



Street scene in the hill town of Lares, Puerto Rico.

Delano, Farm Security Administration

## BATTLE FOR LATIN AMERICA

*Earl Browder points the way to beat the Axis menace below the Rio Grande. Policies for the junk pile. Puerto Rico as a test. Third of five articles.*

**H**ITLER's march toward world conquest has brought danger to the very existence of independent nations in Latin America for the first time since their emergence in the Bolivarian revolution in the early nineteenth century. Latin America belongs, of necessity, in the ranks of the United Nations. The ten republics of Central America and the Caribbean were among its first adherents. Brazil, declaring a state of war with Nazi Germany at the moment this is being written, brings the largest of South American nations into the coalition. Yet it was not without serious reason that Vice-President Wallace, in his famous speech of May 8, warned of serious Axis incursions into Latin America as an imminent danger. The struggle for Latin America between Hitler and the United Nations is intense and bitter, and Hitler's fifth column invasion has long been under way.

It is in the struggle against the fifth column that the war appears predominantly at the present stage in Latin America. And this fifth column has greater organized forces in Latin America than Hitler was able to command in any of his European victims of armed con-

quest. In Argentina these Axis influences still dominate the government, although the masses and their political parties are overwhelmingly on the side of the United Nations.

The bases of Axis operations within Latin America are: First, the large groups of German, Italian, and Japanese immigrants, which are chiefly in concentrated communities dominated completely by Axis leadership, and completely at the disposal of the Axis government; second, the diplomatic network of the Axis-dominated Spanish government of Francisco Franco, which leads and organizes the reactionary Spanish and native elements in the Falangist movement, and which openly prepares the re-establishment of the old Spanish empire in Latin America with Axis military support; and third, the specialized gangs of spies, saboteurs, and agents-provocateur, which Hitler has organized from the underworld of all nationalities, but which is commanded by his direct German agents, and which penetrates even into the labor movement in the persons of Trotskyites and similar criminal elements.

Methods of operation of the fifth column in Latin America follow the classical

pattern. They foment and embitter all struggles going on within the particular nation in which they operate, and try by all means to disintegrate the majority of the people into warring groups. They foment and embitter all issues, real or imaginary, between nations and especially between Latin America as a whole and the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union. Their own forces they keep as a solid striking power by the use of the typical Nazi terroristic dictatorship.

It was the intrigue of the Nazi fifth column which threw Brazil into crisis several years ago, resulting in the institution of a semi-dictatorial regime dependent upon a military force honeycombed with Nazi agents, while the popular leader, Luis Carlos Prestes, was thrown into prison. When recently the visiting Cuban leader, Blas Roca, Communist member of the Cuban Congress, was permitted to visit at length with the imprisoned Prestes, this was an infallible sign that the control of the Nazi-inspired clique at the head of the Brazilian army had been broken by President Vargas. That judgment has now been confirmed with the entry of Brazil fully into the war against Germany and Italy. It

is fully to be expected now that Luis Carlos Prestes, a brilliant military officer and popular leader, will soon be released from prison and take his place in the war effort.

**T**HE anti-Soviet incitement is the chief weapon of the fifth column in Latin America, as in the United States, in China, in Europe, and throughout the world. But in Latin America an almost equally important weapon of the fifth column is to manipulate with the traditional suspicion and fears directed toward the United States, "the Colossus of the North." "Yankee imperialism" and the "Red menace" are the two chief slogans of the fifth column in Latin America directed against the United Nations.

The "Red menace" slogan is designed to arouse the fears of the upper classes against the labor movement and the rising tide of democracy, to intensify the class struggle within the country. The "Yankee imperialism" slogan is designed to cut off good relations between these upper classes and the United States. Then, when these upper classes are engaged in desperate efforts to repress their own labor movement, and are also thrown into a dither of fear of the United States imposing its control upon them from the North, the Axis agents step in with their fulsome promises of how the new world conquerors will befriend and help them to a better place in the world. This is all the more effective since the Axis operates here with a strong anti-Yankee tradition, based on more than three decades of imperialist intrusions of the United States into the inner affairs of Latin American countries, following the Spanish-American war of 1898; they did not have to invent the Yankee imperialist menace, but found it ready-made for them. The "good neighbor" policy of President Roosevelt has done much to disarm the Axis fifth column, though many and serious weaknesses remain in the United States' dealings with the republics to the South, which continue to feed the Axis propaganda.

The "Red menace" slogan of the Axis is being robbed of its effectiveness by the emergence of the real "Reds," the Communist parties, into the public life of many Latin American republics as co-workers and allies of other responsible parties and groups in the nation. Thus in Cuba the Communist Party of that country, fused with another party of the left in the Union Revolucionario-Comunista, is an important sector of the democratic coalition which elected Fulgencio Batista to the presidency of that country, and played a constructive role in the writing of Cuba's new constitution. In Chile the Communist Party was an important factor in the creation of the victorious seven-party coalition of the Popular Front, which rules that country; it is also the leading party in the promotion of the cause of the United Nations among the masses. In Mexico the Communists work harmoniously with the labor movement, headed by Vicente Lombardo Toledano, which played a decisive

role in electing the President, Manuel Avila Camacho, against the pro-Axis candidate Almazan, and all Mexico knows that the "Red menace" is a fraud inspired by German agents. The same tendencies show themselves throughout Latin America. They are the signs of the defeat of the Axis, and the victory of the United Nations.

The greatest single influence toward the unifying of Latin America with the United Nations is the organized labor movement, the trade unions of those countries. This movement is creating its own special continental expression, in the Confederacion de Trabajadores de America Latino, or the Latin American Confederation of Labor. To this Confederation, under the presidency of Vicente Lombardo Toledano, belongs much of the credit for rooting out, exposing, and defeating the Axis fifth column in Mexico, Chile, Cuba, and other countries, and the big steps being taken for national unity against Axis disruption.

**T**HERE is still much to be done to dissipate the fear and suspicion of Yankee imperialism in order to create confidence throughout Latin America in the role of the United States as a leader of the United Nations. Memories of the past, however bitter they may be, of broken promises and violent interventions, of economic pressures, sharp diplomatic practices and financial exploitation, all could be removed to the archives of history and no longer play a damaging role in the present once the peoples of Latin America felt an assurance that the "good neighbor" policy was something deeper than the expediency of the historical moment. To bring such assurance to the Latin American peoples must be one of the tasks which the United States, its government and people, set themselves. That task may begin with words but it must end in deeds.

Beginning with words, we may say that it is always a disturbance of Latin American confidence in the United States when our public spokesmen presume to "talk tough" in giving counsel to our Southern neighbors. For example, it certainly did not strengthen the cause of the United Nations anywhere, when Sen. Tom Connally of Texas, chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, threatened a change in the presidency of Argentina if that country's delegates did not vote right at the Rio Conference. The bluff and hearty senator may be an expert in the politics of the Lone Star State, but he certainly is a bull in the china shop when he intervenes in Latin American questions. His blustering remark did more harm to the unity of the Americas at the Rio Conference than all the machinations of the Axis fifth column agents, and instead of weakening the pro-Axis agents' position it strengthened it.

Proceeding to deeds, it will be necessary for the United States to clear up the anomalous position of Puerto Rico. Our citizenry is peculiarly ignorant of this factor in our

foreign relations. This ignorance is disquieting and damaging, because it reflects an insensitivity to moral considerations on the part of our ruling circles. The United States public and most of its leading circles are blissfully unaware that our government since 1898 has been holding in imperialistic subjection a Latin American nation, one of the most developed culturally, and in size the fourteenth in rank among twenty-one Latin American nations. But even though the United States remains unconscious of the role which it plays as absentee ruler of a small nation, it must not be supposed that Latin America as a whole is unconscious of it, even though its diplomats do not raise the question in their conversations with Washington. Latin Americans, in the nature of the case, develop sensitivity to such questions in inverse ratio to the degree that United States citizenry put on thick skins.

**T**HIS blank in the public and official mind so far as Puerto Rico is concerned is interpreted by Latin Americans generally as meaning that we do not really consider them human beings, and that our official pronouncements of human brotherhood are but diplomatic fiction. Incidents such as the following tend to confirm the suspicion: Not long ago an official of the Office of Civilian Defense was asked what is being done to prepare Puerto Rico for civilian defense. The answer came, with unhesitating naivete, that civilian defense was not a problem in Puerto Rico as that island is one of our military outposts. So completely have we as a nation forgotten that Puerto Rico is not only a "possession" but also a nation of close to 2,000,000 men, women, and children!

It hardly disposes of the problem to protest that "It is such a little one." It is true that Puerto Rico cannot stir the conscience like India does, with the rumbling of giant upheavals, because Puerto Rico is not a giant. But small nations have ways of their own of proving that oppression always brings its own punishment, as the Irish have shown to Britain—and to the whole world, if we will deign to learn something from the Irish question, which has played and even now plays a part in United States domestic politics. Puerto Rico is becoming for our country what Ireland became for Britain, with the additional disadvantage for us that while the Irish had only two or three million brothers in the United States to agitate their cause, the Puerto Ricans have 120,000,000 brothers in twenty Latin American republics who may be stirred into solidarity with them. And it is not wise for the United States to have nearly 2,000,000 sullen "subjects" in the Gibraltar of the Caribbean, when it would be so easy to have instead the same number of enthusiastic and loyal allies.

If Puerto Rico is "a little one," we can only remark that six out of ten of the Latin American signatories of the Declaration of the United Nations are even littler, but we were glad and proud to have them sign as



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One of Puerto Rico's 2,000,000. This farmer lives near Yauco.

equals of the United States. Even little Luxembourg, with one-sixth of Puerto Rico's population and little more than one-fourth of her area, is a proud co-signer of the Declaration with the British and the United States. Why not our "good neighbor" Puerto Rico?

Puerto Rico can be made an ally, a member of the United Nations, a loyal fighter by our side, if the United States would immediately recognize and implement her right of self-determination. It is no solution, but only an aggravation of the problem, when our officials give out newspaper stories which admit the justice of Puerto Rican aspirations but try to mollify them with vague promises of the right to elect their own "governor" sometime after the war. That fatal motto "Too little and too late" seems to be inherent in the bureaucratic conduct of affairs. A forthright recognition of Puerto Rico's nationhood would immediately halt the development of a new and more dangerous "Ireland" on our doorstep, and at the same time cut in half all our difficulties in Latin America. It would raise the moral influence of the United States throughout the world, and cement the United Nations for the strains of war as would no other possible act of ours except the successful establishment of the second front in Europe against the Nazis.

**T**HERE comes to my mind the story of a Puerto Rican. He hated Nazism and fascism so deeply that when, in 1936, the Franco uprising against the Spanish republic began, he made his way to Spain and joined the republican army. He took part in the defense of Madrid until the end, was wounded

several times, and when the republic fell he was one of the fortunate ones who escaped Butcher Franco's firing squads, returning to Puerto Rico. There he was one of the foremost fighters against the insidious influence of the Spanish Falange, agent of the Axis. He would be the first to urge an independent Puerto Rico to declare war against the Axis and conscript an army to fight the Axis anywhere, together with the United Nations. But when the United States conscription law was imposed upon Puerto Rico, this flaming warrior against the Axis refused to register for the draft that violated Puerto Rico's nationhood, and he received a prison sentence rather than sign an acknowledgment that his nation was "subject" to another.

Another symbol of our problem is Pedro Albizu Campos, a prisoner in Atlanta Penitentiary for the past five years. Campos is the president of the Nationalist Party of Puerto Rico. He was "convicted" of sedition, the same crime for which King George III would have imprisoned George Washington if he could have got his hands on him. Campos is of an old family of the Bolivarian tradition, to which Puerto Rico furnished many famous names. He is a Harvard man, a Catholic, and has world-wide contacts and reputation. He is among the purest of patriots. The government of the United States knows no way to handle such men and such forces but to lock them up and keep them mopping cement floors for five years.

If our proclaimed "good neighbor" policy is something deeper than the opportunism of the moment, then our nation's handling of Puerto Rico is a tragic blunder. It makes sense only as a part of a continuing imperialism determined eventually to subdue all of Latin America. Every Latin American nation looking at Puerto Rico, and every Latin American citizen looking at Pedro Albizu Campos, can exclaim to himself: "There, but for the grace of God, go I!"

Not the least of the problems which disturb the relations between the United States and Latin America, and lend themselves to Axis manipulation, are economic. If one wishes to know, for example, why the pro-Axis forces in Argentina are so strong and stubborn, one can find a large part of the answer by turning the pages of the old issues of our *Congressional Record* and read the vitriolic speeches of Texas congressmen denouncing our government for permitting a few cans of Argentinian beef to be sold on United States markets, or consumed on United States warships! Those speeches of United States congressmen did more to establish the pro-Axis elements in power over Argentina than all the machinations of Hitler's agents could do; for these agents could have done nothing without those stupid congressmen in Washington to prepare the way for them.

The famous issue of Argentina's canned beef is only a symptom of a deep-going problem. Latin America urgently requires commerce with the economically advanced countries to dispose of her products of agriculture

and mining and to obtain industrial products. Much of her exports must go to Europe, or fail of a market. The only way to answer this problem for Argentina is to open up the Second Front in Europe and show her in a most practical fashion that Hitler is not going to control Europe's trade with the rest of the world. When Argentina is convinced on that point, she will quickly find the way to sweep out of office the Hitlerite camarilla that now controls the country.

**F**OR all of Latin America, however, there is a permanent problem of economic adjustment to the rest of the world. All the republics to the south suffer from a system of world economy in which the great powers control commerce for their own benefit primarily, and siphon off most of the benefits of this commerce, which should be mutual, to their own side. Control of this commerce in the hands of the great powers further results in accentuating the trend to monoculture in the more backward and weaker countries especially, a trend which in Puerto Rico has brought that island into a catastrophic dependence upon the production of sugar for the world market—a dependence which in 1942 has inflicted actual famine upon that unhappy land. Those efforts which are made by international cartels to bring some order into the chaos of this semi-colonial system of economy bring profits only to the great powers, and only accentuate the dependent position of the less powerful countries.

For the war period it is absolutely essential that the United States give adequate attention to meeting the minimum economic needs of the Latin American countries, on terms which will not increase their internal strains, which are already great. For the postwar period, it is equally essential to develop an over-all plan of world economic relationships which will represent a decisive turn away from the old system of commerce which tends to degrade the weaker countries to the position of a colonial economy. That is one of the most serious of Latin America's problems.

The United States can, by establishing a correct approach, spirit, and method in dealing with Latin America, greatly facilitate that area's inevitable alignment with the United Nations, and increase its contribution to victory. We have as yet only the beginnings of such a correct approach. It is a primary task for all those Americans who want to help our country make its greatest possible contribution to crushing the Axis to become conscious of the problems of Latin America as a part of our own problems; to develop a public opinion which will impress that understanding of Latin America upon a governmental bureaucracy which is fixed in old attitudes and practices; and to establish friendly contacts between the people of this country and our Latin American neighbors, especially through the organized labor movements, which can ripen into a permanent and fruitful hemisphere solidarity.

EARL BROWDER.