

LATIN AMERICA MOURNS OLOF PALME

Not since John F. Kennedy's assassination has the death of a northern hemisphere's head of state been as sad and meaningful for the Latin American people

Olof Palme loved peace, literature, poetry and modern art. He was both a qualified statesman and a simple man. He also cared deeply for the Third World in general, for Latin America in particular. This is why all of the Latin Ameri-

nations —with the sole exception of Chile, where Pinochet played down his death—reacted strongly to Palme's assassination. The reaction has been comparable only to the events that followed the death of President John F. Kennedy 23 years ago.

Latin America understood early on that Olof Palme was a peace-loving man. From every possible forum he called out for agreement and reconciliation. In our continent, violently torn



Olof Palme A.P. Laserphoto

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A year before he became president of his party and Prime Minister of Sweden in 1968 Palme walked at the head of a march in Stockholm to protest the 'dirty war' in Viet Nam. As Prime Minister he was one of the staunchest critics of apartheid, and Sweden's policy in the United Nations was belligerent in favor of measures that would isolate the Pretoria regime.

Palme was a severe critic of the military dictatorships that were prevalent in Latin America in the 70s: Lucas Garcia in Guatemala, Romero in El Salvador, Somoza in Nicaragua, Stroessner in Paraguay, Pinochet in Chile, Aparicio Mendez in Uruguay, Videla in Argentina, and so on. His country opened its doors to thousands of political refugees. In more recent years Palme maintained his country's economic and political support for Nicaragua. More than any other world leader Palme supported the Nicaraguan elections and called them "absolutely honest". In fact, Swedish specialists served as advisors for the elections in which Daniel Ortega was elected president.

Just a year ago Palme spoke to Swedish youths and criticized the policy of support for Nicaraguan counter-revolutionaries: "The Somocista guards and the mercenary soldiers are neither freedom fighters nor democrats. The so-called crusade against communism in Nicaragua is no more than the unleashing of outlaws who attack poor peasants and brutally rape women who are really only young girls." He was one of the first and firmest European allies of the Contadora Group.

Palme always knew he was speaking from that privileged part of humanity that lives in the industrialized northern hemisphere. He was sensitive and conscious of that privilege and always spoke out on behalf of dialog with the South, for a New International Economic Order and even in favor of canceling the underdeveloped countries' foreign debt.

In October of 1985, Palme joined five important Third World leaders in addressing a joint message to Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachov and to President Reagan. Together with Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid, Argentina's Raul Alfonsín, Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere, Greek Prime Minister Andreas Papandreu and Rajiv Gandhi of India, Palme called on the leaders of "the superpowers to take

concrete steps' toward peace and disarmament and to agree on a one year moratorium on nuclear tests.

But perhaps the most important step in Palme's activity in international affairs was the creation of the Independent Commission on Disarmament and Security, which is named after him.

Just a few weeks before his death Palme delivered an important speech at Stockholm's Institute for Foreign Policy. He repeated some of the same ideas when he spoke at Indira Gandhi's tomb in New Delhi, during what was to be his last trip abroad. The emphasis he placed on the problem of the Third World's foreign debt still bears witness to his struggle for a different, better world. "The dialog between the developed and the underdeveloped countries during the 70s had as its central theme the New World Economic Order and long term evolution, in the broadest sense of the term. Today for the most part the central theme in that dialog is how to best collect the interest payments. The banks, the IMF and the governments of the developed countries are demanding harsh and rapid internal readjustments in debtor nations. This is meeting with increasing resistance on the part of the underdeveloped countries who regard this policy as further proof of the injustice of the international economic system."

Palme ended his speech with the following statement: "This (the foreign debt problem) may lead to direct confrontation between the industrialized and the developing countries. Such a contingency would serve nobody's economic interests. The political costs would be unpredictable. The threat to international stability and security would be even more direct."

In several of his last interviews Palme voiced his concern over the dangerous directions the world was moving in. "What most worries me is the development of violence and the influence of imported violence coming from the United States through television and movies."

In the eyes of Latin America Olof Palme stood for the best of the democratic West. Swedish democracy became a kind of ideal: public officials truly in the service of the people, and whose basis for prestige is intellectual honesty; officials who carry out a foreign policy devoid of boastful vanity, personality cults or cosmetic foolery. The seriousness of Palme's mes-

sage was the mature fruit of years of experience.

Olof Palme first visited Mexico as Prime Minister during the administration of President Luis Echeverría (1970-76). From then on our country sought dialog and exchange with European Social Democracy, and particularly with Palme and his party. Palme became a frequent guest of the Mexican government. But he had often visited Mexico since the 1940s; part of his family has lived in our country for over fifty years. A contemptible act of violence ended the life of a good man and a great statesman. It is possible that the killer was in some way conscious of the fact that he was eliminating the main model Latin America had of an

honest politician whose sense of purpose was to generously serve the people in the tasks they had entrusted to him.

The world has lost a citizen dedicated to the noble task of peace. Shortly after the shooting, rustic signs in Spanish began to appear in Stockholm, bearing witness to the gratitude of the thousands of Latin Americans who found refuge in Sweden thanks to Palme's policies. Olof Palme left a universal legacy to all people of good faith on how to stem the plans and instruments of barbarity. ★

Compiled by Arturo Aras based on articles by Juan José Hinojosa, Miguel Bonasso, Tomás Gerardo Alaz and Anna Marie Mergler.