the Peruvian Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (American Popular Revolutionary Alliance — APRA) and the Venezuelan Acción Demócratica (Democratic Action—AD).

As a result of the combination of economic development and the impact of the Cuban Revolution there occurred in Latin America a significant intensification of social contradictions that brought about the eruption of previously disorganized social strata (campesinos), the development and "politicization" of industrial conflicts, the appearance of radical forces of opposition to the status quo, and the questioning of authority and discipline within the armed forces themselves.

It was to cope with these multiple threats and to rebuild the failing system of hegemony that a military and predominantly coercive state was substituted for the "constitutional" state, with the replacement of traditional political personnel by military functionaries. We can invert Gramsci's formula and speak of the state as coercion wrapped in hegemony: when the protective cover (the ideological apparatuses) is stripped away, the coercive nucleus comes to the surface.

These social, political, and ideological factors combine with a fundamental economic one: the new mode of capital accumulation in Latin America and its implications at the level of the state. It is necessary, therefore, to outline the process of Latin American capitalist development in the preceding period, roughly from World War I to the end of the 1940s. The long crisis of the world market in that period created favorable conditions for change in the motive center of the Latin American economies from the primary export sector to the internal industrial sector. The split between production and consumption so characteristic of peripheral economies seemed to
be disappearing (see Furtado, 1973, and Mauro Marini, 1973). The reduction in Latin American exports, whose consequence was a contraction of the capacity of these economies to import, freed monetary resources on the one hand, and created consumers for the development of an “import-substitution” type of industry on the other (Barros de Castro, 1968; Furtado, 1973; Frank, 1968; Mauro Marini, 1973, 1974; Peralta Ramos, 1972; Pinto, 1959; and Tavares, 1972).

This process of industrialization began in the branches of production of finished consumer goods that were less complex technologically, the textile and food industries, taking advantage of an abundant labor force and the availability of local raw materials. The growth of these “wage-goods” branches of industry reflected the increased consumption demands of wage earners. This is not to say, however, that the above-mentioned split between the spheres of production and consumption tended to disappear. If Latin American industrialization was to proceed without abandoning its primary export base, the modes of production and circulation had to be adapted to that base. Latin American industrial bourgeoisie developed as appendices of primary export systems. The foreign currency earnings necessary to import machinery came from exports. Monopolistic appropriation of land generated an important reserve of labor charged with providing labor power at a low price. Demands of the primary export sector frequently constituted, for the most part, the consumption market for local industries.

Following the crisis of 1929, alteration of the conditions of the world market produced significant changes in Latin America’s power systems. On the one hand, a process of industrialization was initiated. On the other, absence of an industrial bourgeoisie politically independent of the rural base led to a compromise power system in which industrial interests were defended by governments whose broad social bases permitted them, starting from a fundamental pact with the ancient oligarchy, to tip the balance toward industry. Vargas in Brazil in 1930, Cárdenas in Mexico in 1934, the liberal government in Colombia in 1934, the Frente Popular (Popular Front) in Chile in 1938, and Perón in Argentina in 1945 all redirected the action of the state with the objective of creating an internal market. These regimes differed from one another owing to diverse alliances and relations of forces and differences in stage of development. But they were all promoters of an extensive process of industrialization, a strengthening of the role of the state, and the incorporation of new contingents of
labor into the urban labor market, without breaking the relation of dependency created by the primary export economy that provided them with the foreign earnings necessary for imports. This is what caused Ruy Mauro Marini to say,

Uprooted from the mode of circulation that characterized the export economy, the dependent industrial economy reproduced, in a specific form, the accumulation of capital based on the overexploitation of the worker. As a consequence, it also reproduced, although in a modified way, the mode of circulation that corresponds to that type of accumulation. Now, it is not the disassociation of production and circulation of merchandise in terms of the world market that is operating but the separation between the high and the low spheres of circulation within the economy itself, a separation that, not being counteracted by the factors that operate within the classic capitalist economy, acquires a much more radical character [1973: 63-64].

The political regimes that installed themselves after the beginning of the industrialization process and whose objective was the development of that process were sustained by a broad social base composed of new levels of functionaries favored by the extension of the state’s role and the growth of employment opportunities in the tertiary sector, liberal professionals, and small property owners favored by the increase in urban rents. Even within the exploited classes, new contingents of workers incorporated within the industrial labor force, enjoying privileges they had not possessed as rural workers or subproletarians, constituted the basis for populist-type relations. The dynamic of this extensive industrialization process, which had produced the conditions for compromise, went beyond those conditions. Having begun with the branches of intermediate consumer goods production, it affected more complex branches of intermediate and capital goods as a consequence of the pressures exerted on the import capacity of the system, and this produced a change in the focus of accumulation for those sectors. During the 1950s, the demands of this transformation became evident in Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina. The governing bourgeoisies attempted, with greater or lesser success, to respond to them in terms of the logic of the accumulation process.

In the process of import substitution, there is a moment at which the amount of investment necessary for the transition to a new stage calls for resolution of the problem of the shortage of internal capital
and the availability of international capital. The solicitation of foreign capital has to be accompanied by definite attractions, the most important of which are favorable legislation for the repatriation of profits, the availability of infrastructural resources at very low prices, and, above all, a cheap work force. Insofar as the world market again broadened, in the postwar period, the dependency of the peripheral industrialization process increased; this was evident in the technological models that dominated it and accelerated the process of monopolization of the economy.

The introduction of a technology too highly developed for the Latin American models produced an expansion of productivity far in excess of the development of the productive base. This is to say that the amount of new investment did not compensate for the unemployment produced by technological innovation. We have here, then, a crisis of realization:

*The bipolarization of income . . . tends on the one hand, to strain the expanded reproduction of capital and exacerbate the contradictions and, on the other hand, through the new orientation of capital accumulation, to have as a by-product a new modification of the distribution of income to the benefit of a third category—commonly called the middle classes—and to the detriment of the working class. This third category demands the reactivation of the process of accumulation when it is capable of doing so, that is, when the repression/integration of the working class is achieved without too much shock ([Salama, 1974: 38-59]).* 

This demand is not an artificial a posteriori creation but a direct product of the above-mentioned mode of accumulation. On the one hand, the technical characteristics of modern industries require an increase in the number of unproductive workers. Under the prevailing conditions of formation of the labor force in these countries, these workers achieve remuneration levels much higher than those of manual laborers. On the other hand, the difficulties in the realization of capital provoke a diversion of capital from the productive sphere to commerce and services. Employment in this sphere increases, producing many more privileged consumers.

Under these conditions, the incremental expansion of the market does not necessarily imply an increase in the remuneration of the work force. On the contrary, it implies the overexploitation of this force to guarantee an “overaccumulation” capable of sustaining the
intensification of consumption of a limited privileged base. This necessity to exert pressure so as to diminish the cost of production, and to compensate for the limits of the market by an increase in the prices of products, is incompatible with populist regimes and bourgeois democracy.

By this I do not mean that the authoritarian regimes imposed throughout Latin America go along with its industrialization. The bourgeoisie does not choose its regimes of domination at its pleasure; these are the result of the relations of social forces present in each situation. In contrast, I argue that the political conditions most favorable for the development of capitalist industrialization in the periphery, in the present stage of capitalist accumulation guarantee the repression of the elementary forms of resistance by the working classes. (Here I am speaking of a stage in an international sense, because independent of the level of development achieved in each country by its industry it is international conditions of accumulation that prevent a repetition of the process of import substitution for relatively closed national markets seen in the 1930s.) For this reason, the regimes that rely on the populist mobilization of the masses within the framework of formal democracy represent increasingly unstable and precarious balances of forces, not the “normal form” of bourgeois domination seen throughout the continent.

**FORMS OF MILITARIZATION OF THE STATE**

Military dictatorships eliminate the balanced representation of different fractions of the dominant classes. In their place arises an executive that concentrates all of the functions of government and is directly dependent on the armed forces.

The unique characteristics of the armed forces—“professionalism,” authoritarian discipline, rigid hierarchy, and an ideology of defense of order—naturally give military regimes a repressive aspect. This direct resort to repression is clearly a symptom of the crises of legitimacy of bourgeois domination of the continent. But if we look closely, we can distinguish between military regimes based on the repressive function (Argentina, Chile, Uruguay, and others) and those that combine semipopulist characteristics with repressive
measures (Peru under Velasco Alvarado, Panama under Torrijos, and so on). Among the military regimes oriented toward repression, we must further distinguish traditional military dictatorships, which come into being to maintain the primary-export society, from military dictatorships that arise in response to the contradictions created by the industrial capitalist society; it will be seen that these differ in accordance with the different functions they perform.

TRADITIONAL MILITARY DICTATORSHIPS

Traditional military dictatorships, being products of relatively simple societies, have relatively simple functions: to ensure the over-exploitation of rural workers and prevent the established order from being threatened by competition among rival sectors of the oligarchy. In a way, these regimes mediate between the rural oligarchy of the country and the foreign companies (or company) that control its external commerce. They receive the assistance of the local oligarchy in protecting their interests against foreign capital and in guaranteeing internal order. Thanks to this support, the traditional military tyrannies are able to impose order from above on the interminable conflicts among oligarchic groups. But the tyrants in turn belong to cliques and utilize power to their advantage.

In this sense, these dictatorships cannot achieve the unification of the dominant class. The stigma of corruption that seems to adhere to them like their own shadows is simply the absence of legal, institutionalized theft. For this reason, they are at the same time instruments of the foreign companies and of the local dominant class in their function of controlling the national economy. Such is the proper description of the Trujillo dictatorship in the Dominican Republic and the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua, according to Halperin Donghi:

In these countries, belatedly attaining the expansion of exports, the dictatorship is the instrument of economic conquest by the ruling group. The Trujillo family in Santo Domingo and the Somozas in Nicaragua help themselves to a large part of the national patrimony. These practices subordinate the traditional oligarchy and allow for the penetration of the representatives of the dominant economy: the conquest of the Dominican land by North American sugar companies and Nicaragua by United Fruit. In both cases, the dictatorship is tied to
previous North American military occupation; the chiefs of the National Guards, exceptionally well armed and maintained, owe their positions to the occupier and count on military assistance for their independence from the traditional bases of local power. The National Guards are loyal to the dictator and are less subject to the influences of the oligarchy than armies [1969: 238].

Let us examine this more closely. What are the problems that these dictatorships endeavor to resolve, upon what kinds of social relations are they based, and what contradictions do they engender?

At the beginning of the century, the United States, Britain, and France shared in the economic domination of Nicaragua. The nationalist government of Zelaya tried to utilize this competition to improve the condition of the local economy. The United Fruit Company then organized an armed movement that overthrew the regime. The direct intervention of the United States in 1911 ensured the “election” of a new president who was a member of the Conservative party, but when the U.S. forces withdrew from Nicaragua in 1924, a civil war ensued. In 1926, U.S. Marines landed again and forced liberal and conservative generals to make peace. Among the liberal generals who opposed the resulting government, however, there were forces that expressed the aspirations of the workers. For these, the fundamental problem was the situation of exploitation imposed by foreign power. Augusto César Sandino, a former agricultural worker and miner, headed a small army that fought the National Guard and the occupation forces until 1930. After the defeat of these insurgents, General Anastasio Somoza, commander of the National Guard, led the coup d’etat that began his long reign.

The Somoza dictatorship was imposed through the power of the National Guard; it overcame the Sandino threat and ensured the existence of a national state free from military occupation but one that would guarantee the unopposed economic domination of the North American company.

The power of a person or of a clan (Trujillo, Duvalier, Somoza, Stroessner) maintained by a loyal and privileged National Guard corresponds to the necessities of a simple society based on the export of primary products. With an eye toward maximizing the earnings for companies in this type of activity, the terror of the state is obliged to crush the slightest manifestation of opposition. The local population, whose demands for more wages can only increase the costs of produc-
tion and reduce income, is not allowed to consume the wealth produced by the important sectors of the economy.

Thus, these regimes employ force, extreme misery, and ignorance to repress the population. The revolutionary energies that develop within this context are illustrated by the Mexican Revolution of 1910-1915, the campesino insurrection in El Salvador in 1932, the long struggle of Sandino, and the Cuban Revolution. Another factor also diminishes the stability of such dictatorships. Depending as they do on police terror and protecting the corruption of the dominant clique, they offer the urban middle class no more than leftovers of autocratic power. As these classes grow and become stronger, they in turn strengthen democratic and moralizing movements. These petty-bourgeois initiatives are assisted by certain fractions of the oligarchy, and their only consequence is the perpetuation of the cycle of military coups throughout Latin America. In reality, from this point of view the Cuban Revolution, the 1979 Nicaraguan Revolution, and the current struggles in El Salvador and Guatemala represent a turning point. At the outset, the United States tolerated Fidel Castro because his movement appeared to be nothing more than a new liberal rebellion against a corrupt tyranny, which in a few years would itself become another corrupt tyranny. By linking its democratic objectives with the profound social aspirations of the working masses, the Cuban Revolution signaled a new dynamic and closed the door to the liberal schemes of the old oligarchies.

Bolivia is a very special case. The restorative cycle of the Bolivian armed forces after the revolution of 1952 ended in 1964 with the coup d’etat of Barrientos. The antilabor character of the Barrientos, Bánzer, and García Meza regimes is very significant if we consider the actual political forces of the Bolivian proletariat. From this standpoint, these regimes look more like new military dictatorships than traditional ones. But just as the revolutionary struggles of the Bolivian proletariat had to overcome the weight of the rural sector and the backwardness of the country, the lack of a corresponding social base prevented the military dictatorships from following the Brazilian model. In Bolivia, the military dictatorships cannot be an instrument of the industrial monopoly sector, it is instead an instrument of mediation between sectors of the national bourgeoisie and imperialism via the state’s control of minerals. Seen this way, the situation resembles the traditional dictatorship, whose particular feature is the nationalization of the mining sector, a legacy of the 1952 revolution. But the principal legacies of 1952 are the experience and maturity of the
proletariat, which impede any reactionary stabilization of the country. The “cocaine coup” of Garcia Meza in 1980 and the succession of coups and countercoups that followed illustrate the chronic instability of Bolivian military regimes.

The triumph of the Sandinista Revolution of July 19, 1979 demonstrated the vulnerability of traditional military dictatorships once again. It showed that the political-military overthrow of a traditional military dictatorship was possible within the context of its loss of any social base and its confrontation by a broad-based mass revolutionary movement capable of initiating an armed insurrection. Nicaragua’s revolutionary victory for its part deepened the crisis of other military regimes in Central America, above all in El Salvador—where the military has tried to camouflage its power with “Christian Democracy”—and in Guatemala, with its military chiefs personally involved in profitable petroleum businesses and land speculation in the so-called Franja Transversal del Norte (Northern Transverse Strip), in direct association with multinational corporations (Shenandoah, Getty Oil, Texaco, etc.).

**NEW MILITARY DICTATORSHIPS**

The new military dictatorship shares with the traditional one the function of coping with workers’ capacity to react to overexploitation. In addition, in that it corresponds to a different stage of capitalist development it has its own tasks. In analyzing the particular conditions in which such regimes originate, Emir Sader identifies

*a crisis of hegemony within the political system that invariably accompanies coalitions of a reformist nature—petty-bourgeois reformism or worker reformism—in government, aimed at reordering the system of domination through the mediation of class conflict and the positioning of conciliatory mass leaders . . . These governments constitute the last possible solution within the prevailing system at the end of the 1930s and beginning of the 1940s: parliamentary democratic governmental regimes, ideologically populist and functionally authoritarian and elitist. Insofar as these intermediate solutions cannot be achieved in a durable fashion, the political system is condemned to a definitive failure [Sader, 1977: 19].

The antilabor character of this type of dictatorship is more apparent than in the traditional dictatorship because it confronts a more
developed labor movement that has matured during periods of relative liberty. Because this type appears at more advanced stages of capitalist concentration, it orders the internal conflicts of the dominant classes by accelerating the monopolization of capital. Therefore, it is logical that the governments that reflect the interests of monopoly capital should be those that substitute class conciliation for the representation of politically excluded sectors. Now, the political expression of such interests implies overall action much more complex than the political direction of the old primary export sectors. To the place previously occupied by the old tyrant and his clique the new military dictatorship elevates the armed forces to a managerial body. The success of the dictatorship is measured by its capacity to convert the armed forces not only into a central organ of power but also into the sole party expressing the interests of the hegemonic fraction of capital.

The armed forces are the last element affected by the system of domination and depend on its hierarchical structure, which does not protect them from class struggle but does diminish their vulnerability to the effects of the violent social and political struggles current in the conjuncture of the society. For these reasons, in its capacity as an institution, the military represents the ultimate base of operations for the reconstruction of the conditions for political domination and economic exploitation [Emir Sader, 1977: 23].

The best example of these regimes is the Brazilian dictatorship. The conditions of capitalist accumulation beginning in the mid-1950s prepared the way. The industrialization process had developed through a massive influx of foreign capital that had injected great dynamism into basic industries and the production of durable consumer goods for a limited high-income urban consumer sector. In the early 1960s, the maintenance of this process required new investments in these dynamic sectors, but the capacity to attract foreign capital depended on the capacity of the system to contain labor demands, guarantee high rates of exploitation, and rationalize the economy, eliminating less profitable units of production at the same time that a new concentration of earnings was operating in favor of the dynamic sectors. The political regime that had directed the previous stage of the industrialization process had shown signs of being incapable of satisfying these new necessities. The political weight given to
all the bourgeois fractions in the representative democratic model impeded implementation of a coherent and rational national policy of capitalist concentration. Relations of a populist type with the masses also impeded the application of a policy of wage controls.

Confronted with the new necessities of capitalist accumulation, the bourgeoisie abandoned populism when the popular movement began to rush ahead of the populist leaders. But its political organizations, the Partido Social Democrático (Social Democratic Party—PSD) and the Partido Trabalhista Brasileiro (Brazilian Labor Party—PTB) remained imbued with this populism or at least were incapable of overcoming it within the framework of a parliamentary democracy, the União Democrática Nacional (National Democratic Union—UDN). Thus, the armed forces presented themselves as the “armed wing” of a broad coalition. The policy of purging the Left and the populist current in order to avoid concessions to the masses progressively eliminated bourgeois leaders from the political scene and emptied civil institutions of all power. In the process of combating “subversion” and “rationalizing” the political and economic apparatus of the state, the armed forces emerged as the backbone of the state, progressively reducing the legislature, the judiciary, and the parties to a purely decorative role and controlling the influence of the press, the universities, and the church.

Without the counterweight of any political representation, the military dictatorship applied the policy of monopolistic capital to overcome the economic crisis that had hung over the country since 1962. It utilized a policy of wage controls, repression of union life, credit restrictions, incentives for foreign capital, increasing rates of exploitation, and restriction of the consumer “wage goods” market; it accelerated monopolistic concentration and the denationalization of the economy.

It was not until December 1968, with the liquidation of the last vestiges of the bourgeois republic, that the military dictatorship was consolidated. During that year, the accumulated contradictions that arose from the economic crisis and the solutions applied to it and from the political repression reached their limit. In response to the extreme unpopularity of the military government, the old bourgeois institutions manifested some intentions of “sending the military back to their quarters.” But this bourgeois opposition, faced with the first symptoms of the radicalization of a popular opposition, retreated and was eclipsed. The Left continued to be equally immature and fragile.
The military dictatorship was then able to resume the initiative, executing another coup, dismantling all trade union and political life. More than a new victory of the armed forces, Institutional Act No. 5 was a decisive turning point for the regime. On the pretext of the necessity “to fight against revolutionary warfare,” the military dictatorship suppressed the parliament and official parties, destroyed what little autonomy still existed in the judiciary, suspended political rights of bourgeois leaders who represented a political alternative, and gathered under its direct control all principal ideological apparatuses, from the university to the press. The military-police repressive apparatus acquired autonomy within the armed forces, given the way in which the regime was consolidated. This prevented it from creating institutional channels of expression for the diverse sectors of the dominant class, and its ideological legitimacy became dependent on its economic success. In this regard, the dictatorship could already count on the effects of the economic recovery that began in 1967. The continual increase in national production, realized through increased exploitation of the working masses, offered extraordinary prospects for profit to large investors and brought about a significant rise in the income of the privileged strata of the urban middle classes. This impeded any attempt at bourgeois opposition during this period.

The form in which the military dictatorship ensured capitalist recovery protected the “monopolistic path” of capitalist development. The overexploitation of workers facilitated accumulation but without developing the internal market for “wage goods,” a sphere that lacked interest for monopolistic capital in Brazil. Acceleration of the capitalist transformation in agriculture also took place through a process of increasing proletarianization of campesinos, and contributed to a reduction in the cost of industrial production. The solicitation of foreign capital and the credit policies of the regime intensified imperialist domination of the economy. Establishment of a system for financing the consumption of durable goods broadened conditions for realization of privileged productive sectors by imperialist capital.

The stability of the Brazilian military regime thus resulted from the fact that it did not rest solely on repression. It legitimated itself in the eyes of the entire capitalist class by offering conditions of high profitability for investments, and even considerable numbers of salaried workers benefited from economic improvement. They were won over not by the explicit ideology of the regime, its conservative authoritarianism, but by its appeal to individualism and political
indifference and the “realization” of consumerism. With these, the atomization of civil society was reinforced.

With the world economic recession beginning in 1974, however, the economy, that assured the legitimacy of the regime, and so dependent on the outside world, reached its limits. The most lucid figures in the government realized that they must look for other sources of legitimation. General Ernesto Geisel assumed the presidency in 1974 with a project of “abertura política” and the reappraisal of civil institutions: liberalization of censorship, of electoral propaganda, and so on. Although this “decompression” could bring to the surface all sorts of underground opposition, the government sought to keep them under control with its economic reorientation and social depoliticization.

Nevertheless, the government was unable to contain the wave of opposition. Its intention to “launch a new cycle of accumulation” collided with the magnitude of the economic crisis, which ended by breaking the old solidarity of the dominant classes and weakening the “military party.” At the same time, the dynamic of social protest considerably surpassed haughty expectations of men in power. The eruption of massive labor strikes beginning in 1978 revealed the existence of a social movement whose tendencies toward political and trade union autonomy made the project of “transition from above” difficult. This is not by any means to say that the military team lost control, but to maintain it, it had to broaden its program of concessions and liberalizations considerably. With President João Figueiredo in 1979 the project changed from one of simple “liberalization of the military dictatorship” to one of “authoritarian democracy.” To accomplish this, the military team required certain conditions: (1) control of the mechanisms of representation, with restrictions on the organization of parties, limitations on legislative action, and, above all, an electoral reform that distorted the results, and (2) the maintenance of mechanisms “of exception,” whether in legislation (the national security law, for example) or with regard to the personnel mustered for these practices (hence the direct rejection of any investigation that threatened the existence of the “paramilitary” groups). But at every step it became more difficult to reconcile liberalization with the maintenance of these conditions, and the elections of 1982 showed the limits of the Brazilian military project.

The increasing weight of the state’s economic apparatus had a tendency to strengthen the power of the governmental bureaucracy
with respect to private capitalists; but in the very process of applying a policy favorable to large capital, the officer corps of the armed forces was absorbed by it. The generals and their technocrats were no longer the defenders of the capitalist system while remaining separate from the capitalist class; now they belonged to that class and entered into the management of the major companies. The officer corps that directed the centers of political power was now the privileged representative of large capital. In this sense, it was possible to speak of a "military party" as the principal expression of capitalist interests.

The same crisis of hegemony produced the Barrientos dictatorship in Bolivia (1964), the Ongania dictatorship in Argentina (1966), the Bánzer dictatorship in Bolivia (1971), and the Pinochet dictatorship in Chile (1973). The inability of the bourgeoisie to forge a social force capable of defeating the left within the context of representative democracy and the incapacity of the left to overcome the bourgeois reaction opened the way for a military solution. The level of violence of the September 11 Chilean coup can be explained in terms of the characteristics of the enemies that had to be brought down. The strength and flexibility of Chilean parliamentary democracy had served to institutionalize redistribution by the state of the income generated by the foreign monopoly in the mining sector. The political system functioned to regulate relations among the dominant groups and between all of these groups and the foreign enclave, to win the support of the "middle sectors" integrated in various ways into the bureaucratic apparatus, and to keep the labor movement within the law via recognition of the rights of unions and of minor políticos belonging to the most organized sectors. When this system proved no longer effective in containing the autonomous dynamic of the proletariat, the bourgeoisie, in seeking to eliminate it, was hampered by the country's legal traditions and the political maturity of the proletariat. These two factors had also impeded the coup d'etat that was intended to prevent Allende from taking office in 1970 after his election.

The gradual rise of the Chilean labor and popular movement became apparent in the late 1950s. In 1958 Allende came only about 30,000 votes short of winning the election. The continued advance of the left coalition led the bourgeoisie to abandon its own conservative candidate in 1964 and unite instead around the "revolution in liberty" of Eduardo Frei, who represented a Kennedy-inspired reaction to the Cuban Revolution. After three years of apparent success, the Frei regime proved incapable of maintaining the timid reforms promoted
by his Partido Democrático-Cristiano (Christian Democratic Party—PDC). The campesino social base, initially won over by the beginning of the agrarian reform, did not make up for the split of the bourgeois bloc provoked by the reaction of the rural oligarchy or for the increase in campesino revolutionary energies, which outpaced the cooptive possibilities of the regime. The urban social base gained by the Frei government’s populist policies on housing and collectivism also failed to compensate for the popular groundswell initiated by the revolutionary Left.

In 1970 the rising Left confronted a divided bourgeoisie. The platform of Allende’s Unidad Popular (Popular Unity—UP) coalition—to convert the economy to one of popular consumption and democratize the state—replaced the DC project of organizing the internal market and integrating the popular bases into a bourgeois state. Such a project carried the contradictions of the Chilean situation to their limits.

The existence of a government consisting fundamentally of traditional parties of the Chilean proletariat, in such a juncture of economic crisis and mass rising necessarily created a prerevolutionary situation. The bourgeoisie, which did not control governmental power and feared the orientation that the process could take, could not effectively confront the economic crisis. Therefore, it reacted by checking investments and engaging in speculation, thus aggravating the capitalist crisis (Mauro Marini and Sepulveda, 1974; and Eder Sader, 1974).

The mass movement, propelled by the crisis and stimulated by the presence of a popular government, expanded and became radicalized. As the institutionalized channels, privileged by the policy of “the democratization of the state,” revealed their limits, the embryos of dual power appeared. Thus, the policy of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario (Movement of the Revolutionary Left—MIR), based on the development of these embryos, ceased to be simply a proclamation; it became attached to the dynamics of the numerically more important fractions of the working class and of sectors of the UP itself. But the UP, consistent with its own strategy, sought to use its stability as an appeal against increased intervention by the armed forces.

Within the bourgeoisie, the PDC and the right in general were also forced to look to a military solution. The PDC’s objective was obviously not a military dictatorship that might deprive it of direct political authority. Its strategy was the “destabilization” of the government:
forcing all demands to their maximum and exacerbating all discontent, at the same time holding the UP prisoner to the “state of laws” in order to prevent it from resolving in its favor the contradictions created. But so risky a policy cannot be followed indefinitely. The social forces that were set in motion had their own dynamic, and although the mobilization of the Right succeeded in destabilizing the government, it did not succeed in overthrowing it. On the contrary, for every reactionary offensive there was a popular counteroffensive that incited the government to further assaults on the bourgeois regime. The institutional “destabilization” gave way to a new institutionalization of “popular power.”

The bourgeoisie, perceiving this situation, shifted the battlefield to the bourgeois state and particularly to the armed forces. The almost complete preservation of the traditional armed forces, with their ideology of order and blind discipline, allowed them to perform the role of privileged agent of the “restoration.” With this, the armed forces went well beyond the liquidation of Allende and popular resistance and the reestablishment of the democratic order desired by the Christian Democrats. The process that transpired in Brazil between 1964 and 1968, when the military dictatorship coexisted with the vestiges of a “civil power,” did not occur in Chile. The parliament did not survive, and bourgeois political parties disappeared. The university fell victim to military intervention, and the means of mass communication were brought under direct military control. The judicial apparatus likewise fell under the direction of the armed forces. The military began managing the government in accordance with its own institutional character, while conserving its own hierarchy, after the bloody “purges” of September.

The state was practically reduced to the armed forces, which performed executive, legislative, and judicial functions and sought to become the only true party of the dominant class. To achieve the last objective, they stressed the evils of the system of political parties, to which they attributed division of the country and the threat of social revolution. In place of all this, the dictatorship proposed its ideology of national unity, to be formed through the depoliticization of the country and its subjection to military rule. It demonstrated its repressive efficacy by its monopoly of force, its national centralization, and its monolithic discipline. Its ability to impose itself as an adequate representative of the bourgeoisie depended on its success in suppressing resistance and in reestablishing the economy.
Destruction of the whole legal apparatus did not mean that the military dictatorship controlled all national life. Even if one does not take into account the clandestine reorganization of the Left and the workers’ movement, not all of the old channels of the bourgeoisie were definitively liquidated. Although it is true that today there are no bourgeois parties, in the true meaning of the term, one does find pressure groups that act within and through the armed forces. The PDC itself was transformed (temporarily?) into a pressure group that used its potential social base to exert a certain influence on various sectors of the armed forces. Together with the PDC, other organizations performed the same function: the church, leading dailies, the law school, and so forth. The armed forces, for their part, having overcome the political divisions that existed in Chilean society, allowed these divisions to penetrate their own ranks. The survival of the military dictatorship was subject to its ability to return order to capitalist accumulation in the country. In this period, in addition to the sacrifices of the working masses, expressed by massive unemployment and by wages that caused malnutrition and misery, the military moved against the small and medium-sized capitalist sectors, as is demonstrated by the disappearance of these sectors from the nation’s economic life. The regime had to demonstrate to the latent opposition in these sectors its capacity to stem the revolution and, at the same time, ensure higher rates of exploitation of the labor force. The argument was convincing only to those who saw that the salvation of capitalism had to come before their own survival as capitalists. The pressure exerted on capitalists in general was much stronger than it was in Brazil, either because of the gravity of the Chilean crisis or because of the peculiarities of the economic policies of the Chilean junta, which, being oriented toward economic liberalism, opened the country to the domination of large companies without counteracting it by state action. Although it is true that, from the political point of view, Chilean capitalists had a much stronger political tradition than their Brazilian counterparts, they were much more constrained by the threat of the proletariat. Therefore, bourgeois opposition did not risk open confrontation and utilized its discontent to influence certain sectors of the armed forces with the objective of making the regime more flexible.

But how can a regime become more flexible when its stability derives precisely from the omnipotence of its command centers? If the Chilean military regime has been the hardest of the new military
dictatorships, it is because Chilean society was the most contaminated by the subversive tendencies of the exploited classes. Its repressive efficacy is achieved at direct cost to its legitimacy. If it succeeds in establishing new perspectives for capitalist development, it will recover its legitimacy among the sectors that derive benefits from that development. But if, before achieving this, the contradictions created by the regime precipitate a crisis within the system of domination due to its rigidity, the entire state will be affected.

**POPULIST MILITARY COALITIONS**

In some instances, civilian governments with populist tendencies originating in representative democratic systems fall under direct control of the armed forces. This happens in situations in which the conditions for a military coup are as yet lacking but the development of class conflict calls for increased intervention of the armed forces. The military in this context has become more than the “ultimate reserve of order” that intervenes only “in the last instance,” but it is not yet the direct holder of political power. Its continual intervention in and direct control over political actions give evidence of the gravity of the crisis and the impossibility of immediate resolution.

In this case we are not dealing with military governments with populist projects, as in Peru, or even military regimes with civilian facades, as was the case with Bordaberry in Uruguay. In these two cases, a military coup had already destroyed the representative democratic system and established a new political equilibrium. In the case of a populist military coalition, political instability arises from the fact that the representative democracy is no longer capable of guaranteeing the stability of bourgeois domination without at the same time producing the factors necessary for the establishment of a military dictatorship.

Such a situation is necessarily transitory; if it is prolonged, as in Argentina, it worsens all the system’s contradictions. This type of coalition lacks the efficacy of military repression or populist mobilization. In contrast, populist military coalitions tend to neutralize themselves and to stimulate the development of social conflict.

In Argentina, the first military solution (1966-1973) had no success, but neither did the Peronist government succeed in achieving political stabilization for the country. The military dictatorship was imposed by the coup of Juan Carlos Ongania in 1966. After 1955, with the
defeat of the workers’ movement that found itself under the direction of the populist bourgeoisie (Perón), the Frondizi government had proved that it was impossible to govern in opposition to this workers’ movement (even if Peronism and the Left were energetically repressed) under representative democratic conditions. The military coup of 1962 overthrew that government, inaugurating a period of civilian government under direct control of the armed forces, charged with performing the necessary political purges.

The failure of this hybrid form of regime, whose civil tasks were assumed by representatives of diverse radical tendencies, revealed the impossibility of sustaining a representative government counter to Peronism. The middle classes, the social base of radicalism par excellence, were attracted by the Peronist opposition. The Onganía dictatorship simultaneously managed to liquidate parliamentary democracy and divide the workers’ movement. From the position of strength that the coup conferred on him, Onganía sought to negotiate with the Peronist labor bureaucracy.

The semi-insurrectionary eruption of the workers’ movement in 1969, an expression of an autonomous proletarian dynamic with respect to the orthodox labor bureaucracy, destroyed the bases of the “stability” that Onganía planned. In 1970, a new coup d’état destroyed the Onganía regime and brought Roberto Marcelo Levingston to the presidency; he would be deposed shortly thereafter by Alejandro Lanusse. None of the vicissitudes of the military dictatorship succeeded in breaking the working class capacity for struggle. Faced with the combativeness of its revolutionary fractions, the government had no recourse but to divide the working class through concessions to the corrupt union leaders. Thus, the Argentine dictatorship could never provide imperialist capital with a labor force as cheap and “disciplined” as the Brazilian one, and was therefore unable to establish the bases for a capitalist expansion of the same type.

The armed forces, recognizing their defeat, decided to effect—through a maneuver of Lanusse—an organized retreat. Lanusse’s call for elections was presented as part of an “organized retreat” of the “military party” designed to avoid overthrow by the rising revolutionary movement and maintain its control over the civilian government. The success of this formula necessarily depended on the dominant tendencies in Peronism, which had unified the rapidly developing mass movement. The calculations turned out to be cor-
rect: the confidence of the masses in Perón played a compensating role with respect to the forces liberated by the “political opening.” In the critical initial period, this confidence served to isolate revolutionary tendencies. When the bourgeois project of Peronism pushed the left wing of this movement into opposition, the armed forces were more or less prepared for it. Peronism had served its purpose, and precisely because it had done so well it divided, and tended toward dissipation. In this stage, availing itself of the military apparatus that had been kept intact, the “military party” revealed itself as the true bourgeois party. Under these conditions, it controlled the advance of Peronism, to which it had passed the responsibility of dividing and disciplining the working class. Given that the latter already possessed an autonomous class dynamic, the Peronist government ceased to be efficient for the bourgeoisie and no longer represented anything for the proletariat. The military coup of March 1976 was the logical consequence of this impasse.

MILITARY SEMIPOPEULISM

Another type of military regime is military semipopulism, in which coercion is not primary or is considerably less pronounced than in the forms mentioned up to now. In this type of regime, the army tries—and to a certain extent succeeds—to perform the role of an ideological apparatus for the masses of certain populist parties and achieves a modicum of consensus through a set of social reforms and nationalist measures (or policies presented as such). One cannot speak of populism in the strict sense of the term, because there is little, if any, popular mobilization in labor or political mass organizations such as the Argentine Confederación General del Trabajo (General Confederation of Workers—CGT), the Venezuelan AD, and so on. The attempt of these regimes to appropriate civilian popular instruments, duly staffed and given new life by military personnel, generally results in semifailure, the classic example being the Peruvian SINAMOS.

These regimes are usually characterized by “Bonapartism,” a relatively high level of autonomy with regard to the dominant classes and an apparent role of arbitrator among antagonistic social forces. In military Bonapartism, the army governs, eliminating political personnel and traditional institutions (parties, parliaments, magistrates, etc.) of the dominant classes, and develops a policy that obtains a
certain popular support and simultaneously safeguards the established social and economic order. This is generally led by a charismatic-type individual (the “Bonaparte”) who exercises the functions of arbitrator within the military apparatus.

In the 1940s and 1950s, Latin America experienced various examples of military Bonapartism transformed into populist civilian Bonapartism. This was the case with Perón, with the Bolivian Movimiento Nacional Revolucionaria (National Revolutionary Movement—MNR). In the case of existing semipopulist regimes on the continent, this transition has not occurred, and the state maintains its militarized character.

Three examples of this type of regime are those of Peru, Panama, and Ecuador. The Peruvian case is by far the most important, owing to the scope of reforms undertaken and to its political impact on the continent and beyond. The Panamanian and Ecuadorian regimes appear to limit their semipopulism to various economic and diplomatic measures in opposition to certain North American interests.

In his analysis of the Peruvian regime, the sociologist Julio Cotler defined the two axes of the populist military model as “the modernization of the capitalist system and the neutralization of popular mobilization” (Cotler, 1969: 11). Modernization means on the one hand, the elimination of traditional oligarchic structures and, on the other hand, reformulation of the system of dependency; neutralization implies the demobilization of any popular movement that oversteps the bounds or rhythms of the process of modernization established by the military regime.

The causes of the October 1968 coup that overthrew the “constitutional” government of President Fernando Belaúnde Terry were located on different levels of the social reality:

—The incapacity of the traditional political system to modernize social relations—above all in the countryside—and to realize the reforms necessary for maintenance of the social order—in particular, the impotence of the government and the parliament to overcome the landed oligarchy’s resistance to the agrarian reform urgently needed after massive peasant mobilizations of the 1960s and guerrilla movements among discontented rural populations.

—The crisis of hegemony due to the weakening, corruption, and demoralization both of the government and of the parliamentary opposition (the APRA) and a succession of political scandals, the last
of which was the capitulationist agreement with the International Petroleum Company (Villaneuva, 1969).

— The authoritarian/modernist nationalism that constituted the specific ideology of the Peruvian military as a social category, allowing an understanding of its reaction to this situation and the establishment of the “semipopulist” junta presided over by Velasco Alvarado.

This latter began to take shape after 1958 with the establishment of the Centro de Altos Estudios Militares (Center of Advanced Military Studies—CAEM), whose instructors included, alongside the traditional military, developmentalist economists close to ECLA (the United Nations’ Economic Commission for Latin America). This was the genesis of an ideological combination sui generis of the political-military problematic of counterinsurgency and socioeconomic concerns of a modernizing and reformist type. The practical conclusion of this instruction was that economic development and social progress were the best guarantees against subversion. As the sociologist Liisa North (1966: 53) observed, “the new military ideology proposes the improvement of social and economic conditions so that the grievances on the basis of which revolutionary groups can obtain support will be eliminated.”

The 1968 coup was only the last of a series of political interventions by the army, which also constituted milestones in its ideological evolution toward a “reformist” conception. In 1962 the army took power in order to prevent president-elect Victor Raúl Haya de la Torre from assuming office. (Since 1932, the year of the APRA’s uprising in the city of Trujillo, the armed forces had considered Haya de la Torre’s party the “historical enemy.”) During the short duration of the military regime (1962-1963) it was confronted with the largest mass campesino movement in recent Peruvian history, in the Valle de la Convención. Combined intervention of the police and the military finally succeeded in crushing and destroying campesino unions and militias directed by the Marxist Hugo Blanco. After the electoral victory in 1963 of Belaúnde Terry, the candidate supported by the military, the armed forces retired from the political scene, only to return in 1965 to confront a new danger to the established order: the rural guerrillas of the Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (Movement of the Revolutionary Left—MIR), a Marxist breakaway
from the APRA led by Luis de la Puente Uceda, and the Ejército de Liberación Nacional (Army of National Liberation—ELN), a dissident communist group lead by Héctor Bejar. The joint chiefs of staff of the armed forces forced the president to suspend the constitution and grant broad powers to the army under the command of Generals Juan Velasco Alvarado and Jorge Fernandez Maldonado (two future leaders of the 1968 junta). This counterinsurgency operation succeeded in physically crushing the guerrillas and their campesino sympathizers.

In military circles, these two experiences contributed significantly to strengthening the conclusions drawn from the CAEM seminars: only economic development, social reforms, and the modernization of the relations of production could prevent threats to the established order and resurgence of revolutionary foci and guarantee social peace and "national security." In the words of the foreign minister General Edgardo Mercado Jarrín, in a speech before the United Nations in September 1969:

_The concepts of well-being, development, and security are firmly and directly related, given that the misery and exploitation that exist at the base of underdeveloped nations fan an explosive situation whose consequences I do not want to dramatize here with excessive words [cited in Cotler, 1969: 12]._

Under the circumstances, the scandal of the Act of Talara (the agreement reached between the Belaúnde Terry government and the International Petroleum Company (IPC), which contained incredible concessions to the U.S. petroleum company) was simply the immediate cause of the military takeover in 1968. Of course, nationalism was from the outset one of the central political axes of the semipopulist junta, which moved from the expropriation of the IPC properties (the refinery of Talara, etc.) to a series of protectionist measures (such as the declaration of a 200-mile limit for territorial waters) and further nationalizations (such as Cerro de Pasco).

Nevertheless, the combined effects of these nationalist measures did not place Peru’s dependency in question but only reformulated it in terms more favorable to the Peruvian bourgeoisie. Thus, in a parallel to the nationalization of the IPC, petroleum agreements and concessions were signed with a series of other North American transnational companies: Occidental Petroleum Corporation, British
Petroleum, Belco Petroleum, Getty Oil, Standard Oil of Indiana, and others. In an article entitled “Oil: Boom in the Andes,” Newsweek pointed out that

“although Peru's military regime expropriated International Petroleum . . . General Juan Velasco . . . is opening up the country to foreign drills . . . For the moment, at least, all three countries [Peru, Ecuador, and Colombia] seem inclined to give the priority to oil production rather than nationalist fervor” [Newsweek, October 18, 1971].

For another thing, in 1969 the Peruvian military government signed a contract with Southern Peru Copper for the exploitation of the Cuajone deposits, among the richest in the world. Copper, it should be noted, is one of Peru’s principal exports ($234 million in 1969 compared with $10.9 million for petroleum).

Diverse and repeated declarations by Velasco Alvarado, president of the junta, clearly demonstrated the limits of Peruvian nationalism and its fear of disrupting the global system of dependency. In a speech on July 28, 1968, the general said,

*Development in Latin America requires foreign capital. But this capital does not come here for philanthropic reasons. It comes for its own interests. We are dealing, therefore, with a mutual interest that should be managed in a manner that is clear and just for the benefit of both parties.*

This moderation explains, in turn, why the authorities of the United States contemplated the development of military regimes like the Peruvian. In his report to President Nixon in 1970, Nelson Rockefeller wrote,

*A new type of military is arising which often becomes a powerful factor of social evolution in the American republics. This new military, motivated by a growing impatience with corruption, inefficiency, and the stagnation of the political order, proposes to adapt its authoritarian tradition to the ends of social and economic progress.*

Among the social transformations undertaken by the junta, undoubtedly the most important was the agrarian reform. By limiting rural holdings to 200 hectares on the coast and 165 hectares in the highlands, the military government eliminated the socioeconomic
foundations of the old rural oligarchy; at the same time, through the system of compensation (agrarian debt bonds had to be invested in industry), it obliged the expropriated hacendados to become industrial capitalists (Quijano, 1970: 15). The preamble to the law emphasized that the objectives of the agrarian reform, aside from “social justice in the rural world,” were to contribute in a decisive way to the formation of a broad internal market and to generate the capital necessary for the rapid industrialization of the country. One can add to these socioeconomic objectives a political dimension, expressed by General Ernesto Montagne Sánchez, prime minister and minister of war, on July 19, 1969: “the agrarian reform law is an obstacle to the advance of communism.” It is still too early to tell if the Peruvian agrarian reform, which is represented as the most radical of those imposed “from above” (as opposed to those imposed “from below” by the campesinos, as in Mexico and Bolivia), will achieve its objectives.

The Peruvian military functioned to a certain extent as a new type of political party, with its uniformed “militants,” its “central committee” (the hierarchical assembly of the three services), its various ideological wings and tendencies, and so on. However, it could not perform all the tasks of a political apparatus: mobilization/neutralization and containment of the popular masses, and so forth. Thus, it had to acquire civilian instruments capable of replacing the political parties or traditional labor organizations or of competing with them: the Confederación de Trabajadores Revolucionarios del Perú (the Confederation of Revolutionary Workers of Peru—CTR). the Movimiento Laborista Revolucionario (Revolutionary Labor Movement—MLR, active in the 1968 Peruvian revolution), among others. The most important of these institutions was the Sistema Nacional de Apoyo a la Movilización Social (National System of Support for Social Mobilization—SINAMOS), created in 1971 and divided into eight regions corresponding to the military regions, within which the military commander was also chief of SINAMOS. The purpose of this structure was to ensure the containment of the population on a local basis (farms, shanty towns, barrios) and to integrate the unions, peasant leagues, and other popular associations into the state apparatus.

But in reality the Velasco Alvarado regime did not succeed in gaining a broad social base or in promoting a real popular mobilization, being overthrown by a military coup in 1975. The new military
junta, under General Francisco Morales Bermúdez, put an end to the semipopulist experiment in Peru and adopted a proimperialist orientation. Confronted with popular discontent, it opted to progressively reestablish civilian government with the convocation of a constituent assembly in 1977 and a presidential election in 1980. The victory in the presidential contest of Belaúnde Terry (the same ex-president who had been overthrown by Velasco in 1968) signaled the return to government of the traditional bourgeois political forces that had been displayed by the military and the return of the armed forces to their “constitutional” role of guarantors of the established order. It is interesting that, in contrast to the situation in Argentina and Bolivia, Peruvian military semipopulism did not make a deep impression on the popular and labor movement.

CONCLUSION

The experience of Nicaragua in 1978-1979, following that of Cuba during the 1950s, appears to suggest that, at least in the case of the more traditional military dictatorships, very few military cadres, finding themselves in a situation of revolutionary crisis, cross over to the popular camp: the military apparatus continues to function right up to its own destruction as an almost monolithic repressive machine.

This does not mean that the armed forces and their officer corps always remain immune to the ideological crisis that besets established ideological apparatuses (the church, the universities, etc.) or political apparatuses (mass parties, etc). It is probable, however, that such crises take radical forms only in limited and marginal sectors of the military hierarchy. The majority of career officers will continue, in the foreseeable future, to choose among military semipopulism, partial retreat from the political scene, and the institution of a predominantly coercive state (or some combination of these three models, as seen in Argentina in 1974-1976).

It is difficult to determine whether this reduction of the range of political choices for the Latin American armed forces and their predilection for the more authoritarian alternatives are the result of social factors (the class origins of the officer corps), economic-corporative factors (“caste privileges”), or ideological factors (systematic authoritarian and anticommunist conservatism in the formation of mili-
tary personnel). Surely it is a fusion of these various factors. It seems probable that the armed forces will continue to serve as guardians of the established order, modernizers, reformers, and, above all, agents of repression. The present policy of U.S. imperialism, under the Reagan administration, openly favors the most authoritarian and antipopular varieties of military states in Latin America, whether of traditional (Central America) or modern form (Southern Cone), providing them with the broadest possible economic, diplomatic, and military assistance.

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