

The Persistent "Mexican Question"

By Manuel Gomez

(Continued from May issue.)

THE "Mexican Question" came permanently to the fore in our generation not simply, as the amiable writers of travel books would have it, because the Mexicans do not understand English and the people of the United States do not eat chili, but because of the requirements of U. S. capitalist industry expanding upon an imperialist basis. Mexico as a source of important raw materials and as a field for the investment of surplus capital were the first considerations in twentieth century U. S. aggression.

Mexico and the U. S. Empire.

To the economic-business factors confined to direct exploitation of Mexican territory were added strategic factors. American imperialism developed further. Even while individual groups of capitalists were pursuing strictly limited purposes in Mexico, the political subjugation of Caribbean and Central American countries was under way. Swiftly and unmistakably the schematic outline of empire in the western hemisphere began to unfold itself with Mexico as an obvious converging point. Cuba, Porto Rico and Panama had already been seized by the United States. American marines planted the stars and stripes in the territory of Nicaragua. Santo Domingo was occupied. The Negro republic of Haiti was "pacified." The policy of military intervention in Latin America became a definite part of the concept of the Monroe Doctrine.

But war is another matter—and everyone agrees that large-scale intervention in Mexico means war. How costly such an undertaking would be was indicated in the tests of the Pershing expedition and the occupation of Vera Cruz. Mexico is a country of 15,000,000 people with a territory as large as all the states of the United States east of the Mississippi. General Peyton C. March has declared that it would take 1,000,000 men and two years to conquer and "pacify" the Mexican nation. Thus Mexico escaped the fate of those around her.

Nevertheless, Mexico, whose rich territory lies contiguous to the United States and is a vital connecting link with the coveted lands farther south, plays a primary role in all imperialist calculations in this country. For economic business reasons, for strategic reasons of empire—Wall Street desires Mexico more ardently than it desires any other unconquered area in the western world.

Mexico's Line of Development.

Meantime, Mexico continues to follow a line of development of its own. Our neighbor on the south is making use of its present unique position to fortify herself for the future. While awaiting the next political assault from the "colossus of the north," Mexico is grappling earnestly with the all-important problem of economic self-sufficiency, of independence from foreign bankers and industrialists. She has embarked upon a program of economic resistance constituting a serious challenge to the program of foreign capital—and this circumstance makes the "Mexican Question" all the more urgent for American imperialism, for it foreshadows a possible ultimate development which would allow Mexico to slip thru its fingers entirely.

Fundamental factors in the progress of Mexican economic development provide the main-spring for what is going on.

The revolution which overthrew Porfirio Diaz was anti-feudal and agrarian, but not anti-foreign. When Carranza rose in arms against Huerta, the Mexican revolution had already taken on a consciously nationalistic form. Indeed, if Calles should conduct his foreign relations in the same bellicose manner as Carranza—today when the aggressive imperialism of the United States is one of the marks of the epoch—the intervention avalanche from the north would be upon him in no time. Nevertheless, the economics of the present situation in Mexico embody a more serious challenge to Wall Street and Washington than all the stubborn blustering of Carranza. There are two principal reasons for this. First, the signs of a developing native capitalism in Mexico; and second, the beginnings of development of an independent national economy with a base broader than that of the strictly capitalistic classes.

The Beginnings of a Native Mexican Bourgeoisie

Great changes have taken place in Mexico in these last few years, visible even at the first glance. Capital cities of most of the states have enlarged their suburbs on the near plains and in the capital city of the republic the population has increased tremendously. Walking thru the streets of Mexico City at the hour when workers are going home from their jobs, you cannot fail to be impressed by the rush of crowded street cars and "camiones" branching out in all directions. According to official gov-

ernment figures, the Mexican republic now has 112 sugar refineries, 142 cotton mills, 36 woolen mills, 75 large shoe factories, 222 cigar and cigarette factories operating on a commercial scale, 68 hydro-electric plants, as well as important paper mills, iron and steel foundries, soap factories, etc. Like the mining and oil industries, most of the industries listed here are under the domination of foreign capital but great numbers of large individual plants are owned by Mexicans. This is especially true in the cotton industry, the shoe industry, the paper industry, the sugar industry, the cigar industry and the soap industry. In the very shadow of the foreign enterprises, which still dominate Mexican economy and which in fact press forward more surely than ever, native enterprises are springing up.

Only a few years ago revolutionists were insisting, not without reason, that there was no national bourgeoisie in Mexico. In the larger sense even today the Mexican bourgeoisie is still struggling to be born. But there is quite a definite middle class crystallization. The Mexican chambers of commerce now have a relatively large Mexican membership. Reinforced by a whole army of petty bourgeois bureaucrats, professional men and intellectuals, the bourgeois elements have acquired something like a uniform ideology and are pushing forward on all fronts. They find themselves in direct conflict with the imperialism of the United States. The struggle of the Mexican national bourgeoisie to be born is a struggle against foreign monopoly of Mexican resources, industrial production and credit.

"We must insist by all means in our defense against the imperialistic capital," wrote Senor Rafael Nieto in March of this year, shortly before his death. "I have the absolute conviction that if we allow another billion dollars of foreign capital to be invested in Mexico, in the same form it has been invested thus far, that is by buying outright the land and its natural resources, and securing the undisputed control of our industry, we might as well resign our economic independence right now. A few bitter instances in our contemporary history justify this dread.

"We need the foreign capital, but we must not secure it by surrendering to it our economic independence. The Mexican government intends to solve this giant problem—with the Law of Foreigners, the Oil Law, the Irrigation Law, etc.—and the logical result will be that the future foreign investments will satisfy themselves with securing a reasonable profit and little by little they will delegate to Mexicans the responsibility and control of their industries. This is absolutely necessary for the future autonomy of the republic."

Senor Nieto, a former Assistant Secretary of Finance in Mexico and a typical representative of the middle class, expresses the ideology which is dominant in this class in Mexico today. He died last April while serving as Calles' minister to Italy.

The Policy of Calles.

It is necessary to appreciate recent capitalist development in Mexico to understand the government of President Calles. Calles will be accused of giving in to U. S. imperialism in the recent conflict over the oil and land laws. Of course, he did give in. Yet it is a mistake to brand him as an agent of imperialism, as many radicals in this country and Latin America have been doing. There is too much in the administration of President Calles that does not go with such a characterization.

I have myself frequently insisted that the classic representative of petty bourgeois nationalism in the Mexican revolution was Carranza, who was opposed more determinedly by the United States than any other leader. Carranza was overthrown by the Obregon-de la Huerta-Calles combination and this was a defeat for nationalism, greeted with unconcealed joy in Wall Street and Washington. However, the Obregon-de la Huerta-Calles support was of a dual nature. It included workers and peasants systematically and stupidly rendered hostile by the Carranza regime, whose reasons for revolt were quite different from those of the favored friends of foreign capital.

The agrarian revolution—with its inevitably anti-imperialistic orientation—continued to develop further. The working class of the towns found itself in a strategic position as a result of the confusion reigning in the ranks of its bourgeois enemies after the collapse of Carranza. Altho Obregon tried to change it, the Mexican atmosphere continued to be "radical." It became still more so after the failure of the reactionary uprising of de la Huerta in the last weeks of 1923.

Here was a new rallying ground for the struggle against U. S. imperialism. The shattered forces of the petty bourgeoisie pulled themselves together and reorientated themselves toward the workers and peasants. They were not the same elements who had been with Carranza in 1914, for Carranza had in truth been a petty bourgeois leader without a petty bourgeoisie. It was to a considerable extent a new grouping, which is really only now finding its feet. These newly-made business men, government bureaucrats and politicians, are now making a definite bid for leadership in the broad national movement against imperialist domination.

Calles represents the movement for the creation of an independent national economy in Mexico under the leadership of the petty bourgeoisie, and as such, he is an enemy of U. S. imperialism. He is not always an uncompromising enemy, however—first, because he has the example of Carranza before him and is afraid of a head-on collision; second, because Mexico

needs capital and until there is some substantial prospect of native Mexican accumulation it will have to come from abroad; third, because he dare not cut off all ties with the United States for fear that the "radical" Mexican workers and peasants will relegate the insecurely weak petty bourgeoisie to the background.

The Calles Program.

In a country like Mexico the middle class forms far too narrow a base for the construction of a national economy. Calles recognizes this fully. His governmental program—the first really well-worked out constructive program that has appeared in Mexico—assigns an important role to the workers and peasants, altho always with an eye to middle class hegemony. That is what I referred to earlier in the present article when I spoke of "the beginning of development of an independent national economy with a base broader than that of the strictly capitalistic classes."

Calles' nationalist program is clearly set forth in a long series of official acts which piece together in a surprisingly consistent whole. The more important of them are the following:

1. FOREIGN RELATIONS.

(a) Controversy with United States over attempt to regulate Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution (oil and land laws).

(b) Orientation toward Latin America. (Move for Latin American congress; official explanations of U. S.-Mexican conflict to Latin American countries; raising of Mexican legation in Guatemala to rank of embassy; similar move with regard to Argentina, etc.)

(c) Close relations with the American Federation of Labor. The A. F. of L. appears to Calles as the only existing substantial organized force in the United States itself which may be used against the imperialists.

(d) Continuation of diplomatic relations with the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics. (Calles sometimes takes an ambiguous and even provocative attitude with regard to Soviet Russia—first, in order to satisfy the demands of the A. F. of L., and second, to discourage proletarian revolution in Mexico, but the bare fact of uninterrupted diplomatic relations is a circumstance of importance).

2. INTERNAL-POLITICAL.

(a) Official support to the Labor Party and CROM (Mexican Federation of Labor). (Appointment of Morones as Secretary of Industry, Commerce and Labor; appointment of Morones' supporters to minor posts of all sorts; subsidy of Labor Party papers; support of Morones against ex-Governor Zuno of Jalisco, etc.).

(c) Application of the laws striking at the roots of power of the Catholic Church.

(d) Persecution of radical labor and peasant leaders, disruption of independent unions, etc.

3. INTERNAL-ECONOMIC.

(a) Economy program—reduction of the army—balancing of the budget—resumption of interest payments on the foreign debt.

- (b) Establishment of the sole bank of issue.
- (c) Establishment of farm-loan banks.
- (d) Establishment of co-operatives.
- (e) Distribution of permanent titles to lands partitioned out in "ejidos" (peasant communities).
- (f) "Ley del Patrimonio de Familia"—step toward individual peasant ownership as against the "ejido."
- (g) Oil and land laws (under Article 27)—"Ley de Extranjeria."
- (h) Irrigation works, on co-operative basis or under government control.
- (i) Local road-building program.
- (j) Law exempting from all taxes Mexican business concerns formed with a capital of 5,000 pesos or less.

This is plainly a program for building up a national economy in Mexico which would be independent of foreign capital. It would be based upon co-operation among petty-bourgeois, peasant and working-class elements under state patronage.

Can Calles' Program Succeed?

Can such a program succeed? Certainly not if it is followed out precisely as President Calles intends. The Mexican middle class could lead in the creation of a national capitalism only at the cost of great sacrifices by the workers and peasants. Already Morones has obliged workers belonging to the CROM to accept reductions in wages, on the ground that it is necessary to help Mexican capitalism in competition with the United States. This is called the method of the "reajuste" and it is one of Calles' schemes for the accumulation of Mexican capital. Similar reasons are given for attacks on Communists and attacks on militant elements in the labor movement generally. Capitalist newspapers, business men, government and CROM labor leaders tell the workers day in and day out that "class collaboration" is a national necessity—"class collaboration," that is, for the benefit of the middle class. Calles and his friends take up the slogan of the "united anti-imperialist front" and brandish it as a club to force the workers and peasants to accept the hegemony of the petty bourgeoisie in the nationalist struggle. But Mexico is overwhelmingly an agricultural country and the agrarian revolution is still in process. For this reason alone, if for no other, it will be impossible at the present time to put a damper on the radical atmosphere of Mexico. The Mexican masses have not sufficient confidence in the middle class to allow it to carry thru its own national program. Moreover, it has neither the requisite resources nor the courage, nor the ability.

The Hegemony of the Workers and Peasants.

The petty bourgeoisie has given body and form to the economic struggle against imperialism, and is necessary to any constructive pro-

gram of Mexican nationalism. But the workers and peasants must dominate the alliance. On such a basis—with the center of gravity shifted to the workers and peasants—who can say that Mexico will not be able to work out her own economic solution while at the same time offering effective resistance to the imperialist pressure of the United States? Mexico has enormous natural resources. She has, considering the stage of development of the country, a well-disciplined working class. She has a peasantry which is already being organized on a national scale. Workers as well as peasants are skilled in the use of arms. With proper leadership and a proper constructive program—embracing many of the points brought forward by President Calles—Mexico may be able not only to maintain herself as an independent nation at the very door of the greatest imperialist power of the world but to become, far more actively than in the past, an organizing center for the whole Latin American resistance to imperialist domination.

Much would depend upon the complicated balance of forces in the United States and in the world at large. American imperialism only makes truce with Mexico. It obviously does not accept the present situation. Every step to curtail Wall Street privileges in Mexico and to build up an independent national economy places the persistent "Mexican Question" a little higher up on the American agenda.

Considerations that might have led Wall Street and Washington to temporize a few years ago do not have the same weight today. In the period since the World War, U. S. capitalists have fallen heir to a position which puts the United States in the forefront of consciously imperialist powers. American imperialism is everywhere on the offensive. Its aggressions reach into Europe, Asia and South America. It is impossible to appreciate the recent series of adventures of American imperialism in Latin America—from General Lassiter's invasion of the City of Panama to the Pershing-Lassiter "arbitral" expedition in Tacna-Arica, and including the latest U. S. assault upon the sovereignty of Mexico herself—without expecting a determined drive for the complete subjugation of Mexico.

We must realize all that is at stake in this conflict. We must be prepared to lend solid support to Calles in his struggles against American imperialism, at the same time calling upon our comrades in Mexico—and thruout Latin America to point out to him that if he is sincere in his nationalist program he must rely frankly upon the important revolutionary and constructive elements of the Mexican population—the workers and peasants, who cannot be sacrificed to a small group of petty bourgeois and whose sacrifice would constitute the betrayal of Mexican nationalism.

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