

Revolution in Latin America

By BERTRAM D. WOLFE

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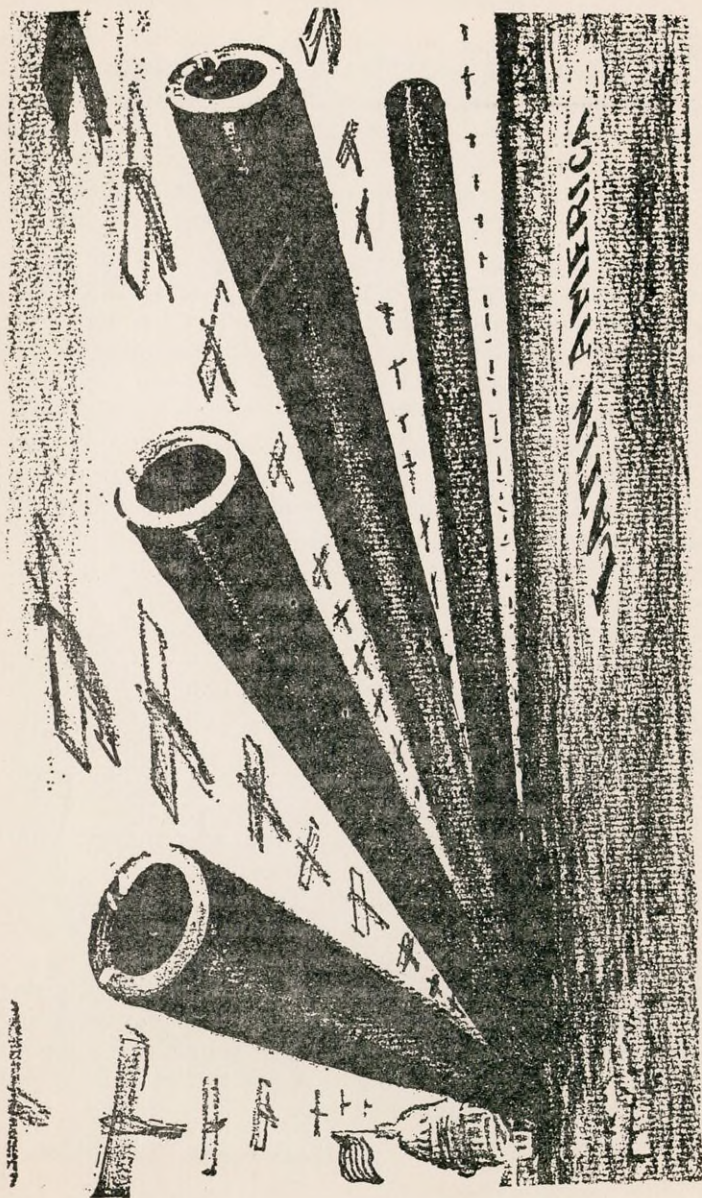
FOREWORD

Resistance to American imperialism in the countries of Latin America is growing. Such a little country as Nicaragua has been able to hold out for over a year against complete occupation by American marines. The heroic revolutionary army of Nicaragua aroused the sympathy and support of the toiling masses throughout Latin America and enormously strengthened their demand for a united struggle against the growing encroachment of Wall Street.

There is a strong basis for such a united struggle. With the exception of Brazil, all the countries of Latin America speak the same language. There is a general similarity of traditions, historical origin, class divisions and social problems, and a common cause to serve as a unifying force. The population of Latin America is almost equal to that of the United States. Its area is far greater.

The same powerful financial-monopolist clique that runs the government of the United States makes and unmakes, runs or destroys governments in Latin America. The same millionaires who send the police, national guard and army to break our strikes send the marines to the countries of the Caribbean. The open-shop, speed-up, wage-cutting, union-smashing, war-making imperialists of the United States are our enemies and the enemies of the toiling, suffering, oppressed and exploited masses of Latin America. The growing resistance of the Latin-American masses to Wall Street's imperialism is a guarantee to the workers of the United States that in fighting against the most powerful imperialist ruling class in the world we have a powerful ally in the revolutionary workers and peasants of Latin America. American workers should know more about their brothers-in-arms of Latin America so that an ever stronger union can be cemented for a common struggle against a common enemy in a common cause—the cause of the freedom of the oppressed toilers from the shackles of capitalist-imperialist slavery. To make the Latin-American revolutionary movement better known to the workers of the United States, we print this little pamphlet, giving some of the main features of the Latin-American movement and the conditions under which it struggles. The pamphlet is a reprint of a portion of a speech of Comrade Wolfe to the Sixth World Congress of the Communist International.

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Drawn by FRED ELLIS

"GOOD WILL"

Revolution in Latin America

By BERTRAM D. WOLFE

In Latin America, the imperialism of the United States is creating new colonies and semi-colonies. There are those who claim that in so doing it is playing in some cases even a progressive role.

It is perfectly true that the United States, in certain countries of Latin America, has found it necessary to overthrow certain reactionary governments. But not because the United States is playing an essentially progressive role. The reason is a *historical* one; namely, that Great Britain got into those countries first; that Great Britain picked in advance the best natural allies for imperialism in those countries—namely, the landowners and reactionary Catholic church.

When the United States came into the field to challenge Britain's privileged position, it was faced with the accomplished fact of the union between landowners and Catholic reactionaries with British imperialism, and in order to break ground for the forward march of the dollar it was necessary to further certain revolutionary forces in those countries. However, just as soon as Britain's puppet governments were overthrown, the United States tried to stem the tide of the revolutionary development which it had helped to set loose. On the contrary, where the United States is free to choose its allies, in those countries in Latin America where it can take its pick, it links up with the semi-feudal, Catholic land-owning reaction and all the most reactionary class forces in the country. Thus, for example, we find in a whole series of countries that the United States sets up fascist dictatorships, autocracies of the most brutal sort. I refer to such countries as Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, and Chili.

To turn to another field, we find this "progressive" American imperialism, so far as Liberia is concerned, attempting to go back to a system of chain-gang, chattel slavery.

U. S. INTERVENTION IN LATIN AMERICA

Now a few general remarks on Latin America. First, the situation in Latin America presents us with a whole series of new forms of semi-colonies of various grades and kinds, most of them maintaining their formal independence, while this formal independence comes to mean less and less as the power of the United States grows greater and greater.

Secondly, American imperialism has invented or further developed many forms of intervention. We can distinguish the following:

1. Military intervention, primarily in Mexico and the Caribbean countries. In those countries we have witnessed no less than 30 interventions by military forces in a period of a quarter of a century.
2. Customs control. The Orient is not the only portion of the world where the customs of so-called sovereign countries are controlled by imperialism.
3. Direct fiscal control of bank appointees, who are nominated by the President of the United States and formally approved by the puppet governments.
4. Military advisers.
5. The financing of revolutions and of reactionary dictatorships.

The third general observation I wish to make on Latin America is that the general process of American domination is from north to south, from near to far, from the Canal to the Straits of Magellan. Of course, it is not a regular march; there are jumps in the picture. For example, a country may be overlooked for a moment, if in another country a little further off, oil is discovered. Certain countries were temporarily overlooked in order to make the jump into Chili for copper and nitrates and other mineral wealth there. But the general march is north to south.

My fourth observation is that this march involves not only a struggle with the peoples of Latin America but also a struggle with British imperialism. A few figures to indicate the character of that struggle:

The United States has at the present time something like \$5,200,000,000 invested in Latin America. If we add Canada we find that the United States has invested in the New World—so-called—something over eight billions, out of a total of 13 billions which is invested in the world as a whole, exclusive of the war debts.

To date the United States has invested in Latin America an amount almost equal to Great Britain. You can calculate both of them in round figures at about 5 billion dollars; but the interesting thing about this apparent equality is that *before the war Great Britain already had 5 billion dollars invested in Latin America, and has today only \$5,200,000,000, whereas the United States before the war had only \$2,200,000,000 and has now equalled Great Britain. In other words, we find Great Britain's power in Latin America, as measured in economic terms, virtually stationary, whereas the Yankee dollar marches with giant strides.*

The fifth point I want to underscore is the importance of Latin America in the scheme of economy of the United States, and also its importance in the coming war period. Take oil. Venezuela today, with its oil resources scarcely touched, is the second biggest producer of oil in the whole world; the first being the home territory of the United States. Mexico is the fourth, Colombia and Peru have scarcely been opened up and are rich in reserves of oil. North Argentine and a section of Bolivia also show oil deposits. Metals—every precious metal and every non-precious metal—are found in rich abundance and in forms easy to extract. Raw materials of importance in making munitions are potassium and nitrates. There is rubber and, of course, agricultural products.

REVOLUTIONS IN LATIN AMERICA

Sixth, a word as to the revolutions in Latin America, as to their character and their content: The Latin-American revolutions are bourgeois democratic revolutions. They represent a close fusion of revolutionary movements primarily agrarian, with the struggle against American imperialism. However, the basic driving force in these revolutions is not the bourgeoisie, but the workers and peasants. This explains the vague socialist aspirations which are continually being expressed in these revolutions. It also explains the socialist phraseology, the radical gestures of the petit-bourgeois governments that take advantage of these revolutionary forces for their own purposes. Socialism in some parts of Latin America is as fashionable today as it was in continental Europe before 1848. All of the various forms of socialism mentioned in the Communist Manifesto you will find in Latin America: petit-bourgeois socialism, feudal socialism, bourgeois socialism and utopian socialism, along

with the genuine proletarian socialism of the communist movements that are developing in these countries.

I give only one example. During the electoral campaign of Calles and Angel Flores for the Presidency of Mexico, Flores, who represented the land-owning Catholic reaction with the support of British capital, posted all over the country a placard with his picture and the words, "I am a socialist and a revolutionary." You can imagine what revolutionary phrases the "socialist" Calles used if that was the character of the propaganda of the reaction.

In this connection I quote a warning of Lenin's which applies to the Latin-American comrades. He said:

"It is necessary to carry on a determined struggle against any attempt to cover with a communist mantle the not truly communist revolutionary emancipation movement in backward countries."

We have in Latin America, for example, such dangerous careerists as Haya de la Torre of Peru, who came to Moscow, who attended the Fifth Congress of the Comintern as a fraternal delegate, who came to the Third Congress of the Profintern as a regular delegate, and who has attempted to cover with the mantle of communism an essentially non-communist movement, and in this case a dangerous careerist personalist movement.

CLASS FORCES IN LATIN AMERICA

Seventh, a few additional remarks as to class forces in Latin America:

(a) We must not, in the first place, forget the great weakness of the national bourgeoisie in most of the Latin-American countries. All important industries, in most of these countries, are in the hands of foreign capital, as are the banks, means of communications, etc. Thus in Mexico, in the field of petroleum, the investment of native Mexican capital comes ninth on the list and even Cuban capital has more money invested in Mexican petroleum than have native Mexicans, Cuba being eighth. This weakness of the native bourgeoisie helps to account for the greater role played by the petit-bourgeoisie in Latin-American revolutionary movements.

(b) We must note the peculiar character of certain sections of the Latin-American petit-bourgeoisie. Intellectuals who are partially declassed play an important role out of all proportion to their numbers in the movements of Latin America.

There are two basic reasons for the existence of discontent among the intelligentsia of Latin America. One is that foreign imperial-

ism in general, and American imperialism in particular, tends to maintain autocratic governments in power for indefinite periods, until these degenerate into cliques of superannuated bureaucrats who leave no room for the young intellectuals turned out by the universities to find a career in the important sphere of government. This was one of the driving forces which made the students and the young intellectuals of Mexico virtually unanimous in their opposition to Diaz and his group after they had been in power for thirty years. A similar situation exists in countries like Venezuela, Peru, etc. Secondly, there is the tendency of American capitalist enterprise to employ as technicians, engineers, overseers, etc., Americans who are brought into the country especially for the purpose so that the only other field that might be open to intellectuals is thereby closed to them by imperialism. They have only one remaining field of activity, namely, opposition politics and anti-imperialists politics, and into this they tend to enter. They represent, however, a dangerous force, combining with the usual vacillating characteristics of the petit-bourgeoisie and intelligentsia a peculiar susceptibility to both open and direct bribery, being readily satisfied by a "share" in the government—an opportunity to lay their hands on part of the national treasury, or with employment by American imperialist enterprises as technicians, fiscal agents, etc.

(c) The proletariat in the Latin-American countries, with the exception of the most developed of them, is extremely weak. This is a reflection of the weakness of industrial development in general. Also, even where there is a proletariat developing it is still lacking in experience, organization, technique and discipline, due to the newness of the proletariat as a class. It is closely linked up with the peasantry, often made up of only recently "deruralized" peasants. This has, on the one hand, the advantage of making easier the leading role of the proletariat over the peasantry, but on the other infiltrates the proletariat with peasant ideology, making popular a sort of "narodnikism," which underestimates the leading role of the proletariat, idealizes the peasantry, and identifies the bourgeois-democratic agrarian revolution with the socialist revolution.

THE LATIN-AMERICAN PEASANT

(d) As to the peasantry, it presents some peculiar features in many of the Latin-American countries which makes it necessary to distinguish sharply between it and the European peasantry. Errors have been made by comrades here, because the concept "peasant" has been taken too mechanically and too literally in a European sense in judging peculiar Latin-American problems. The peasant in many Latin-American countries is not a landowner of even the smallest parcel of land. Economically speaking one might say he is not a peasant at all; he is a former joint owner of communal

lands or perhaps even of a small parcel of land on an individual basis, but the process of creating large estates, or dispossessing the peasant Indian communes from their communal possession of the soil, the process of enclosures, has removed him from the land, pauperized him and made him into an agrarian worker, or a rural pauper. However, he retains the tradition of having been possessor of land and the ambition of recovering the lands taken from him or his immediate forefathers. Oftentimes he does not even demand private property in land, regarding it with suspicion and aversion, but demands that the communal lands be restored to the entire village unit or tribal unit that formerly possessed them.

It is this which gives the Latin-American peasant in many countries his peculiar characteristics.

INDIGENOUS RACES

(e) Next, there is the complication of race to be considered. There are whole sections of inland countries in Latin America where Spanish is not the language of the people, where there are still vast Indian tribes with strong survivals of tribal organization—often strong enough to be basic and decisive for the social character of their movements. These Indian tribes speak their own language, retain strong vestiges of primitive communism in their tradition and their economy and in some cases have a powerful tradition of former tribal glory (Incas, Aztecs, Mayas, etc.). They view Europeans and even mixed white and Indian natives of the coastal and more industrialized regions of the country with suspicion and aversion and can rarely be led by those who cannot speak their own tribal tongue. The parties of Latin America in those countries where this state of affairs exists must work out a whole series of special measures to meet these problems, measures involving such matters as *self-determination for the indigenous races, special propaganda in their own languages, special efforts to win leading elements among them, special educational activities for those communists who are of Indian origin and who speak the Indian dialect, so that they can go back into the inner regions of the country and organize the indigenous elements.*

The history of the last generation in these Latin-American countries where compact indigenous tribes exist, especially where there are mountainous regions which have tended to protect this compactness and semi-independence, is characterized by a whole series of Indian uprisings, sometimes against foreign imperialist oppressors, sometimes against the landowners, sometimes against the native state bureaucracy—generally a fusion in different degrees of these three revolutionary movements. These uprisings constitute the greatest reserve of revolutionary energy that exists in Latin America, which reserve is only very imperfectly connected with the proletarian and agrarian peasant movements of the rest of the countries.

LACK OF PARLIAMENTARY LIFE

(f) Emphasis must be laid on the lack of bourgeois democratic and parliamentary traditions in Latin-American political life and the lack of such traditions and illusions among the masses. The weakness and oftentimes the virtual non-existence of the native bourgeoisie is of course the basic explanation of this. The petit-bourgeoisie makes up the state apparatus and often the officership of the armies. This state and army apparatus plays a large role in the life of Latin America and is one of the means of native exploitation of the indigenous and peasant masses of the various countries. A struggle for control of the treasury is quite literally an important force in the conflicts between the different so-called parties in Latin-American life. The "outs" are almost always ready to sell themselves to American imperialism if the British are tied up with the "ins," and vice versa.

(g) As to these rival imperialisms, the conflicts between them often result in liberating revolutionary forces in a country where they are about equally balanced. Neither of them is strong enough to run the country without utilizing some native elements. Each of them supports contrary elements and if one of them is tied up with the reaction, the other one often has to tie up with the progressive elements. The result is a continuous see-saw, as manifested in Mexico since the discovery of oil there. We may look for a similar situation now in a country like Venezuela, where oil has been discovered in large quantities and where British and American capital are in pretty even balance.

THE PAN-AMERICAN FEDERATION OF LABOR

Eighth: A word on the Pan-American Federation of Labor. When the ancient Spanish conquerors wanted to win what is today Latin America they sent Jesuit missionaries to prepare the conquest ideologically. Today the masses of Latin America are too rebellious for religion to accomplish as much as once it did. A more "radical" ideological weapon is needed. This the American bankers and state department have found in the labor lieutenants of imperialism. The leaders of the American Federation of Labor, Green and Woll and their henchmen, Morones, Iglesias, Canuto Vargas, etc., with their Monroe Doctrine of Labor and their Pan-American Federation of Labor, seek to paralyze the fighting will of the Latin-American masses, and pave the way for the new conquest of the continent. Comrade Martinez, a delegate to the Sixth Communist International Congress, did yeoman's work in exposing the imperialist role of these

new missionaries. But the American and Latin-American parties must many times multiply this work and set up against it the closest union of the working-class organizations of Latin America with each other, with the left wing of the American labor movement and with the R. I. L. U.

THE QUESTION OF WORKER-PEASANT PARTIES

Ninth: I think the Congress must categorically reject the proposal for the founding of workers' and peasants' parties in the Latin-American countries. Our primary task in Latin America is to establish communist parties, build them strong and make their line of demarcation clear. They must penetrate the mass movements of the workers and peasants, and lead these movements. Some comrades have been confused, particularly during the period of the forward march of the Kuomintang. It is one thing when we are faced with an already existing Kuomintang, and have to answer the question as to whether or not we shall work in it, another thing when we *create a Kuomintang* as an obstacle and a problem. Particularly in view of the weakness of the parties, the political backwardness of the masses, the lack of parliamentary tradition and the excessively big role played by the petit-bourgeois state bureaucracy and the petit-bourgeois professional politicians in Latin America, there is the danger that such elements will get control of the workers' and peasants' party. *The correct form for Latin America today is the worker-peasant bloc, with penetration and leadership by a steadily developing communist party.*

THE ARMING OF WORKERS AND PEASANTS

The tenth point—concerning the arming of the workers and peasants: In the various struggles against imperialism and against internal reaction in the various countries, the workers and peasants must enter as a separate force. The communist party must make clear its own program at every stage, must criticize at every stage the elements with which at times it must cooperate; must struggle consistently for the hegemony of those movements. At the same time we must pay special attention to the *organizational form* that the struggle manifests. For example, when elements of a still revolutionary character seek the support of the peasants and workers of Latin America, we must put down as one of the minimum organiza-

tional conditions *the right of those workers and peasants to separate armed detachments under their own leadership, with their own program, and maintaining the status of guerrilla forces in the general struggles that take place.*

This tactic has been applied with some success in Mexico, and as a result whole sections of the peasantry are armed today, and, in spite of the repeated efforts to disarm them, they retain their arms. This tactic must be applied to the various Latin-American countries as revolutionary situations are produced.

A NEW WAVE OF STRUGGLE

The eleventh point—There is a new wave of resistance against American imperialism; a new development of revolutionary forces in the agrarian revolution, and all the phases of the revolutionary movement in Latin America. This is particularly marked in the post-war period. I mention only a few instances: the long struggles in Mexico, the revolutionary struggle in Ecuador, uprisings in Brazil, in Colombia, in Peru, in Venezuela, in Bolivia, in Paraguay, in Northern Argentina; the sharpening struggle in Chile, which has only temporarily been defeated by the establishment of a brutal military fascist dictatorship. And above all, the heroic resistance that has been manifested by such little countries as Santo Domingo, Haiti and Nicaragua and in the other Central American countries to the aggression of the United States.

A recent newspaper carries reports of stirrings in a new quarter. Costa Rica has been quiet for a while, but we find here in an issue of a Costa Rican paper of May 18, 1928, that a motion of interpellation to the Secretary of Foreign Relations as to why they are not recognizing the Soviet Union, and a demand that the United States blockade be broken in this respect, was carried by the Chamber of Deputies. Of course, that does not mean that the Chamber of Deputies has become revolutionary. It means that there are stirrings among the masses, or these petit-bourgeois politicians would never attempt to frame such a demand.

The outstanding example of the new strength of the resistance of Latin America to American imperialism is the struggle in Nicaragua. Never before has Nicaragua, or any of the small Central American countries, been able to put up so brave a resistance for

so long a period. For a year and a half, in one form or another, the forces of national liberation in that diminutive country have been holding at bay the marines of the United States and carrying on, with more or less success, incredibly heroic guerrilla-warfare. Never before has such a struggle awakened so much echo in the rest of Latin America and gone so far towards unifying the revolutionary and anti-imperialist forces for a common struggle.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LATIN AMERICA

In the face of the dominant power of American imperialism in the world today, Latin America assumes more importance than ever; in fact, it moves up to the first rank among the vital questions that concern the entire Communist International. The United States and the Soviet Union represent the two poles of the earth today. Leninism has taught us where to seek and find allies against our most powerful enemies. It teaches us now that the whole Comintern must turn its attention to this natural enemy of American imperialism, this natural ally of the proletariat of the world—the revolutionary movements of the Latin-American peoples.

At the Fifth Congress Latin America was represented by one party and two league delegates for all of these numerous countries put together. The large representation at the Sixth Congress is an evidence that the Comintern has already turned its eyes in that direction and an evidence also of the rapid development of class relationships in Latin America. But the entire Communist International, and particularly the American section of the Comintern, must multiply by many times its attention and its aid to the communist parties and the revolutionary movements of Latin America.

Finally, I want to say that as far as the question of "Latin-Americanism," which has been raised in some of the discussion here, is concerned, we cannot slavishly accept the general proposals for Latin-American unity which are made by the petit-bourgeois intellectuals of Latin America. The proposal for a union of all the existing governments and countries as at present constituted in Latin America *is a fundamentally false and reactionary proposal*, because they include a whole series of puppet governments of American imperialism, and some governments which are still puppets of British imperialism.

We must raise the slogan of the union of the revolutionary forces, the workers' and peasants' movements of Latin America with the revolutionary workers of the United States; and we must add to that the slogan of the union of Workers' and Peasants' Soviet Republics of Latin America for a common defense against American imperialism, and for a common federation in a Soviet Union.



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