

Reagan's Soldiers of Fortune

Though situated on three different continents, Nicaragua, Afghanistan and Angola have much in common. Most prominently, they are led by relatively new, revolutionary governments that have embarked on a development process to pull their people out of poverty and backwardness. All three have sought and acquired the support of progressive forces around the world, especially the socialist community. For exactly these reasons, all are targeted by a special brand of imperialist aggression: CIA-directed, indigenous counter-revolutionary forces. This is a main element in the Reagan Administration's global crusade against communism and the right of the peoples to determine their own future.

The turn of the year witnessed a marked escalation of the US administration's open support to counterrevolution. There was a flood of demagoguery to justify aiding forces that are little more than paid saboteurs. In his State of the Union address, Reagan pledged «moral and material assistance» to «freedom fighters» in Afghanistan, Nicaragua, Angola and Cambodia. On January 21st, the administration announced plans to seek \$100 million, the bulk of it (\$70 million) military aid, for the contras, almost four times what the US Congress approved last year, after considerable squabbling.

Also in late January, the administration spoke of seeking funds for UNITA, chief agent in the undeclared war on Angola. UNITA leader Savimbi arrived in Washington to the type of welcome usually reserved for heads of state - a pat on the head for ten years of service to the CIA and the apartheid regime of South Africa. Reagan assured Savimbi: «Your cause is our cause.» Public aid proposals were only outlined for the contras however. Apparently, the Reagan administration thinks that covert funding of UNITA and the counterrevolutionaries in Afghanistan will do for the time being, while it concentrates on a propaganda campaign to make more overt support feasible in the future.

Reagan devoted special speeches to alleged Soviet «atrocities» in Afghanistan. This was his way of responding to indications that the Afghani gov-

ernment and the Soviet Union are interested in a peaceful settlement, if there are guarantees that all foreign interference is halted. This is now a realistic possibility in view of the military setbacks suffered by the counter-revolutionaries, and the increasing number of Afghani refugees in Pakistan, who have responded to the government's call for their return. (A main task for the counterrevolutionaries today is preventing their return.) The last thing the Reagan Administration wants is a negotiated solution, for this would remove a major pivot in its secret war on the Soviet Union. US Attorney General Edwin Meese made a late March pilgrimage to the frontlines - almost. Actually he stayed safely inside Pakistan where the counterrevolutionaries are based, and exhorted to more struggle against «the Soviet empire.»

Margaret Thatcher, who has steered clear of genuine freedom fighters like the PLO and ANC, joined Reagan's drive to lend credibility to the Afghani mercenaries. On March 11th, she and the British foreign minister received Abdul Haq, military commander of Hezbi Islami (Islamic Party) which, *inter alia*, claimed the September 1984 bomb in Kabul airport in which 28 per-

sons died, 12 of them family members bidding farewell to children travelling to study abroad. Some airport attacks, it seems, are legitimate - if only 'third world' citizens die!

The Reagan Administration has moreover upped the military ante by covertly supplying Stinger surface-to-air missiles to the counterrevolutionaries in Angola and Afghanistan - and reportedly also in Nicaragua. This sets a precedent as the US has previously supplied Soviet or Chinese-made arms purchased on the international arms market. In April 1985, the contras received SAM7s from the US, a clear escalation as it is the first time irregular forces on the continent have been supplied with surface-to-air missiles (*Barricada Internacional*, December 12, 1985).

Mercenaries

Despite US officials' talk about «freedom fighters», the counterrevolutionaries operating against Nicaragua, Afghanistan and Angola are, in the last analysis, mercenaries. As if to prove the point, the leader of one Afghani gang, Habibullah Mayar, was a guest speaker at the most recent convention held in Las Vegas by *Soldiers of* ►

Demonstration in Nicaragua against the US attack on Libya and funding to the contras.

