How Cardenas Built Up His Regime

By ELLEN WARD

(This is the third article in Ellen Ward's series on Mexico.
—Editor.)

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THE C.R.O.M. was an instrument of Calles and could not survive his fall. Today, it is reduced to a mere shadow of its former self. Cardenas set about encouraging a new combination of labor forces under a leadership that would be 100% loyal to him. Lombardo Toledano was chosen for this post and he organized the C.T.M. (Confederacion de Trabajadores Mexicanos). The C.T.M. was constructed from fragments of the old C.R.O.M. plus the independent unions. Toledano, himself an intellectual, writer, philosopher, ex-director of the National Preparatory School, ex-Cromista, did a good job of organization, and, since the federation was born in the Cardenas-Calles left-right struggle, it is unquestionably to the left of what the C.R.O.M. was during its declining period.

Toledano And Morones

Toledano is a much cleverer leader than Morones. He is much more articulate, less cynical and even his enemies will readily admit that personally he is an honest man. He is not motivated by greed or love of display or a yen for great wealth, as his predecessor was; he is moved solely by the desire for leadership and power. He is unquestionably a better influence on the growing labor movement than Morones, and yet his political role is not very different from that of his predecessor. Toledano bears the same relation to Cardenas as Morones did to Calles. When Cardenas broke a railroad strike in 1936, it was Toledano who had to curb the wave of indignation and protest and who had to direct it into harmless channels.

Toledano is still forced to work with a part of the corrupt machinery inherited from the old days and it is a matter of common knowledge that the Mexican Chamber of Commerce issues a list to trustworthy members to let them know how much it costs to "settle" a labor dispute. The list carries the name of each of Lombardo's lieutenants with a price after each name. Lombardo is, of course, aware of all this and he finds it exceedingly distasteful and uncomfortable but such is the material he has to work with; and it will be many years before the Mexican burocratic labor machinery will be cleansed of this evil. Such cleansing can come only if democratic control from below and initiative from the rank and file develops in the unions. So far, this has never existed in the government-controlled labor movement with a self-constituted leadership, installed from above. However, despite all these handicaps, Lombardo has succeeded in welding a much more closely-knit organization than Morones had before him. The consolidation of the majority of workers into the C.T.M. left very little effective labor opposition against Cardenas. Since his regime coincides more or less with the People's Front policy of the Stalinists, the Mexican Communist Party has also rallied to the Cardenas banner and has given unconditional, enthusiastic and uncritical support. It is even less critical than the supine C.T.M., which, at least, from time to time, attempts a critical analysis in its theoretical organ, El Futuro.

As soon as Cardenas felt that the workers and peasant masses had been consolidated behind him, he consolidated the personal dictatorship which is the characteristic form of rule in Latin American lands.

The Cardenas Dictatorship

Cardenas, directly or thru his agents, names all governors, senators, deputies, decides on who shall be the leader of each component section of his new political party which he has just created in preparation for the naming of his successor in the elections of 1940. And basically he is running his government in the interest of native capital. His dictatorship is thickly covered with pretty phrases of democracy and constitutionalism and it maintains itself without great difficulty because, up to the present moment, it still has the support of the army, the peasant-labor masses and, despite friction, the American government.

As soon as Cardenas was certain of his support, he began to rule in his own right. He eliminated the Calles men from all important posts and left them only where they could do no harm. He reconstructed his cabinet, ranging from the former leftist, General Mujica, to the conservative-Catholic general, Cedillo—openly the representative of large landowners and the Church—controlling a private army of some 10,000 men.

Then Cardenas established freedom of speech and the press and began to push forward, as fast as he could, and as fast as a semi-colonial land will permit, the program of economic expansion. In 1937, for example, 150,000,000 pesos were spent for railroad construction; 19,000,000 pesos for three dams to irrigate newly

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V. Progress

improving the lot of the underprivileged. They fought valiantly against the high living costs in Flint, Muskegon, Bay City and Saginaw, thus resisting the greed of profiteers and trusts.

The Auxiliary is now forming clubs for the children of the members of the U.A.W., called the "Auto Kids Union." The purpose of these clubs is to provide the youngsters with legitimate amusement, keep them off the streets and alleys, and generally help to direct their activity, particularly during vacation time.

The Women's Auxiliary is also leading the way in the campaign for a national health program that will provide medical care for those in need and health insurance as protection for the worker on the job.

Aid For The Unemployed

Shortly after our last convention, the most precipitous decline in employment in the history of the nation set in. Practically eighty per cent of the automobile workers were either out of work completely or on such short time that they were eligible for relief. Faced with this unemployment situation, we began the important task of securing proper welfare and work-relief for our members. We brought the full story of unemployment, as nearly as possible, before the President of the United States as well as members of Congress, and asked for immediate aid. Aid was secured, and hundreds of thousands of automobile workers in the city of Detroit and elsewhere were placed on relief during the unemployment period. In this, as in many other phases of activity, the U.A.W. has

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Perhaps even in Paris it will prove capable of giving its enemies a special 'dose'."

Cardenas Rule

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distributed lands; 50 Yucatan townships were provided with sanitary water supplies; 1,020 new rural schools were founded, 75% of these in Indian districts; over 2,000 new plans were passed for buildings in the capital; 54,000 dwellings were provided with sanitary conveniences; and over 500,000 acres were distributed to the peasants of the Laguna district.

Simultaneously with these activities, Cardenas began to lay plans for the reconstruction of the political organization, the National Revolutionary Party, which he had inherited from Calles. This party, whose very name was a joke on the lips of the entire country, was neither a party, nor national, nor revolutionary—only a very convenient instrument for carrying out the wishes of Cardenas in the various sections of the country. It had to be reconstructed to fit more closely the program of Cardenas to rehabilitate it somewhat in the eyes of the masses and it had to be reorganized in preparation for the naming of the candidate for the next presidency.

U.A.W. BOARD SCANS C.I.O. "PEACE" PLAN

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of the membership came from the Western Michigan organization under Regional Director Lester Washburn. During the course of the previous week, almost all locals in that region voted on the Lewis proposal and all rejected it without any exception. These were membership meetings not local executive boards. Included among the locals is the Lansing organization, with a membership of 12,000.