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Mincho Hristov

HISTORICAL AND SOCIOPOLITICAL PREREQUISITES OF THE MILITARY LATIN AMERICAN AUTHORITARIANISM

Abstract: In the sixties and seventies of the 20-th century, several military regimes in South America were established, carrying out long-term structural projects for the national development. Initially the presence of the military in politics has been institutionalized through the parliamentary democracy mechanisms, but afterwards, the military itself, on the basis of its long-term and strategic project, began to change the institutional framework of society. Legal norms, parties, or even the constitution were suspended in order to conduct the pre-determined policy of the military. The newly emerging authoritarian regimes in Latin America in the sixties without exception received ideological support according to the so-called Doctrine of national security, regardless of their specificity. Its essence is concentrated in two key words – security and development.

Keywords: Doctrine of national security, Latin America, Military regimes, Democratization.

Due to the effects of the social and economic structure that has been imposed in Bulgaria over the last 20 years, many researchers and political observers have begun to make comparisons of the situation to the relevant phenomena in the Latin American region. The strong social contrasts in the latter, the lack of a significant middle class, the huge external debts and the transformation of the countries into net exporters of capital, the establishment of small comprador classes that actually work against the interests of the masses and the widespread corruption, are well-known features of the Latin American societies. In the times prior to and immediately after the World War II, because of their geographical and economic characteristics and because of being able to use the advantages of the international situation, some of the Latin American countries, in particular Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Chile, managed to turn their main agricultural goods into a major source of capital from abroad. This source of profit had such a significant impact that it changed the previously established economic and political realities for a relatively short period. Quite often, the participants (especially Europeans) in the Second World War were forced to pay the high monopoly prices in gold. The wealth which has been accumulated in this way empowered the state to have an enhanced economic and social activity. A powerful industrial sector was emerging, a policy known in the economic literature as “an industrialization through substitution of the import”. This industrialization has often been regarded by some supporters of “national” and “independent” developments as one of the most significant achievements of Argentina’s “Peronism”, of the “Vargasism”¹ in Brazil, or of the “Battlismo” in Uruguay. All the terms are derived from the names (and imbedding therein the charisma and popularity) of three historical figures, who were heads of state of respectively Argentine, Brazil and Uruguay: Juan Peryn, Getúlio Vargas and José Batlle.

The industrialization succeeded in making the Southern Cone economically the most advanced region of Latin America. However, the extent to which this industrialization is a result of “nationally responsible” political decisions and strategic projections or simply a result of the absence of an industrial import of the traditional economic partners of these countries because of these partners being exclusively engaged in military production, is not the subject of our research. Anyway – a powerful and strongly funded state sector has been created. This is particularly typical for Argentina, for example, where the share of the state sector in the national GDP is more than 40%. Although these numbers don’t cover the respective values which are

¹ Or “vargism”, but the latter choice of wording can be confusing because of the “vargism” in the English vernacular, which means “a random or an untypical thought and/or behavior”.

characteristic for the so-called “developed” or “mature” socialism, the similarity of the latter with this kind of a state-dominated economy is obvious. Actually, General Perón has repeatedly emphasized the “anti-capitalist” character of his regime and the policy of the so-called “third way” of development as well, that “is neither capitalism nor socialism.” Free education and free healthcare, the higher payment for the workforce and the guarantee of many social benefits, including the right to a thirteenth salary, are a truly unprecedented case in Latin American history. Before its painful collapse, the “state of prosperity” appeared to be close to accomplishment and very real with its apparent socio-economic dimensions and concrete projects.

In the case of Latin America we are witnessing a wide-scaled redistributive policy, characterized by its social focus. These redistributed resources are essentially “external” in character. The scheme here is deliberately simplified, but more importantly, there was a painful socio-economic collapse after the termination of the flow of the “external” revenue.

The significant role of populism as a policy that is inconsistent with the economic realities is a particularly important feature of the analyzed societies. Here is also the place to express our essential point: Populism as an economic and political approach enjoys enormous support until the state is able to reallocate a significant public wealth. It collapses when this scheme is deprived of its economic base. The forms which this collapse takes in Argentina and Brazil – the unreliability of the political structures, the need for painful structural reforms, the economic and political anarchy and the unbridled crime are quite similar to what we see in Southeast Europe after the collapse of the socialist economic models. The political formulas that were imposed alongside the essentially structural neoliberal ones are very interesting as well.

In this study, I have attempted to determine the historical place of the military dictatorships and the role of the subsequent democratization in the Southern Cone of Latin America. Were the political consequences unavoidable after the collapse of the formally democratic and populist regimes? What really did determine their misfortune? Why did the military circles occupy the political scene and after a certain period – more or less long – leave it? How did they ideologically legitimize their intervening in matters of politics? What did their governments change?

Despite the specificity of each of them, all of these countries demonstrated development of similar economic and political processes. In the seventies, in all of them, the military was at the top of the governments. In the eighties, namely the military circles organized their withdrawal from power, restoring parliamentary democracy.

In the sixties and seventies of the 20th century, several military regimes in South America were established, carrying out long-term structural projects for the national development. Initially the presence of the military in politics has been institutionalized through the parliamentary democracy mechanisms, but afterwards, the military itself, on the basis of its long-term and strategic project, began to change the institutional framework of society. Legal norms, parties, or even the constitution were suspended in order to conduct the pre-determined policy of the military.

The factors that determine this tendency are multi-layered and interconnected and could therefore be separated only implying certain simplifications. The main ones are the economic changes unfavorable to the Latin American countries, especially the devaluation of their main export products, the need to close down or restructure unprofitable state-owned enterprises, the implemented unpopular policies, the lack of nationally responsible political elite, and the institutionalized corruption and so on.

The Cuban Revolution of 1959 and the engagement of Cuba with the Soviet bloc is one of the reasons for rethinking the US foreign policy towards the entire Latin American region. At the time of President Kennedy, the Strategic Doctrine “Alliance for Progress” was adopted, where the new social challenges and the ways to overcome them were taken seriously. The doctrine of continental security from a point of view of foreign policy is a continuation of the Monroe doctrine formulated by the American President James Monroe in 1823, whose main thesis was that America must be only for the Americans. Furthermore, according to him, “the American continent ... can no longer be considered a subject of a future colonization by any European force”².

In the 60-70s of the 20th century, the Doctrine of the Homeland Security aimed at overcoming the subversive and anti-state activity of the world communism and its supporters. This doctrine took the leadership within the surveyed countries. Its major difference from the Monroe Doctrine is that, according to the latter,

² Castro, M. *Estados Unidos y America Latina*. Santiago, 1972, p. 339.

the world is now generally divided not on a geopolitical but on an ideological basis, borrowed from the basic principles, established during the Cold War.

The military dictatorships in the Southern Cone were a reaction to a certain historical conjuncture, both external and internal. The new international division of labor clearly obliged national elites to carry out painful economic reforms. The present paper is not intended to return to the old discussion of the decisiveness or insignificance of the so-called external factors. We mention only that the official report of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (UNECLAC) for 1987 emphasizes “the decisive burden that the external factors have on the economic evolution of the region”³.

Were the military dictatorships the only way out of the situation or other decisions would also have been possible? How realistic were the alternatives in those times and could we anyway state another special ones – populism, socialism, or just some kind of a more democratic development? From an economic point of view, the postulates of neoliberalism related to the rationalization of the economy on the basis of comparative advantages seem to be unshakable. The closure of unprofitable enterprises seems inevitable but this is so mainly due to the state’s inability to continue its redistributive functions. This raises the question of whether it is possible for a government to conduct market reforms in the frame of a parliamentary-representative system. And whether the authoritarian rule is not, in fact, the only way to impose the social price of reforms on the population. Quite often the paying of this price is associated by some researchers with the objective impossibility for the government to use milder forms of political coercion.

After using all of the economic mechanisms of policy, the government is compelled to implement non-economic or power tools as well. Authoritarian governments in Latin American countries are initially attuned to significant reduction of the real incomes of the population and to suppression of the various forms of organized resistance of the laborers. The more one have to take away from the already existing standard of living, the more authoritarian pressure is applied. It seems therefore reasonable that in Argentina the repression of the syndicate leaders is many times greater than that of the Communists. By dramatically reducing the consumption of the population and transferring the accumulated share to the sphere of capital, the macroeconomic stabilization characteristic for most of the authoritarian regimes in the region is reached. Could this stabilization have a more humane image in the social sphere? In our opinion, this is hardly possible for purely economic reasons. Huntington noticed that in the poor countries democracy is always an exception, not a rule⁴.

Typically and according to the common sense, the notions of “dictatorship” and “democracy” are opposed to each other as absolutely incompatible. Dictatorship is identified as reactionary and even inhumane, while democracy is considered progressive, a symbol of justice and even of prosperity. Similar is the case of the “revolution”. It is a possible for all sorts of socialized and “antisocial” regimes, so it can hardly be a criterion for this analysis.

In fact, almost all military governments in South America identify themselves as “revolutionary” and “nationally oriented”. Almost all of them are perceived as rescuers of the state and of the traditional national values. In many cases, they are regarded as saviors by a significant number of people. “The military saved Chile and all of us”, the former Chilean President Eduardo Frey said, shortly after the success of the military coup d’état against Allende in 1973. When a government acts like this, the right to uprising is becoming an obligation, he adds⁵.

It is a fact that the military was making significant changes. It is also true, however, that these changes have been made together with gross violations of human rights, repressions often even accompanied by torture and murder. “We are not insensitive to what is happening,” a Deputy Minister of Economy of a Latin American country explains. “But we are in front of the most beautiful revolution that we could have”⁶. The context of this utterance appears to be clear: the goal justifies the means. Such statements let a number of researchers to believe that the military dictatorships have a negative impact, both in political and economic terms, on societies.

³ Informe anual de CEPAL, ONU, 1987.

⁴ **Huntington, S.** Tsenata na svobodata // Spektar, 36, 1994 (in Bulgarian).

⁵ **Frei, E.** ABC, 10.10.1973.

⁶ **Frez, G.** Subsecretario de Economia, 22.03.1975, Elisabeth Weigert, Fernando Sanchez, Chile: antecedentes para un analisis, ed. Ciencias sociales. La Habana, 1977, p. 419.

It is noteworthy that where the level of organization of laborers and the standard of living are higher (such as in Argentina, for example), the activity of the repressive system is also higher. During the dictatorship in Argentina, the number of missing persons, according to the data of human rights organizations, exceeds 25 000, while in Brazil, Uruguay and even Chile, countries with a relatively lower standard of living, this figure is significantly lower. This fact has much significance. In spite of the variety of ideological and political analyzes of it, it alone poses the question of whether it would be possible to reduce the living standards of big groups of society without repression and without cruel authoritarian regimes, able to suppress the reaction of these groups of preserving their social, economic and political rights.

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