

RUMBLINGS IN LATIN AMERICA

(Thunder, 4 June 1960)

Latin America is famous for its revolutions. Simon Bolivar, the great Liberator first removed this area from Spanish colonial rule. Colonialism came to an end. This was the first era.

But soon afterwards followed a new era of imperialism. The big landlords and the reactionaries joined forces and assumed power. In most Latin American countries, these forces collaborated with foreign imperialism.

A feudalistic, imperialistic system developed, with the local "*caudillos*" becoming the junior partners sharing the spoils with foreign imperialism.

Two Tactics

Foreign imperialism, to gain an ally and thus to stabilise itself, did two things. (1) It made the local reactionaries perpetuate their feudal – large land holdings and land idleness – hold on the masses; and (2) it used them as its local agents.

This situation created not only grave social and economic problems. It also created jealousies. The result was revolution. But the character of these revolutions has been different. Not to note this is to fall into a grave error.

For instance, Mexican revolution, with people like Villa, Juarez, Zapata, were based on the people for definite objectives – social and economic changes like land reform, nationalisation, etc. And then there were the "palace" revolutions – revolutions caused by personal jealousies among the local ruling classes for prestige and money.

Venezuela

Venezuela is a case in point. In 1948, the Betancourt-Gallegos government was overthrown by force. The big oil interests played a big part. These big interests did the same in Iran with the overthrow of the Mossadeq Government in 1951, the PPP Government in 1953, and the Arbenz Government in Guatemala in 1954.

For ten long years the people of Venezuela suffered under the heel of the hated dictatorship of Perez Jimenez. Jail, terror and torture were the order of the day, while the oil companies made millions of dollars in profits.

The end came in 1957. The people rose in their wrath, took guns in their hands, and threw out Jimenez and his gang.

Several Attempts

Several attempts have been made since 1957 to overthrow the forces of democracy. The latest attempt took place in April last at the time when the Second Inter-American Congress for Democracy and Freedom was meeting in Venezuela.

The leader of this "golpe", (revolt, or coup d'état) was Castro Leon, formerly an air force leader in the Jimenez regime. His attempt started with an attack on San Cristobal, a city near to the Colombian border.

Support Expected

It was felt in some quarters that this revolt would not have started without the expectation of support from certain sections of the armed forces. In fact, the communists had apparently warned the Government before of this impending attack. At the same time they pointed out that certain sections of the armed forces who were in command during the regime of Jimenez dictatorship were disloyal to the Government.

On the first day of the revolt, the city of Caracas was tense. No one was sure what the forces would do. But the workers, youths and students made sure that they behaved in

the right way. They all came out on strike. The hotel where the Congress guests were staying was deserted – even the clerical desk workers left.

People Controlled

This action by the students, youth, farmers, and working class demonstrated the stage of political consciousness, understanding and development. They barricaded the streets; they directed traffic. They took over all the radio stations and newspapers. The Confederation of Trade Unions ran the only newspaper *Ceteve* printed in the crisis period. No one could speak over the private radio and television networks unless the workers agreed.

Political Strike

Our TUC should note well. The workers were not striking for immediate personal gains – wages and working conditions. This was a political strike.

They were striking to demonstrate to the armed forces and the reactionary elements in and out of the country that (1) they were prepared to fight to preserve democracy, and (2) that the reactionaries and the armed forces must be prepared for civil war if they support the "golpe" of Castro Leon. This is evidence of the political maturity of the people.

There is no doubt that the revolt failed because of this great solidarity of the people – workers, students, youths, farmers, national capitalists – in defence of democracy.

Incidentally, the military failed the Arbenz regime in Guatemala in 1954. This is why Fidel Castro has disbanded the regular army in Cuba. In its place Castro has his rebel army, backed by the people's militia – armed workers and farmers.

Economic Freedom

The struggle is now joined. 1960 is said to be Africa's year – the year of political freedom for Africa. This is also freedom year for Latin America with emphasis not on political but economic. Castro has set the pace for economic freedom.

From now on no doubt we will hear many more revolutionary rumblings in Latin America – not the "palace" affairs we are accustomed to in the past, but genuine people's revolutions *a la* Castro.

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