

Kids—say no to Government

Fifth Estate Collective

1986

Media manufactured crises come and go so quickly these days that it is often hard to comment on one before it has disappeared from immediate concern. At the height of frenzy about a particular issue—whether it is terrorism, the space shuttle crash or most recently, drugs—the unitary message of power appears to command all thought. Nothing seems to exist outside of the official messages: we are all portrayed as angry or sad or worried.

Of course, just as suddenly as it appeared, the crisis passes. But no matter how short-lived its tenure, it leaves an important social residue which remains secure in the wings eagerly awaiting its next call to center stage.

The terrorism fright no longer commands major attention or concern at the moment, but “anti-terrorist” measures—more cops, more searches, ID tags, metal detectors, etc.—have become an accepted part of daily life, universally recognized as “necessary” even though the terrorism they protect against has never even been a reality in this country (see p.24).

Often there is a convenient conjuncture of these pseudo-events which goes unnoticed as evidenced recently by the almost universal quiet about what amounted to a U.S. invasion of Bolivia as part of the Reagan administration’s hysterical “War on Drugs.” The anti-drug crusade has set the stage for a variety of domestic repressive measures, but it is folly not to realize that it will also be put at the service of Reagan’s desire to pacify the U.S.’s historic sphere of influence south of the border.

Terrorism and Drugs

Under an agreement, typical of the banana-republic type relations the U.S. has traditionally had with Latin America, Bolivia permitted the stationing of 174 American troops in its country to ostensibly help in eradicating its endemic cocaine trafficking. Since Reagan has accused Nicaragua of both terrorism and drug dealing, it seems amazing that the Central American anti-intervention movement uttered nary a peep about Bolivia in what should be seen clearly as a dress rehearsal for further invasions of the area.

For instance, Bolivia’s neighbor to the northwest, Peru, also a major source of the cocaine flooding U.S. markets, is plagued both by economic instability and a growing rural guerrilla movement, the maoist Sendero Luminoso. One should not show great surprise if, during the next U.S. incursion to “get at the source” in South-America, the drug raiders suddenly wind up in battle with armed Peruvian rebels as well.

The U.S. “incursion” into Bolivia (a word used by the media to avoid the nastiness of the more honest term, “invasion,” as in “incursion into Cambodia”—1972) wasn’t without its problems. There were Oct. 11 news reports of angry Bolivian townspeople of Santa Ana chasing away government troops, who along with U.S. soldiers and drug agents had been raiding jungle-based cocaine labs.

This particular expedition, the first foray into a town, was led by the Leopards, a Bolivian anti-coke squad, trained and paid for by the United States, and roundly hated by local villagers for their brutality and for interfering with their livelihood.

Press accounts said about 80 Leopards and 30 Americans entered the town and began searching homes and cars and questioning residents about the whereabouts of several major narcotraficantes.

About an hour after the raid began, some 3,000 residents, drawn by the constant pealing of church bells, surrounded the raiders and began shouting, “Kill them, kill them, don’t let them leave,” and “Yankee go home, kill the Yankees!”

The Yankees got the message quick and split for their waiting Black Hawk helicopters, leaving their Bolivian stooges to the tender mercies of the crowd. The Leopards managed to get aboard an air force troop carrier but were blocked from take-off by the villagers who surrounded the plane and refused to move even after the troops fired tear gas and bullets into the air.

Finally, the town’s mayor was permitted aboard to see that no residents had been arrested, and the troops beat it back to La Paz with their tails between their legs.

Dragged Into A Cash Economy

Shortly after the Santa Ana incident, the U.S. troops left Bolivia as scheduled, but the dust from the raging townspeople, the fleeing troops and their airborne machines of destruction, drifts back to Earth with many unsettling implications. Naturally, now that the norteamericanos have left, business will return to normal in the cocaine industry, complete with official Bolivian complicity, the Yankee intervention having only put a momentary crimp in production.

But what of the invaders from the North, far from the center of the Empire, raging through Indian land, like Cortez’s small band pillaging Mexico, hearing that almost universal phrase, “Yankee Go Home”? These words, which, in fact, may be the only English the people of that tropical flatland village knew, encapsulates their hatred for the imperialist looting and domination of their region, but are also words which mock us so eloquently.

Perhaps these people of Bolivia, dragged into the world cash economy from their earth centered lives to supply the U.S. with its poisonous drugs, sense the awful truth of the matter: that the Yankees have no home. They know the invaders came from a land which isn’t theirs, which was stolen from its original inhabitants and destroyed in order to create a hideous land of factories and shopping malls. They know that beneath the sharp pleats of his uniform and behind the arrogance of his demeanor, the Yankee (the very origin of the word is lost, perhaps a diminutive of the Dutch name, Jan—Janke) is rootless, that he pushes everywhere into the world and even into space, but never finds rest or a home.

One result of this homelessness is that we are a nation of drug addicts where mass feelings of estrangement, boredom, rage and terror are barely constrained. As it is, those emotions escape in a thousand different ways, but to many, daily life is tolerable only through mass drugging, both legal and illicit. Altered brain chemistry is needed to pump us up, calm us down, stop the hurt, give some juice to a culture which substitutes wage work and consumption for a connection with the rhythms of the planet.

That tens of millions use drugs and alcohol suggests quite cogently that the official model of conformity and happiness is almost universally shunned—anything seems preferable to facing daily life with one’s raw nerves exposed.

We quite simply can’t go on like this either as individuals or as a people. The human spirit demands a fundamental relationship with the earth, a solidarity with others, and a life of meaning and intensity. The ecstatic states and momentary periods of bliss induced by drugs or alcohol are but shallow reminders of the rich enchantments that our species is capable of.

Perhaps the saying, “In a society that has abolished all adventure, the only adventure is abolishing that society,” is the best departure point for reclaiming our human capacities. Ultimately, we must re-invent the world we have lost or continue our hopeless wandering.

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<https://www.fiftheestate.org/archive/324-fall-1986/kids-say-no-to-government>
Fifth Estate #324, Fall, 1986

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