

Bolivian President calls for war on usury, drugs

by Valerie Rush

In a Nov. 30 presentation before the General Assembly of the United Nations, Bolivian President Harnán Siles Zuazo outlined the magnitude of the crisis facing his nation. Coming just as the President of the United States departed for a five-day tour of Ibero-America, the Siles speech defined the issues that Reagan will have to tackle during his trip in order to restore U.S. relations with the rest of the continent, so badly damaged by the Malvinas conflict and its aftermath.

Ibero-America is burdened with an unpayable foreign debt, and lacks the credits and technology required for real industrial development, Siles Zuazo warned. Failure to resolve these issues dooms the rest of continent to the same fate suffered by Bolivia for so many years: the imposition of drug dictatorships, sustained by speculation, usury, and the repression of the population. Or, as Siles Zuazo indicated when he first assumed power in early October, it will lead governments to consider actions such as the joint renegotiation of their debts and creation of new financial and political institutions that are designed to defend their interests in the face of advanced sector hostility to industrial growth.

The following are excerpts from the Siles Zuazo speech of Nov. 30:

"My country has just lived through the Calvary of 18 years of dictatorship, with very brief periods of nationalist governments. . . .

The country now lives under the rule of law . . . Bolivia, I am proud to say, has a democracy of the highest quality. . . . It has recovered its dignity and its international image and has begun to identify itself with democracy and not with drug trafficking and illegality.

My country was trapped in a chaos of horrifying dimensions. To the political and moral crisis was added a desperate economic situation whose most salient outlines are known and shared by many other Third World nations: an enormous foreign debt, uncontrolled inflation, . . . and a vertical collapse in the level of activity, and its sequel of bankruptcies, unemployment and misery. . . .

My country participated in the surge of prices for raw

materials for export that took place as a result of the expansion of the world economy and the hike in oil prices. It also resorted to many foreign loans, which were readily granted due to the international financial liquidity that existed during the past decade. . . .

Nonetheless, the expansion of financial resources . . . were not used to benefit the majority of the nation. The dominant minorities of the private and public sectors used the resources from the export of our raw materials and the foreign debt to deepen and consolidate social inequality. . . . They squandered our resources, leaving the great problems of development unresolved. These minorities used imported and national goods and services which allowed them to imitate the patterns of consumption of the high-income countries, while they abandoned productive investment. . . .

This economic policy, based on financial and commercial opportunism, received the warm support of the great academic centers of the advanced sector, where it is still believed that the principles of the comparative advantage of the conventional doctrine of the international division of labor, is the best route to development. . . .

But this anti-national economic policy could only be carried out behind the back of the population, and for that reason it was necessary to establish ferocious and regressive dictatorships. . . .

Bolivia is not the only country suffering from the overwhelming burden of foreign debt. We share this problem with other nations of the Third World.

In my country's particular case, it is repugnant to the national conscience that we should have to pay with such immense sacrifice a mortgage contracted behind our back by illegitimate governments that used these resources to maintain themselves in power. . . .

Among the countries of the North, there are those that refuse to review the decision-making mechanisms and operating rules of institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, or the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade [GATT], as if these institutions, created in 1946, were endowed with infallibility, as if nothing had happened since then. . . .

But the world today is different, and it is necessary to adapt the institutions of yesterday to today's needs. . . .

My government has made a commitment to its population: to respond to its offer of sacrifice with a gigantic effort to defeat, in the shortest time possible, the tragic inheritance of dictatorship. . . .

Repression of the illegal drug trade is a duty to be assumed by all—the governments of the producing countries and the governments of the consuming countries. I need not insist on the nefarious consequences that this filthy and detestable business carries with it. Its corrosive action affects us all. It encourages corruption, conspires against the political order, attempts against the morality of country of origin, and constitutes a serious social threat to the countries where demand is greatest.