

MEXICO'S PRESIDENT BACKS DOWN BEFORE FIRM LABOR

By Linn A. E. Gale.

MEXICO CITY. — When Nikolai Lenin made the statement that a real Communist could hold office under a bourgeois government without surrendering his manhood or turning traitor to his revolutionary conscience, he cited the instances of Liebknecht of Germany and Hoglund of Sweden.

Today he could make the same statement again and cite the case of Celestino Gasca, Governor of Mexico's Federal District.

On Sunday morning February 27, there occurred in this city a most unusual conference — a conference which may go down in the history of Mexico as an event of far reaching consequences.

On Saturday night President Alvaro Obregon had summoned Governor Gasca to him and declared, that the advertised demonstration of 15,000 railroad men and other workers the following morning, must not take place. Gasca had told Obregon that before he was Governor, he was a worker, and he was still a worker who would never use his official authority against the working class. The two parted unable to agree.

Sunday morning Gasca with Eulalio Martinez, General Secretary of Mexico's One Big Union; Jose Lopez Cortes, Secretary of the Interior of the Mexican O. B. U.; Ezequiel Salcedo, chief of the government printing office and one of Mexico's leading Radicals; and two railroad strike leaders, went to the house of Obregon to have the matter out with him.

The argument that followed is unique in Mexican history and perhaps without parallel in the history of any country.

The Radical Governor of the Federated District and his comrades demanded that the President show his hand. Obregon replied with emphasis that the strike demonstration could not take place, that the strike being on the lines of the National Railways, was against the government, and that the government was determined to break it. He wound up by reiterating his order to Gasca to send out the city police with instructions to stop the parade.

Gasca is a quiet, unostentatious little man whom many workers do not yet fully know. He is more given to simple, sincere acts than to speeches and philippics. But when the test comes Gasca always shows the mettle of a man who stands by his convictions in spite of power and pelf.

When Obregon issued his ultimatum, Gasca, ex-shoemaker, ex-mechanic and always a worker and a Radical even when Governor, made his brief, simple and unmistakable answer.

"Mr. President," said the Governor, "I told you last night and I tell you again now that I am a worker. My duty is first of all to the workers. If my duty as Governor conflicts with that as a worker, you have right now my resignation as Governor. I shall stop no parade and break no strike. It is too late now to stop the parade anyway for the procession is already forming on the square in front of the statue of Charles IV, but even if there were time, I would obey no such orders. If you insist on having me obey you, I shall give you my resignation this very moment."

Obregon, dazed with surprise, pale and nervous, shifted about but made no answer.

Then spoke up Ezequiel Salcedo who sat side-by-side with Obregon in the late revolution, who worked day and night to overthrow the Carranza regime in the belief that the new one would be a proletarian regime, and who years ago was an exile in the United States where he fled to escape the wrath of Porfirio Diaz for engaging in "seditious" propaganda.

"Mr. President", declared Salcedo passionately, "we want to know once and for all whether you are with us or against us. We thought you were with us. That is why we supported your revolution. If we were mistaken, if we made fools of ourselves, we want to know it and determine our future course accordingly. Are you going to permit this demonstration and also permit us to win this strike, or are you going to try to stop the demonstration and arouse the opposition of the organized proletariat of Mexico?"

Again Obregon moved about uneasily and evaded a direct answer. "Regardless of the outcome of this strike", he said, "the Radicals ought to be satisfied. You have your men occupying some of the biggest offices in the government

— Calles, Secretary of State and head of the cabinet; De la Huerta, Secretary of the Treasury; Morones, head of the munitions factories, an office that is as important as a cabinet ministry; Villareal, Secretary of Agriculture; Salcedo, chief of the government printing office; Vasconcelos, rector of the National University; etc."

Salcedo flared up in rage. "Do you think the working class of Mexico is satisfied with a few government jobs?" he roared. "Do you think these few jobs are going to accomplish the salvation of the wage slaves of this country? Don't you know that all we can do is to appoint a few Radicals to good-paying positions in our respective department and to use a big share of our salaries for donations to help maintain working class propaganda and organizations, support the Institute of Social Science, our daily newspaper and other publications, etc.? Don't you know that the only reason why we are holding office under this as yet capitalist government is to get money and means with which to destroy that very capitalist system? We did not accept these positions for the purpose of patching up things and making the workers satisfied but for the purpose of obtaining resources with which to hasten the end of capitalism in Mexico. We have been accused at times of being your tools Mr. President, and of having surrendered our revolutionary convictions, but the charges were lies. We worked with you to a certain extent for it seemed to us the most practical thing to do but we only worked with you when your policies were inclined to help the workers. The minute you do anything against the Mexican proletariat, we shall fight you to the bitter end. And we know that not only Comrade Gasca but General Calles and Don Adolfo de la Huerta will stand with us and against you, if you take such a stand. De la Huerta has already told us that he will resign if you persist in this attitude. Calles is in Yucatan with Felipe Carrill and helping the Yucatan Socialists store up arms with which to resist any counter revolution that the henequen capitalists may start. Calles already knows what is happening here and by tomorrow you will have his telegram of resignation unless you yield to the wishes of the workers."

"Don't deceive yourself, Mr. President," continued Salcedo. "The workers made you and they can unmake you. Your revolution was a revolution of and by the workers. Maybe they were fooled but they will not be fooled again. I remember and so do you, the incident of Celaya. You had a banquet there in the closing days of the Carranza regime and we had to beg the prominent men of the town to accept tickets. They didn't want to come, were afraid and suspicious because so many workers and Radicals were backing you. Even after the fall of Carranza, in the election in which you defeated the Catholic candidate nobody voted for you except union men peasants and farm laborers. The business men stayed at home or else voted for Domingues. I warn you not to trifle with the rising proletariat of Mexico. Either it will get what it wants under your administration and you will permit it to do so, or it will overthrow your administration as it did that of Carranza and take what it wants by forces of arms. Do you believe you can betray your promises when the strongest men in your cabinet are with us and will, if necessary, fight with us? Do you believe that you can save yourself if the revolutionary Socialist governments of Yucatan and Campeche turn against you and the strong Radical movements of Chiapas and Tabasco unite with them? Never."

Obregon had heard enough and he was in no mood for talking. For nearly two hours he had been listening to the impassioned declarations of Gasca, Salcedo, Martinez, Cortez and the two railroad men. He turned suddenly, more nervous and uncomfortable than before, and said, "I shall not give permission for the demonstration but go ahead and have it without permission of the government. I promise you that you will not be molested."

Obregon turned abruptly and ended the interview. The workers' Governor and the representatives of Mexico's One Big Union filed out of the presidential residence silently, grimly, with jaws shut tight.

A few weeks before the Mexican proletariat, angered when second

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class mailing privileges were denied "La Lucha", forced the government to yield under threats of a general strike and by the pressure of Radical officials.

Now representatives of that same proletariat, aided by those same Radical officials, had forced the President of the Republic to abandon his shameful resolution to maul and jail thousands of marching strikers.

Moments later Salcedo, Martinez and Cortez were in the long procession of 15,000 marching men and making frequent and fierce speeches to the strikers, while Gasca, back in the offices of the Governor of the Federal District of the Republic of Mexico, was reiterating to the police heads the emphatic order to leave the parades alone.

The next move is to be made on the chessboard but be that move what it may, men like Gasca and Salcedo have furnished added proof that Lenin was right.

A revolutionist in office under a bourgeois government can effectively serve the working class.

A coward or a traitor is a coward or a traitor whether in office or out office.

It would be well for Communism if men like Gasca and Salcedo could occupy official posts in the bourgeois governments of every country and rob those governments of some of their venom.