The Next President of Mexico

By ELLA G. WOLFE

DURING the past two decades the military chieftains of Mexico have been the decisive factor in the struggles for political power. Until only a few years ago the workers and peasants were unorganized; Mexico's middle class—hopelessly weak; and its aristocracy not given to struggle; so that the army represented the only well-knit, resolute and militant organization. And even that has never been a unified national army—but rather a number of groups built upon personal allegiance. Barring a few these military chieftains are the most unscrupulous and unprincipled group whose one purpose is loot. "The government becomes the first victim of this military system; its offices, its contracts, its concessions, are the spoils to be torn apart in the greedy claws of all the military underlings from lieutenant to general. The partial failure of every program of social reconstruction during the past 17 years must be laid in large part at the doors of the military clique, which largely remains a tool of... the Church, the Landed Aristocracy, and of American Big Business."

But slowly and almost imperceptibly this power has been steadily shifting from the military cliques to the awakening peasant masses. Families comprising thirteen million Mexicans (out of 15 million total population) make their living by agriculture. Up to very recently this vast mass has been the most downtrodden and exploited. The expropriation of their common lands by the Diaz regime left them in a state of hopeless wretchedness from which they are only now beginning to recover. Today, due to the untiring energy of a few agrarian leaders members of the Mexican Communist Party, over a million peasants from the most important agricultural states, have been united into the National League of Agrarian Communities. This organization is the vanguard of the other 12,000,000, and any political or armed movement which does not count with its support is a lost cause.

For over a year now Mexican politicians have been preparing for the next presidential elections—although they are still a year away. In Mexico long before election time hundreds of mushroom parties from all over the country—and as soon as the election is over and all the political patronage has been distributed they quietly fold their tents... until the next time.

The Candidates

Up to a few days ago the presidential nominations numbered six to eight possible candidates. Now, however, the atmosphere has been cleared and three leading candidates have emerged—all generals:

1.—**General Serrano**—Minister of war under ex-president Obregón and until a few weeks ago, Governor of the Federal District

under Calles. He runs on an "anti-reelection platform." The original plan was to split the "no-reelection" forces by putting Serrano in the field. Serrano agreed to run as a straw candidate for Obregon. But apparently the possibility of snatching the presidency was too much for him and he broke his agreement. Now he is fighting for himself. Serrano lacks, at present, the backing of any strong social class in Mexico. He is supported by a small group in the army. Since he became governor of the Federal District he has acquired a reputation by maintaining secret gambling and drinking resorts and "high-class houses" for his military friends.

2.—**General Arnulfo Gómez**—In charge of military operations in the State of Vera Cruz; notorious for shooting down militant workers and peasants and for forcibly disarming the peasantry in his region. He sponsors the lost cause of the Catholic Church, defends the interests of the landed aristocracy, and is in the pay of the Doheny and Standard oil interests—Thus he has frankly declared himself the standard-bearer of the reaction.

3.—**General Alvaro Obregón**—Former president of Mexico. Although also a military man he has proven himself to be a rare exception to the average run of Mexican military chieftans. He has "shown himself capable of dominating the military machine and bending it to the social reconstruction of the country." His program is based on the desire to build a strong native bourgeoisie. He has the support of the petty bourgeoisie and part of the larger bourgeoisie. He is exceedingly popular with the major part of the army. For want of the necessary class political development to put their own candidate in the field, the organized peasantry and the Mexican Communist Party will support Obregon, as against the candidate of the reactionary forces, because he represents a more progressive tendency.

The Programs

A word of caution before going into detail on the programs of each of the candidates. Generally speaking, the programs of all political parties in the Latin-American countries are drawn up for the double purpose of confusing and misleading the masses of workers and peasants. And often the more reactionary a party or a leader, the more revolutionary the phraseology he uses. Especially is this true in Mexico where the country is rich and the spoils richer where the masses are largely armed and thru years of revolutions have become an active force. (It goes without saying, however, that from this indictment one excludes the programs of the Communist Parties and of the organizations under its control.)

1.—Serrano's Program:

General Serrano was nominated by the "National Revolutionary Party" (freshly founded for the occasion) in convention assembled at the end of May. The party adopted a program, the most important planks of which are as follows:

1.—Consolidation of the principles of the revolution (whatever that may mean.)

2.—Defense of the principles of "No-reelection."

3.—Campaign to bring the concept of democracy to the popular understanding (hot air.)

4.—Liberty of conscience within the limits prescribed by the laws of the Republic.

5.—Liberty of press.

6.—Encouraging laws furthering national economic independence.

7.—Establishment of loan banks.

8.—Fulfillment of the agrarian promises of the revolution (how definite!)

9.—Fulfillment of the revolutionary labor program.

10.—Rapid education of the army elements; creation of a fleet of light cruisers for the protection of the coast.

11.—Promote close relation with foreign peoples, especially with those close to Mexico in race, history, and language. Respect for existing treaties.

Only the very special brand of Mexican military cynicism can broadcast such a program to the masses. Those who wrote and those who read know that this is nothing but a vote catching program intended to attract the workers and peasants, the petty bourgeoisie, the opponents of the Calles policy towards the Church and anybody else who can be caught.

2.—Program of General Arnulfo Gómez:

The "National No-Reelection Party" (also freshly founded for the occasion) met in Mexico City at the end of June—nominated Gómez as their candidate for the presidency and adopted the following program:

1.—Democratization of the government through honest suffrage, no-reelection, cabinet responsibility to parliament.

2.—Democratization of the army, creation of a general military staff; improvement of the physique and the education of the common soldier.

3.—Democratization of labor; creation of small property-owner; **no violent and unindemnified expropriation of the land.**

4.—No retroactivity of the land and petroleum laws.

5.—Guarantees to foreign and native capital.

At this convention, General Gómez, who is a staunch supporter of the Catholic Church, said that Mexicans should see that their fellow citizens were allowed absolute liberty in all affairs, and that "any restriction of liberty of thought, religion and the press is a crime." His program is a bid to the present Catholic opposition, to the army; his "no unindemnified expropriation of the land" swings behind him the landowners; and his "no retroactivity" of Article 27 of the constitution is bait to the American government and a promisory note to Doheny and Standard for the millions of cold cash already advanced. His program is frankly opposed to the interests of the workers and peasants.

3.—Program of General Alvaro Obregón:

Realizing that he will probably be Mexcio's next president

Obregón is much more cautious in the formulation of his program. He makes no promises to any class or group. He issued a whole series of veiled implications based chiefly upon his past presidential record. These aim to reconcile the American government and the Mexican workers and peasants; the native petty bourgeoisie and "honest" American capital. No one better understands the utter impossibility of such reconciliation than the Mexican workers and peasants, and were it not for the fact that they have not developed their class organization sufficiently to have a candidate of their own, and were it not for the menace of the reactionary candidacy of Arnulfo Gomez, Obregon would not have the support of the masses.

In his manifesto he states that he bases his power:

First: on the peasants, because more lands were distributed under his administration than during any other.

Second: Upon the workers—whom he promises a satisfactory regulation of the labor code.

Third: The railroad workers, whose demands he says he always heeded. (This declaration has greatly offended the leaders of the Mexican Federation of Labor, (the CROM,) who have been trying all these years to smash this strong independent union.)

Fourth: The middle class. He goes on to say that he will uphold the Calles policy in the Church question and the position of the present administration on the petroleum and land laws. And

> "In so far as our policy toward the United States is concerned, we continue to maintain with energy the right which Mexico has as a sovereign state to give herself that legislation which best adjusts itself to the aims which this country is pursuing and to its interest without other limitation than that imposed on all states by international law.
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> "We should be extremely cautious with regard to investments which the imperialist interests of Wall Street attempt to make in our territory but **give every facility compatible with our laws to industrial, commercial and agricultural interests which may wish to come from neighboring countries to cooperate with us in the development and exploitation of our natural resources.**"

In answer to this declaration there appeared a significant news item in the New York Times of July 7, stating that "Alvaro Obregón's candidacy for president is accepted by this government as forecasting better relations if Obregón is elected." The item also reminds Mexico that the pledges which were made by Obregón precedent to recognition of Mexico by the United States provided that the retroactive clause of Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution would not be applied against the United States.

The above unofficial statement of the American government's "gratification" at the candidacy of Obregón leads one to believe that Obregón has made some tacit promise on the petroleum and land laws. It is most likely that the Supreme Court will be induced to render a decision favorable to the American oil interests.

The Mexican Labor Party and the Mexican Federation of Labor (CROM)

Strange as it may seem, the only groups that have not yet declared their attitude on the presidential candidates are the Mexican Federation of Labor and the Mexican Labor Party, both under the domination of Luis N. Morones, Minister of Industry, Commerce and Labor in the Calles cabinet. This does not, however, signify that the membership of these two organizations are unwilling to support Obregón as against Gomez. Nor does it indicate that they are banking on Serrano, the least likely of victory. Their decision has simply been postponed by Morones until September. One reason for the delay is the personal hostility between Obregon and Morones. Obregon is determined that Morones shall have as little additional power under his administration as possible, and Morones is determined to get as much out of Obregon as possible before he swings his two organizations into line.

The Role of the Mexican Communist Party

Small and scattered as the forces of the Mexican Party are no one who has worked with it will deny that it has done excellent work especially among the peasantry. To its efforts alone must be attributed the formation, strengthening and growth of the National League of Agrarian Communities with over a million members, affiliated with the Peasant International with headquarters in Moscow.

In the recent crises between the American and Mexican governments; between the Calles government and the Catholic opposition; the Party issued a manifesto which shows how fully it understands the principles and tactics of the Nationalist movements and the united front. The following are some of the most important provisions of the manifesto:

"In answer to the rebel Catholic reactionary bands in the Republic and in answer to a threat of a subsidized reactionary revolt, the Party declares the following:

"The refusal of the United States to renew the treaty regulating contraband is nothing but open aid to the enemies of the Calles government. Before the Calles administration there lie two roads—one leading to the left, towards the unification of the workers and peasants in an implacable fight against reaction—the other leading towards the right—towards political indecision, compromise, which sooner or later must inevitably lead to a union with the landowners and with foreign capital.

"Only through the complete expropriation of the land and its distribution among the peasants; only through the nationalization of large-scale industry can Mexico accomplish national reconstruction in favor of the large masses of workers and peasants.

"Today the immediate interest of the workers and peasants demands a close union between the proletariat and the petty-bourgeoisie in defense of the present government against the attacks of reaction and the threat of American intervention.

"The Communist Party of Mexico calls upon all organizations independent and hostile to the CROM, upon all the locals of the National Peasants Leagues, upon all the workers and peasants organized within the CROM, upon the members of the Labor Party, upon all the workers and peasants in general wherever they may find themselves to form a united front in defense of the Calles government against the rising reaction. The success of reaction will mean the complete extermination of the workers and peasants movement and the liquidation of the 1917 Constitution. The Party issues the following slogan to all of the above groups: FORM DEFENSE COMMITTEES, in each factory, in each workshop, in all the locals of the League of Agrarian Communities, in each union, in each hamlet, in every city. WORKERS AND PEASANTS DEFENSE COMMITTEES AGAINST THE REACTION!"

In the present political confusion the Party attempts to simplify and clarify the issues for the workers and peasants on a class basis. It has made the following analysis:

The professional politicians are participating in the presidential campaign, some under the slogan of "Reelection" others under the slogan of "No-Reelection." Well-known reactionaries are entering the race under the phrase—"Defend the principles of the Revolution."

To pose the problem of the presidential succession under the slogans of "Re-Election" or "No-Reelection" is to confuse the masses of workers and peasants. They should know that all political struggle is the struggle of one class or another for power, or the struggle of one faction or another faction of the same class for power.

In Mexico there exists, generally speaking, the following three social groups:

1.—The landowners—united with American and British oil interests.

2.—The bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie.

3.—The masses of workers and peasants.

Consequently the political struggle, and with that the question of the presidential succession—signifies a struggle between the above three classes. The landowners, the bourgeoisie and the petty-bourgeoisie are the classes that dominate at present, while the proletariat, although constituting the overwhelming majority, has not yet succeeded in developing the political cohesion necessary to enter independently into the political struggle.

The representative of the reaction is General Arnulfo Gómez.

The representative of the national bourgeoisie is General Alvaro Obregón.

The large masses of workers and peasants instinctively understand that in comparison with Gómez, Obregón represents a more progressive tendency; and for that reason support him as against Gómez. That, however, does not signify that Obregón represents the interests of the workers and peasants. On the contrary, the more conscious workers know, that once in power, Obregón will defend the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. The workers and

more advanced sections of the peasantry have no illusions about that. But these will support him in order to prevent the reaction from capturing power. At the same time the workers and peasants must begin to build an organization which will be able to represent and defend their own interests. They must begin to create their own political forces, with their own program, with a program based upon the class struggle. For such a step a united front is absolutely essential...

In answer to Obregón's recent manifesto the Mexican Communist Party issued the following statement:

"Obregón, leading military chieftain, represents the bourgeoisie and the petty bourgeoisie of Mexico. He represents the struggle of these classes against the feudal system and the financial and industrial hegemony of foreign capital. Obregón, yesterday military chieftain, is today the defender of the new national economy.

"The military problem of 1927, as in 1923, will be solved by the armed masses of peasants. The triumph of Obregón will terminate the struggle between reaction and liberalism, in favor of the young bourgeoisie.

"The program of Obregón is the program of national reconstruction—within the frame of capitalist production, but within a country constantly threatened by economic and military invasion of Yankee imperialism.

"In such a situation, the bourgeoisie, under pressure of American imperialism, must seek as allies the workers and peasants, if it is to preserve its power.

"We cannot realize national sovereignty without economic independence. The fundamental problem, then, is to solve the economic problem, which means the agrarian problem first, and secondly to develop a national industry to supply the needs of the agricultural masses.

"We esteem the words of General Obregón in his manifesto, against the imperialist interests of Wall Street, but we are convinced that the remedy proposed by him—to provide all kinds of facilities to industrial, commercial and agricultural interests of our neighboring country—in no way assures the 'definite consolidation of an autonomous and sovereign people' which Obregón claims as his aim.

"To create a socially independent economic basis—it is imperative to solve the AGRARIAN PROBLEM. In this respect the manifesto of Obregón promises little. He limits himself to reminding the peasants of what he did for them in the past but makes no promise for the future.

"The faith and confidence which the masses of workers and peasants have placed in the person of General Obregón, express the desire to unify all advanced and progressive forces in the country against the intrigues and the dangers of reaction—but at all times and under all circumstances, the workers must remember that the emancipation of the working class is the task of the workers themselves."