

LAND OF THE SIX-YEAR PLAN

(This is the first of a series of articles by Bertram D. Wolfe on present-day Mexico. They are based on the last two chapters of his forthcoming book, "Portrait of Mexico," with pictures by Diego Rivera, to be published on February 26 by Covici-Friede—Editor.)

By BERTRAM D. WOLFE

MAY 1, International Labor Day, is a national holiday in Mexico. Government employees are obliged to march in the great labor demonstration held in the capital, under a colorful medley of banners: the red flag of socialism and communism, the red-and-black flag of the organized labor movement, the tricolor, red-white-and-green, of Mexico's national ensign. I had seen enough of these demonstrations in Mexico City, so last Mayday I motored into a provincial capital to see how the holiday was handled there.

The town movie house had been taken over on the occasion by the government which in public handbills invited "you and your distinguished family to the festival in honor of the Day of Labor." The program included music by the municipal band, music by the military band, recitations, wrestling and boxing matches, songs by school children, a one-act play, speeches by officials of the Agrarian Department of the States and speeches by local labor leaders. On the stage was a huge red banner with hammer and sickle and the words: "Lenin Group—Six Year Plan." The seats and boxes were filled with peasants of Indian type in huge sombreros, white "pyjamas" and sandals or bare feet, a few workmen in overalls, and the town middle class men, women and children in "European" clothes. They talked incessantly during the plays, recitations and speeches, listened good-naturedly to the music and cheered their heads off at the wrestling and boxing matches. I thought of Moscow's great Red Square filled with marching millions of laborers and soldiers, of blood-stained streets in other European capitals where I had seen prohibited demonstrations ridden into by mounted police and sprayed with machine gun bullets on the First of May; and I rubbed my eyes in bewilderment at the great red banner which filled the stage background in this rural town movie house, decorated with hammer and sickle in gleaming gold thread, and the awesome legend: "Grupo Lenin: Plan Sexenal." (Lenin Group: Six Year Plan.)

The Six Year Plan

During my many years of residence in Mexico, countless "observers," flying tourists on the wing and hastily improvised "authorities" on Mexico who belong to the class of writers that run so that others may read, have assured me of Mexico's radicalism and bolshevism. Frightened conservatives, hardboiled advocates of military intervention, guileless liberals, and naive newly-baked communists of the "People's Front" variety, have all agreed on that score. Especially the latter, enthusiastic American youngsters who came in droves last July to attend summer sessions at Mexico's Labor University, assured me after three days in the Republic that Mexico's Six Year Plan was the equivalent of Moscow's Five Year Plan with a year of planfulness added for good measure. As I sat in the last row of the little movie theatre in Cuernavaca and gazed at the red banner on the stage, thoughts of these tourist experts flashed through my mind, and I mused on the ease with which great masses of mankind can be persuaded by a banner and a slogan, by external symbols and empty and resounding phrases till they are blinded to the elementary so-

cial realities thrust under the tips of their uninquisitive noses.

Mexico's Six Year Plan is the high-sounding name given by the last nominating convention of the National Revolutionary Party (surely a name no less resonant) to the presidential platform adopted by it in December 1933. Its six years comes not from a desire to surpass by a year the planful projects of the Soviets, but from the fact that that is the length of the presidential term. The description of the electoral platform as a "plan" comes from the fact that talk of economic planning was in the air in the early years of the depression. Readers of better than average memory will recall the days when business leaders and economists ranging from Herbert Swope, William G. McAdoo and Paul N. Mazur to Charles A. Beard, Rexford Guy Tugwell, Stuart Chase and Howard Scott, made the welkin ring here in the United States with their talk of economic planning. Despite its Russian-sounding name, itself an advantage to Mexican government leaders in impressing their popular following, the Six Year Plan is really inspired in and closely comparable to the platform of the Democratic National Convention of 1932 and Roosevelt's subsequent "New Deal" electoral campaign.

If by planned economy is implied the abolition of private ownership of basic industry and the organization of production by the government according to estimates made in advance, then Mexico's Six Year Plan has less than nothing to do with economic planning. In fact, it begins with a declaration of the principle of private property. It promises, as have previous, less high-sounding presidential platforms, to improve the lot of the workers, encourage the development of national industry, undertake public works, promote education, and improve Mexico's relation with foreign countries. One can look in vain through all its pages and promises for any sign of planned economy or socialism. It is neither more nor less than Mexico's equivalent of her Northern neighbor's "New Deal."

"Socialist Education"

Another red rag to irate conservatives and red flag to naively enthusiastic radicals from the United States is Mexico's Constitutional amendment for "Socialist Education."

"Why are you keeping your children out of school?" I asked a poor couple, a portero and his wife participating in the Catholic boycott of the government "Socialist" school system here.

"I don't know, Señor," answered the husband a little uneasily "The padre told us they are teaching evil."

"I don't see why we shouldn't send our boy to school," said his wife. "With the girls it's different. After all, the boy is a man-child and sooner or later he will have to know how women are formed. . . ."

To them "Socialist Education" meant sex education. To ninety-nine out of every hundred schools in the Republic it does not mean anything even so "revolutionary" as that. What the government really means by "Socialist Education" is:

1. Education by the State.
2. Ultimately universal and compulsory education—today there are not nearly enough schools for that.
3. Obligatory use of State-outlined courses and texts in private schools, much as the New York State Board of Regents requires the use of its syllabi and standardized texts in State-supervised privately owned institutions.
4. Absolutely non-sectarian and non-religious instruction.

5. The rigid enforcement of the eighty-year old constitutional prohibition on the intervention of ministers and priests in primary, secondary and normal school instruction.

The Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Licenciado Ramon Beteta, put it this way:

"To the foreigner, this name, 'Socialist Education,' connotes an idea which is not one our legislators had in mind when amending the Constitution. . . . Thinking only of the literal meaning of the word (the last thing one should ever think of in seeking to interpret Mexican political phraseology—BDW), one could well imagine that this new school is attempting to teach communism, the destruction of the family and the establishment in Mexico of a classless society in which the right of private property would not be recognized. The plan of the so-called socialistic school in Mexico is by no means so ambitious. On the contrary, the government recognizes the existence of a constitution which provides a federal, representative, democratic and republican form of government, and which expressly acknowledges the right of private property as a social function. It would not be possible, therefore, for that government to teach officially a doctrine contrary to its very existence. . . ."

Mexico's "Marxism"

On November 20, 1936 there was an unusually impressive celebration of the twenty-sixth anniversary of the outbreak of Mexico's Revolution of 1910, from which the present self-styled "Regime of the Revolution" officially dates the birth of its institutions. The trade unions, the revolutionary veterans, the government employees, the military garrison, crowded the huge Zocalo or public square in the center of Mexico City and spokesmen of various tendencies including official representatives of the Mexican Congress expressed the views of their organizations and bodies on the great occasion. From the words of Niceforo Guerrero, speaking on behalf of the Senate of the nation, we cull the following:

"What is the Socialism of our Revolution? We must say it frankly, the Socialism of our Revolution cannot be anything but Marxian Socialism. . . ."

"For many, to speak of Marxism is to invoke the disappearance of private property . . . but that is the phantasma of the uninformed. Neither the Revolution nor the Government is trying to implant communism in Mexico. The Revolution includes in its program restraining, not abolition of private property. . . ."

Such is the "Marxism" of Mexico (Continued on Page 5)

NAZIS GET IN FROM SPAIN

(Reprinted from the English press releases of the GENERALIDAD DE CATALUNYA as dated.)

The German press, thinking they can affect an armistice as discussed by French and British diplomats, have published an account of the amount the rebels owe to Germany.

In bullion, Franco owes the German state 230 million gold marks; importation of ammunition, cannons and rifles delivered to Spain, more than 237 aeroplanes remitted directly from the German factories; the amount of these is not yet known from the above mentioned sum.

As Franco has no intention of paying all his debts in gold, Germany thinks they ought to be paid

PORTRAIT OF MEXICO

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ico. With this thin shadow of a specter Catholic propagandists for intervention would terrify the United States and make it believe that "red radicalism is rampant in Mexico." And with these same phrases in lieu of substance, Communists of the People's Front variety would content the Mexican workers and peasants and work themselves and their movement internationally into an intense fever of enthusiasm for "Socialist" or "People's Front" Mexico.

Another Language

President Cardenas leaves most of the demagogy to his assistants and supporters, especially to his supporters of the Left. After all, they are the masters of the revolutionary phrase and if they choose to put it at the service of his government and thus drape his far from revolutionary acts in a flag of red, why should he object? He too, on occasion, has known how to make the mountains of Mexico ring with his radical speeches: but when he speaks to American financial interests, he talks another language.

On December 22, 1936, in his first public interview with the American press since the consolidation of his regime, President Cardenas told a representative of the Associated Press what he had previously said in private to United States Ambassador Daniels:

"Mexico would look with gratitude on elements with capital which might want to invest money in the country, giving them every class of guarantees within the law, and they ought not alarm themselves since our legislation is more protective of capital than that of the United States, where taxes are greater and wages higher."

This is the simple truth, and no doubt a natural program for the spokesman of the ruling class of a semi-colonial government, whose core is formed by men who are developing in their own persons the beginnings of a native capitalism. But it is a far cry from the radical phrase-demagogy, the "Socialism," "Marxism" and "Revolution" with which his speeches bristle when they are intended for popular home consumption. It is, too, a far cry from the servid anti-imperialist sentiments that actuated the stor-

"connections" with the administration but on its independent class organization and activities. And if this affair serves to clear the air, and aids in building labor party consciousness, it will have in it much for labor's good.

When Sloan read Lewis' original appeal, he immediately left Washington, and prepared a new plan which he hoped would scare the union. General Motors under the slogan of "the right to work" (read: the right to be starved and to be exhausted by the inhuman speed-up) will attempt to re-open certain factories.

The union immediately answered that should such attempts be made, the strike movement would be extended to those factories.

When asked about the possibilities of a "plebiscite," Homer Martin declared: "The strike itself is

my days of the Revolution that began in 1910, and from the dreams of the nationalization of the vast natural wealth of Mexico's subsoil, and socialization of Mexico's land and industry which inspired the struggles of millions of workers and peasants.

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Next week: *The Master Key to Mexican Politics.*