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Dear Peter,

Bolivian Minister of Foreign Relations and Culture Guillermo Luis Bedregal Gutierrez took the time to see me on Saturday morning in his private office of the Ministry that sits on the corner of the Plaza Murillo in downtown La Paz. He wore a silk ascot and sportcoat in lieu of the formal club tie and flannel suit in which I have seen him on other occasions. Indeed, I was lucky to get the interview during one of the Minister's rare moments of relaxation. Foreign Minister Bedregal had just returned from the Organization of American States summit held in San Salvador, El Salvador, last Thursday, and he is on his way to Vienna, Austria, today to preside over the United Nations sponsored Conference of Plenipotentiaries to discuss the illicit traffic of drugs around the world.

Guillermo Bedregal's curriculum vitae would make an appropriate entry for an edition of Who's Who in Bolivian Politics if such a book existed. The holder of a doctorate in law from the Central University of Madrid, Bedregal also graduated from Spain's prestigious Diplomatic Academy before taking yet another degree, this time in economics, from the Universitat Ruprecht Karl in Heidelberg, Germany.

Guillermo Bedregal's education has served him well. He first gained enduring fame in Bolivian politics as President of the Corporación Minera de Bolivia (COMIBOL) during Victor Paz Estenssoro's second administration, 1960-64. Coincidentally, the problems facing COMIBOL's management in the early 1960's were not radically different from those experienced by COMIBOL's management today. By 1961, COMIBOL had amassed a debt of over \$20 million, and a restructuring of the parastatal mining company that had been formed after the 1952 nationalization of the Hoschild, Aramayo, and Patiño mines was in order. Bedregal worked with the Kennedy administration represented by Ambassador Benjamin Stephansky in La Paz to implement what later became known as the Triangular Plan. The Plan was funded by the United States, West Germany, and the Inter-American Development Bank. \$37.5 million was granted to COMIBOL on "soft terms" (low interest, and a long repayment schedule) on the condition that inefficient mines be shut down and a bloated labor force be trimmed back.

As has usually been the case in the history of modern Bolivian mining, reforming the sector proved a contentious task at best. The Soviet

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Union tried to curry favor in Bolivia by proposing an alternate, and according to one historian, "more favorable" rescue package, but Bolivia remained firmly committed to the Triangular Plan. No doubt, the government in La Paz must have been influenced by the generosity of the entire U.S. aid package, which rose by over 600% between 1960-64. Prominent Bolivians were also put off somewhat when a Soviet delegation excited the miners at the Siglo XX tin mining complex to wave with exceptional fervour their flags painted with the hammer and sickle, as well as portraits of Lenin and Trotsky. The Bishop of Oruro even led a public prayer hoping for a rejection of the Soviet offer. And Guillermo Bedregal was opposed to Soviet interference as well, citing the Soviet's role in depressing the world tin market when they dumped large quantities of tin on consumers in 1959. Bedregal also seemed to favor a fairly strong response to what he saw as an unresponsive and unproductive labor movement. Writing in a 1961 essay entitled, "The Recuperation of the Nationalized Mining Sector," he argued that illegal strikes organized by the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (FSTMB) had cost COMIBOL and Bolivia \$12 million in lost revenue alone. To rectify the problem, he urged the dismissal of 5,000 miners.

But by 1963, opposition in the mining camps to the Triangular Plan was so entrenched that Bedregal had been successful in cutting COMIBOL staff by only 2,000 miners and workers. Frustrated by the attitude of the syndicates, he imposed a lock-out at the Siglo XX mine that in turn led to a general miners' strike being declared throughout Bolivia. Foreign technicians, and even U.S. Embassy personnel, were taken hostage at the Siglo XX mine. Remarkably, there were no casualties and military occupation of Siglo XX and another mining complex, Huanani, was forestalled with deft negotiation. But the strike lasted nearly five months, and when it was over, Victor Paz Estenssoro's MNR party had suffered a loss of popularity among the miners and the Bolivian Left in general.

Bedregal's tenure in the Paz government came to an abrupt halt in November 1964, when General René Barrientos staged a "golpe del estado" to put himself in office. General Barrientos was a flamboyant character in his own right. At one point the General jumped out an airplane using the same model of parachute that had failed to open for several unlucky Bolivian paratroopers during an Air Force exercise. General Barrientos ruled as virtual dictator of Bolivia until he died in a helicopter crash in April 1969. So Bedregal and Paz Estenssoro were forced back into private life. Over the next decade, most of the now Foreign Minister's time was spent writing books, teaching legal history in Bolivia and lecturing as a visiting professor at other universities in Latin America and the United States. Bedregal also advised the Venezuelan government on agrarian reform and mining.

Perhaps the most controversial moment in Bedregal's career came in November 1979. At 2 a.m. on 1 November, Colonel Alberto Natusch Busch led a rebellion against the presidency of Walter Guevara Arze. Delegates to the Organization of American States summit held in La Paz that year awoke to find the streets around the Palacio Quemado in the Plaza Murillo blocked off by tanks of the Tarapacá regiment. The golpe had gone ahead despite U.S. Secretary of State Cyrus Vance's pointed warning during the OAS meeting that the U.S. would not recognize any government that came to power by other than democratic means. When it was time to fill his Cabinet, Colonel Natusch appointed Guillermo Bedregal as his foreign

minister. Bedregal, who was dismissed from the MNR for joining the insurrection, maintained that he allied himself with Natusch only because Victor Paz Estenssoro also supported the golpe. Nevertheless, Paz Estenssoro refused to back publicly the new regime. Even the Alianza Democratic Nacional, the conservative party of General Hugo Banzer -- who had also come to power after a golpe in 1971 -- failed to endorse the Natusch rebellion.

The silence of both the MNR and ADN leadership proved to be a straw in the wind. Colonel Natusch provoked street riots that turned into street killings when he threatened to close the Camara de Diputados and Senado. On 5 and 6 November, helicopters hovered over La Paz, machine-gunning demonstrators in concert with armored troops deployed on the ground. According to the Permanent Assembly of Human Rights in Bolivia, over 200 Bolivians died, 125 disappeared, and some 200 were wounded. A large part of the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) headquarters was demolished. Because the golpe and subsequent massacre took place during the celebration of Holy Day, "Todos Los Santos," in which Catholics commemorate the memory of dead relatives by exchanging food and prayers over the graves of the deceased, the killings became known as "El Massacre de Todos Los Santos."

Two weeks later, when it was evident that the Natusch golpe had produced only bloodshed and opposition, U.S. Ambassador Paul Boeker received directions from the Carter administration to freeze approximately \$60 million in economic and military aid. Universal recrimination from the international diplomatic community followed. The Andean Pact countries condemned the regime; only Egypt and Malaysia ever recognized formally Natusch's government. Seeing that defeat was inevitable, Natusch's backers entered into discreet negotiation to remove the Colonel from the Palacio Quemado. By the end of November, Natusch had been replaced by a woman, Lydia Gueiler Tejada, who was appointed interim president.

His reputation somewhat tarnished, Bedregal adopted a low profile in Bolivian politics and devoted most of his time to scholarly research in the years following the failed Natusch golpe. In 1982 he published a book on Bolivian politics with an apt title, El Poder en La Revolución Nacional.

But since Victor Paz Estenssoro returned to presidential office in the 1985 elections, Bedregal has managed a rather amazing comeback within the MNR. Paz Estenssoro first nominated Bedregal as his Minister of Planning and Coordination. It was from this Ministry that the plans for Decreto Supremo 21060 were drawn up; D.S. 21060 provided the statutory authority to reorganize the Bolivian economy, and especially the public sector, on the basis of a "no money in, no money out" philosophy. That is, deficit-ridden state enterprises like COMIBOL would no longer be subsidized by revenue from other efficient sectors of the economy. Bedregal served in this capacity for less than a year before switching offices to take over stewardship of the Ministry of Foreign Relations and Culture. As Foreign Minister, Bedregal's priority has been urging the Chilean government to renegotiate a 1904 treaty that formally recognized Chile's capture of Bolivia's coastline and outlet to the sea during War of the Pacific in the 19th Century. The Chileans have refused to budge on the issue, however, and one diplomat in Washington who regularly attends OAS meetings on the subject told me before I came to Bolivia that there was little or no chance of the issue being settled in Bolivia's favor.

Most recently, Guillermo Bedregal stood for the MNR presidential nomination at that party's September convention. To the surprise of some and the satisfaction of others, he lost out to the man who replaced him as Minister of Planning and Coordination and is given the most credit for implementing the rationalization of the Bolivian economy over the last three years: Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada. But regardless of what happens in the May elections, few can match Bedregal's experience in national affairs since the 1952 Revolution. So you can well imagine how intrigued I was to hear his thoughts on Bolivia and other issues of current importance to Andean statesmen. This is what Minister of Foreign Relations and Culture Guillermo Bedregal had to say on Saturday morning:

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Q: In reading the essays you gave me, I have been struck by the central theme of conscientious pragmatism that runs throughout. But in Bolivia it also seems obvious that there are politicians who would prefer pragmatism without a conscience or who would reject pragmatism altogether. How would you propose to unite these political forces, regardless of whether they pertain to the Left or the Right?

A: In the first place, I do not believe we are talking about pragmatism in the philosophic sense that Anglo-Saxons understand, particularly when they read William James. No. No, [pragmatism] simply requires that practice and reality are understood in their proper historical context. That means that we in the MNR have actualized our ideas taking into consideration that theory must be related to practical reality. And practical reality means the facts -- and particularly, the economic facts -- during times of crisis. And it is not the other way around. What happened with the Unión Democrática Popular (UDP) government (1982-85), in fact, the paramount error of not only UDP but the past military governments, was that they believed that reality came after -- or better put -- that reality was subordinated to ideas. That is not the way it works. In the history of man, the greatest political changes that have come about have resulted from men knowing how to interpret, dialectically, a specific moment in history. In that sense, yes, we in this government are practical. If you want to use the word "pragmatic" just make sure to put it between quotation marks. But first and foremost we have considered the historic moment in which we are living. That is my answer.

Q: Speaking of history, you referred to President Victor Paz Estenssoro in one of your essays as a man who has always been "punctual in the space and time" of Bolivian politics. Now that he is in his 80's and will step down as President next spring, who will take his place in the Party? Who are the most outstanding members of the new generation that will guide MNR now?

A: Obviously, there is the MNR presidential candidate, Gonzalo Sánchez de Losada. And I believe I am there, no? You also have to mention Edic Sandoval Moron, Raul Lema Patiño, and Gernán Quiroga. And speaking about the Party on a different level, there is Nuflo Chavez Ortiz, assuming that his fundamental ideas bear fruit, and that Chavez shows himself capable of adapting to reality.

Q: Without considering the 1952 Revolution, what historical event has been the most important in shaping MNR and modern Bolivia?

A: I believe the most important event -- unfortunately, negative -- refers to 20 years of military dictatorship. And after that, the horror, the catastrophe of hyperinflation. Hyperinflation was the gravest political and historical disaster to ever paralyze this country. And you must remember that this peculiarity was not the product of, nor did it owe itself to, a social revolution. Neither was it the result of a lost war, like the other periods of hyperinflation experienced in this century, particularly in Europe. No, hyperinflation resulted from the incapacity of a government to know how to interpret reality.

Q: And the collapse of the international tin price in London in October 1985?

A: That was a very important moment for us, especially from the point of view of Bolivia's externally-oriented economy. But the tin price collapse did not happen during the period of hyperinflation, but later, after we in the MNR had already indicated our revolutionary project: the New Political Economy (NEP). And yet, after the collapse, our country is still around. It has not disappeared.

Q: I was fascinated by your various references to the Venezuelan patriot Simon Bolívar. If Bolívar were to return to live during our times, what do you think the Liberator would say about the Andes now? What would he think of the violence -- such as the terrorism in Peru -- the drug trafficking, and the poverty?

A: Well, Bolívar's ideas were prevented from being realized, no? They were destroyed by the colonial Hispanic oligarchies that merely wanted to take off the monarchists' jacket and put on a republicans' jacket. The structure of colonial society never changed. Secondly, owing to the very great influence of the United States that has impeded the integration of the Andes in distinct historical eras, that integration -- or rather, reintegration -- after the Wars of Liberation never happened. First there was England, who interfered here during the Victorian years, and after that there was the "big stick" of our friend, with his own type of politics. I think that we are living in a time now in which the Liberator would do exactly what is occurring at the moment: he would look for an understanding of mutual benefit between the North and the South. After all, we cannot ignore the great power of the international financial community and its various organs, particularly when we live in a situation of comparative backwardness in this country.

The basic problem for Bolívar was the problem of land, and the ownership of that land. So if today in Bolivia we have yet to experience violence -- and if Che Guevara did not enjoy success in Bolivia -- it is because we gave ourselves the revolutionary answer in 1952. The land belongs to he who works it. On the contrary, this is not the case everywhere, and this phenomenon has generated the violence in Colombia and the violence in other countries, including the violence in Peru. The fight for land and agrarian reform is the greatest factor contributing to the backwardness of Latin America today.

Q: You just returned from the OAS summit held in San Salvador. What was the mood of Latin delegations with respect to the election of George Bush as the next president of my country?

A: I would say that there prevailed a mood of great tranquility. Mr. Bush is a man who understands foreign affairs very well. He has worked under President Reagan in specific duties, and he knows the world. There are so many North Americans -- and I say this with the greatest respect -- that believe the United States is the beginning of the world, and that world ends in Ohio too. They are not adequately informed, and that also includes North American politicians. They focus on problems that you have there without seeing how important the United States and her foreign policy is to the maintenance, to the development of, world peace. I think Mr. Bush -- we commented among ourselves in El Salvador -- is inheriting an era in which there exists great potential for negotiation. The United Nations (UN) is acquiring new life, a new pulse. Multilateralism is turning out to be a necessity. No longer is there just hegemony, whether it be Soviet, European, or North American. I think Mr. Bush knows that there are many channels through which to resolve problems. Just look at the UN's role in the Persian Gulf. And I believe there could be a larger role for the UN in Nicaragua, because that is a problem that worries us tremendously.

In this vein, the presence of Mr. Bush, and particularly the presence of Mr. Baker -- Baker has a very clear idea of what constitutes the world economy, which is extremely important -- is positive. At the same time, he [Baker] has been a great negotiator with respect to trying to resolve the world debt crisis. The debt crisis is so important, perhaps it is unique in the history of the world because it has gone on for so long now. Too long. If the United States eternally enjoys low unemployment, a negligible inflation rate, etc., etc., you cannot ignore that when you look at the global economy, there exists a very grave and serious problem. And that problem matters to the great powers.

I also think that the relationship between Mr. Bush and Mr. Gorbachev will be crucial.

For us, as Latin Americans, I think the new OAS protocol that we ratified in San Salvador will be good for our relations. What we should do also -- and I proposed this informally to my colleagues at the OAS meeting -- is convene a hemispheric summit of all the presidents. It would be a good start and favorable stage in our relations if President Bush were to assist in such a summit with the object of discussing common problems.

Q: The Brazilian Secretary General of the OAS, Joao Baena Soares, has complained recently that the organization is suffering from a lack of funds. He argues also that Latin countries need to convert the OAS into an

international body with teeth, comparable to the newly revived UN. What do you think of the OAS as an international body to resolve regional conflict in Latin America?

A: I believe it is the best. From the point of view of political dialogue, there are also other small groups, like the Group of Eight, that play important role. But now the OAS needs to assume a greater voice in the communication of political dialogue in the region.

Q: U.S. Secretary of State Schultz addressed the OAS on the debt problem. You also referred in your essays to the Anglo-Saxon way of life and our tendency to quantify everything. I am Anglo-Saxon and I have wondered the same. What has been your impression of the negotiations Bolivia has undertaken with the private international banks, the IMF, the Paris Club, etc? Are we now living in an era in which monetary interest outweighs human capital?

A: Yes, unfortunately, yes. But we are living in an era of transition in which men do not yet perceive with great clarity what is happening. It is like the transition from the Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era in Europe. Men living then did not realize the significance of the extraordinary leaps in knowledge that were taking place in the sciences like navigation. Nor did they understand in that epoch the pioneering attitude of the bourgeoisie as a class, when the bourgeoisie allied themselves with the aristocracy to build the cities of Europe. And who understood the incipient beginnings of industrialization and where it would take us during a period dominated by a culture based on agriculture?

I believe in this world in which we live, we have to create unity. Not too many years ago, there was a presidential candidate in your country named Wendell Wilkie. You all do not pay him much attention. Well, Wilkie wrote a book titled, One World. That was a man who understood the time in which he lived and foresaw the need to rescue human values that transcend nationality or religion. First comes man and then comes the economy. But now, disgracefully, first comes the economy and then comes man.

Q: You also mentioned the importance of your Catholic faith in your writings. Did you speak with Pope John Paul II when he visited Bolivia earlier this year? What do you think of the contemporary Catholic Church, and especially, Liberation Theology?

A: I really enjoy theology. Are you Catholic? Ah, you are Protestant. Well, I have always lived with this book at my side (lifting up the Holy Bible). It is an extraordinary book, no? It is exceptional. We Catholics learned very late the importance of reading the Bible, no? This has happened only since Vatican II, because before Vatican II, there were certain passages in the Bible that did not please the official Church. Now no.

I believe in Liberation Theology in the same way it is interpreted by Pope John Paul II. And I do not say that because of discipline, but because of conviction. I think the Pope is right. Because violence, regardless of its content or its sophistication, is violence. Violence, theologically speaking, is always a bad thing. In that sense, the effort

to justify and look for a violent revolutionary solution to our problems cannot be the only way, the only solution. I think we owe it to ourselves as Christians to look for ways to achieve understanding. And I believe one of the best paths to understanding is democracy. That is our great inheritance from the Anglo-Saxon world that we are incorporating into the very essence of Latin society. Because it is an imported good for us, we who have come from a tradition of Latin absolutism, no? Although there were very profound democratic mechanisms complementing the principles we owe to the Spanish Empire and the men of that period, none had the repercussion of the Magna Carta conceded by King John to his barons in 1215. And then there was the Declaration of Independence, which, along with the Declaration of the Rights of Man, have become instruments of mankind and no longer belong exclusively to England, the United States, or France. In these documents the concern for human dignity stands out above all.

From the point of view of Liberation Theology, I would say also that it is an instrument in the fight to rescue human dignity, to do something about poverty, unnecessary sickness, marginalized peoples, the lack of opportunity, and before everything else, the problem of education. In Bolivia, our crisis begins in the countryside and continues with the contradiction that exists between life in the countryside and life in the city.

Q: In your writings, you referred to "integration," using the example that a Bolivian from Santa Cruz should feel comfortable in La Paz. But what about the integration of the indigenous population, the Aymara of the Altiplano and the Quechua of the valleys? What, in your opinion, have been the most notable advances or errors that mark the years since the 1952 Revolution?

A: I would say there have been very good advances from a political point of view, and very bad progress from an economic point of view. That is my interpretation. The Revolution was lost in November 1964. There was never the economic assistance to go along with the organization of the Agrarian Reform. Missing was productive organization, the assistance of the business community, and the incorporation of technology to modernize agricultural production in the Bolivian countryside. That is what was needed. I do not know if included in the works I gave you there was the statistic provided by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the UN showing that in 20 years of investment in Bolivia -- investment funded by Bolivians themselves or backed up by indebting ourselves to foreign creditors -- only 0.5% of those monies ever actually went to reinforce the Agrarian Reform. So we have to invest. This is the problem of the marginalized in the cities, the displacement of the campesino in the city where his expectations grow apace with the growth in modern communications, which in Bolivia -- particularly in the area of radio -- is fantastic. So that is the problem. In our own MNR policy since 1985, we are trying to meet the challenge with AGROPODER, and with programs like that we will return to power and win the elections this spring.

Q: Ever since I heard Octavio Paz speak in Cambridge, England, I keep coming back to a couple of his statements. Roughly put, he stated that one of the most significant errors of his youth was forgetting about democracy. About Latin society in general, he also thought that perhaps Latins enjoy



too much culture, the suggestion being that practicality is sometimes lacking. In other words, there is an abundance of colonial furniture and antiques such as this fine chair, and a wealth of writers and essayists like Mario Vargas Llosa in Peru, but the real problems remain unsolved. Would you agree?

A: I believe this has occurred in all societies and throughout history. Can you not see Aristotle writing on the sidelines of an absolutely unjust Greek society that was home to a terrible slavery? So, unfortunately, this type of success does happen. And now, with certain qualifications, yes, I think the message of Octavio Paz is correct. Now we have in our hands the scientific mechanisms and communication technologies that would allow us to share wealth with ease, not to mention the fact that we can now pass through historical stages with much greater velocity than was possible in the past. Evidently, Don Quixote de la Mancha, written by Don Miguel de Cervantes, is one of the most liberating, the most outstanding, books that a human brain has ever produced. Nonetheless, Cervantes lived in terrifying times, when there was a horrible absolutism in Spain, when there was religious persecution -- the Inquisition -- that was intolerable. And the distinctions between classes and castes, between nobility and campesinos: these were principles that held back the genius of man. But in our time, I think in our world, the democratization of ideas and its [democracy] practice is much easier than during past historical periods.

Q: One last question. You wrote that you first met President Victor Paz Estenssoro in 1949, in Buenos Aires where you had gone to visit your father who was living in exile. Could you tell me a bit more about your youth and what led you to a life of political service to MNR and Bolivia?

A: I entered politics having known Colonel Gualberto Villaroel, that is, President Villaroel. Villaroel was an intimate friend of my father ever since their youth together. Villaroel was with my father in the Colegio Militar, and Villaroel was his superior there. So I met Villaroel when I was very young. The first discussion that I ever heard about politics and my first experience with politics was on the morning of 20 December 1943, when my father opened the door to my bedroom and told me, "Do not be afraid, but there has been a revolution and your uncle Gualberto is going to be president." It was the Revolution of Villaroel.

So it was in my bedroom that political consciousness<sup>7</sup> awoke in me, and I understood what change and transformation meant. You see, unfortunately I have had a very classical education, and I only knew the German high school, Mariscal Braun, which in that time was very exclusive. Besides, we had to put up a terrible fascist discipline in those days. I did not know my own country. I did not know about other social classes. I did not know campesinos, because my father was a city man.

I did not really know anything until I finally went into the Army to complete my military service. It was while I was in the Army that I saw the government change, the hanging of President Villaroel in the Plaza Murillo, the assault on my home -- the pillage of my home -- the persecution of my father, his exile, etc., etc. So I went to visit my father in Argentina. But I was also beginning my university studies at this time and I had entered my first year at university in Cochabamba. It

was in Cochabamba that I met Oscar Ursula de la Vega, who was head of the Falange [Falange Socialista Boliviana]. I developed a great friendship with him because he was the librarian at the Municipal Library where I always went to look for books. I was a Falangist. When my father found out, he sent me to study in Europe, because he was not a Falangist (laughter).

So I went to Europe. It was in Europe that I saw with a clearer perspective and understanding what was Latin America. In Castilla, Spain, for example, I understood for the first time the landscape of my own country, of La Paz, a landscape that I had never really seen but only intellectualized. I read a wonderful essay by José Ortega y Gasset titled, "Sus Castillos," threw myself into a third class train coach, and freezing in the cold, traveled to Salamanca de la Madre. Gazing out from that train, I began to discover how gorgeous the Altiplano was -- much more beautiful than the Castilian plain -- because in Castilla you do not have the Andes all around you.

That was my relationship with the political problem. My family was persecuted, my father terribly so, even sentenced. When there was the Civil War before the 1952 Revolution, I saw my father in prison. To see a father thrown in prison for political problems? So since that time I have been a full-time politician. And for that reason I have an education steeped in the humanities, maybe the best education a Bolivian could have, no? I have studied in Europe, in Germany. I saw what post-World War II Germany was like. I have studied in Spain; I witnessed the fascism of Franco from up close. I have had the luck to learn various languages, to know English and German, to think in those languages, and thus, better know the globe. That has prepared me well, so that whenever I am in prison, I will not be bored. And that is very important.

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As ever,

*W.L. Melvin*

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