

Background of Religious Conflict in Mexico

The Medieval Grip of the Church on the Peons—The Juarez Revolution of 1857—The Church Comes Back Under Diaz—The Alliance Between Rome, Wall Street and the Mexican Church—The Constitution of 1917—The Role of the Laboring Masses.

By MANUEL GOMEZ.

ARTICLE I.

POST-WAR Europe, overwhelmed by new hopes and new fears, heard the voice of the dead. From the Vatican at Rome it came—the strange-old demand of the Pope for restitution of his temporal power.

The sudden renewal of this medieval demand had a certain significance, altho the demand itself was manifestly impossible of realization. It was an announcement to the world that the catholic church was again a world political factor of first-rate importance.

The European social order was in a state of flux; long-established institutions were crumbling; monarchies were falling; the triumphant Russian Bolshevik Revolution was proving an irresistible force of attraction for the exploited workers of western Europe. Among the ruined de-classed elements and petty-bourgeoisie, particularly, there was a wave of pessimism and lack of faith. In the midst of all this capitalist disintegration and disorganization, organization became god. Every center of reaction that had widespread organization implications, discipline, authority and a semblance of stability, was eagerly sought after. Organization and authority—if possible organization that would have the appearance of transcending governments—but above all organization and authority.

It was the hour of the catholic church. Protestantism could not meet these requirements. The protestant denominations lost members steadily, as all recent figures show. Authoritarian catholicism rose from the dead, still smelling of the grave it is true,

THIS IS THE FIRST OF FIVE ARTICLES ON THE PRESENT MEXICAN CRISIS

The present article is the first of a series of five studies of the struggle between the church and state in Mexico. Others to follow are:

The Class Lines in the Conflict.

The Church and Foreign Intervention in Mexico.

The Catholic Church and American Imperialism.

The Meaning of Mexico's "Reformation."

They will appear daily on this page.

to live feebly thru a new brief existence—as the religion of declining capitalism.

American Capitalism And The Church

SUCH a phenomenon could not be ignored in the United States, which the nominally protestant, has long since emerged from the period of economic individualism in which protestantism got its real foothold. American capitalism, as the greatest imperialist power in the world, with a dominant position in the world market and billions of dollars tied up in European investment, is the chief subsidizer of European reaction. But the foreign interests of Wall Street and Washington are not confined to Europe. Right at our own door is the primary foreign base of American imperialism—Latin-American, with a catholic tradition three centuries older than the Monroe Doctrine and a ponderous hierarchical organization still

maintaining close contact with wide sections of the population. Is it any wonder that American imperialism opened its arms to the catholic church? Is it not quite understandable that millions of American dollars should be poured into the publicity fund of a eucharistic congress at Chicago, that ostentatious government honors should be paid to the attending cardinals, that the entire press of the land should be mobilized for the event and that catholic, protestant and Jew alike should sing its praises?

The medieval church has found a modern social basis, with ramifications reaching into the new world as well as into the old.

So it is that, in the twentieth century, a conflict between church and state becomes a tremendous thing, with imposing forces mobilized on each side and the reverberations of struggle echoing loudly far beyond the borders of the Mexican republic.

Newspapers are not exaggerating the Mexican crisis. It is a grave one. Twenty-five thousand priests are on a general strike, refusing to perform any public clerical function. An economic boycott has been ordered by organized catholic laymen; purchases are to be limited to necessities, the purpose being to paralyze the economic life of the nation and bring the government to its knees. The Calles government, which has overcome so many obstacles, is engaged in what is unmistakably one of the most momentous struggles of its career.

Calles' Problem.

CALLES is fighting a triple-headed monster: one head represents the counter-revolutionary landowning aristocracy.

(Continued from page 2)

Gomez Writes on the Background of the Conflict in Mexico

(Continued from page 1)

tocracy at home, another represents Rome, and the third is that of U. S. imperialism. These three heads can not be confronted singly, for they all grow upon a single body.

Religion plays only a secondary role in the conflict—religion and the church being of course two entirely different things. What we are witnessing is a phase of the Mexican revolution. It is customary in Mexico nowadays to speak of the revolutionary period as embracing the years 1911-1920, but actually the revolution did not begin with the overthrow of Don Porfirio Diaz any more than it was terminated by the overthrow of Venustiano Carranza. The beginnings of the bourgeois revolution in Mexico date back to the so-called "Ayutla revolution," the reform laws and the constitution of 1857. The struggle of those years was against army, church and landed aristocracy. The church was one of the great props of the semi-feudal system.

As in Europe before the reformation, the church was rolling in wealth. Two-thirds of all the land in Mexico were said to belong to it. Its interests were tied to those of the ruling aristocracy, not only economically but socially and

politically as well. Recognized officially as the state church, to the exclusion of all others, its mighty organization was part of the reactionary governing machinery, as a part of which it engaged in constant political intrigues and exercised religious-political domination over the fearful masses from the cradle to the grave.

The Reform Laws.

THE famous Reform Laws and the constitution of 1857, carried thru under the leadership of Benito Juarez, severed once for all the official relationship between church and state. They also abolished monasteries and convents, prohibited the church from owning property and secularized public education.

During the long years of the Diaz dictatorship, however, the church slowly regained much of its former power. The constitution of 1857 was still nominally in effect but most of its anti-clerical provisions, like many others, became dead letters.

With the popular revolution against Diaz the modern period in Mexico begins. To the revolutionary movement was added a new force: the agrarian revolution, the struggle of the poor peasants for the land. Moreover, as the rapid stages of revolution from 1911 on succeeded each other, the upheaval ceased to be entirely capitalist in the classic sense. A militant proletariat emerged, and peasants, workers and petty bourgeoisie became the

dominant social forces in the revolutionary movement—more or less under the uncertain hegemony of the petty-bourgeoisie.

WHEN estates began to be partitioned out to peasant communities and nationalist legislation began to be projected, American imperialism took alarm. As soon as the Mexican people began to lay hands on the oil question and on the question of foreign economic domination in general, Wall Street became the outstanding enemy of the Mexican revolution, allying itself with every reactionary element in Mexico, from Felix Diaz to the Catholic church.

Thruout this period the church remained an active rallying center for reaction in Mexico. In the name of religion, it mustered "the faithful" for one political coup after another. It openly and covertly supported counter-revolution. It even stooped to treason against the national interests, engaging in countless intrigues with the representatives of foreign capital.

IT was natural and necessary, therefore, that the constitution of 1917, which was a revolutionary nationalist constitution aimed particularly at the foreign monopolists of Mexico's oil and other resources should strike hard blows at the power of the church.

President Calles is the outstanding representative of Mexican nationalism on the petty-bourgeois program of the constitution of 1917. Determined to

preserve the hegemony of the petty-bourgeoisie, he has not been too scrupulous in applying the working-class provisions of the constitution. Because he was afraid to rely frankly upon the working and peasant masses he has sometimes had to vacillate in his struggles against the imperialist demands of the United States—a circumstance which must certainly do him harm. Nevertheless, he is a revolutionary nationalist and has evolved a program for the development of an independent national economy which is the first serious and systematic effort of its kind put forward in Mexico.

Obregon dodged the provisions of the constitution referring to the church, just as he dodged many other provisions. Calles set out resolutely to carry them into effect. The constitution of 1917 goes much further than that of 1857 in this respect. It not only forbids clerical education of children in public or private primary schools, but it excludes all priests from politics, prohibits foreign priests from officiating and limits the priesthood in various other ways. In his recently-issued regulations upon the subject, Calles prohibits religious newspapers from discussing politics or criticizing the government.

IT must be remembered that these regulations were issued at a time when the untiring political activities of the clergy were working hand and glove with the reactionary elements at

home and abroad. It had been necessary for the Mexican government to deport two official emissaries of the reanimated pope, one of whom had wilfully deceived the immigration officers as to his purpose in entering Mexico. The imperialist pressure from the United States developed into a steady, continuous offensive, and the imperialists had manifested their determination to make use of the church to weaken the Mexican revolution for its own ends. Following the deportation of the lying priest, Caruana, the Eucharistic Congress at Chicago had taken place, in which the alliance of Rome, Wall Street and Mexican reaction had been sealed.

That alliance is full of foreboding for Mexico. Calles will have no less trouble in applying the anti-clerical articles of the constitution than he had in trying to apply article 27—and from the same sources. The religious issue furnishes a moral justification which United States imperialism cannot overlook, particularly when it offers the services of a mighty religious-political organization in Mexico itself. Baffled and checked in successive phases of its offensive against Mexico, Wall Street now takes up the banner of "religious toleration." Catholic, protestant and Jew unite for catholicism and oil. The newspapers in this country are playing up the issue for dear life. Public praying "for Mexico" is being conducted in churches of all

denominations. Cartoons are again appearing here and there furtively hinting at the possibility of counter-revolution. And in Mexico itself the reactionary clericals, encouraged from outside, are organizing "leagues of religious defense" and engaging in open and audacious conflict against the government along the whole line.

YET Calles must stand firm. If the church is not now finally stripped of every strategic possibility for political struggle the conquests of the national revolution will be permanently endangered. But the government is finding that it cannot mobilize its natural supporting strength without turning to the working masses.

Among the politically and economically organized workers of Mexico the power of the church has already been broken. It is to be hoped that Calles will now cease his efforts to break up the organization of the railroad workers, give up his fitful attacks upon the Communists, and discontinue insisting upon the necessary domination of petty-bourgeois standards, so that the entire organized working class, together with all other elements interested in maintaining national sovereignty and the conquests of the hard-fought revolution, may present a common front to the native and foreign forces of reaction. Every enemy of reaction and imperialism should support the Mexican government in this crucial conflict.