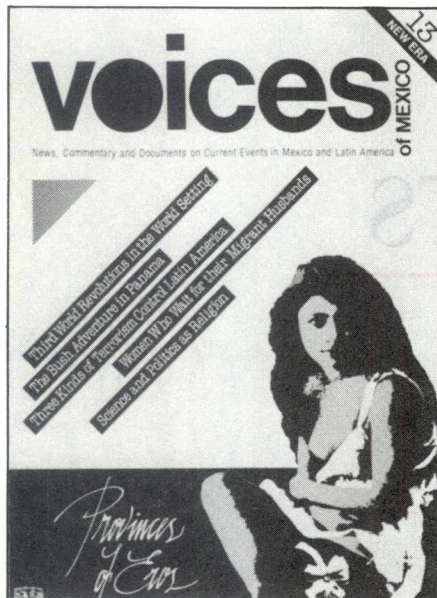


THIS ISSUE



Cover: Angel García Domínguez

We are glad that the change towards democracy which is taking place throughout the world, has made its presence felt in Latin America. However, for our countries, located in the sphere of influence of the United States, these changes have a double edge. For as long as the U.S. government considers Latin America as a zone of special importance for their national security, and therefore insist on meddling in our internal affairs and manipulating our political processes, our viability as sovereign states will be in danger.

Examples of U.S. intervention in Latin America are abundant. Remember the role played by the U.S. in the military coup against Salvador Allende's legitimately elected government in 1973. Ten years later, the military invasion of Grenada, and the recent one of Panama, through which a *de facto* president - supposedly elected in a ballot which had been declared null and void by Panamanian electoral authorities - has been imposed.

There are few reliable proofs of the legality of this president. The invasion of a sovereign state, on the pretext of pursuing a drug trafficker, and imposing a democracy, can achieve propagandistic effects in a wide sector of the European and North American public, but for Latin Americans it is obvious that -once again- international laws on the autonomy and self-determination of states were violated. This was made clear in the votes of the Organization of American States (OAS), and of the Latin American Parliament, which condemned the invasion of Panama. The disastrous effects of that invasion are beginning to become public: economic and social devastation and the spread of violence, all of which point to greater political instability and possibilities of future intervention.

Can we speak of democracy without the right to self-determination?

For the citizens of Latin America, the answer is a clear **NO**. Our peoples have always struggled for the legitimate aspiration to elect the governments which suit them most. They have also exercised this right each time there has been an opportunity to do so, but the U.S. government imposes conditions on our development which impede the full enjoyment of this basic human right.

The victory of the United National Opposition in Nicaragua was undoubtedly the result of a general popular vote, but it was also the result of ten years of systematic persecution of that Central American state for having dared to assert its national sovereignty. In these conditions, can the democratic life of Nicaragua - a tiny nation exhausted by war and economic strangulation - be guaranteed in the future?

The resolution of this problem, sovereignty with democracy, is of crucial importance for Latin America. *Voices* dedicates this issue to those people who suffered the traumatic invasion of Panama, and presents essays by Gérard Pierre-Charles and Francisco Gutiérrez Pérez who, from complementary viewpoints, contribute to the analysis of this complex and delicate question.

Mariclaire Acosta