

Communism to the South of Us

There are several factors favoring it in Latin America, but we could counter it by supporting true liberals.

By WALKER LOWRY

IN the world-wide contest between the United States and Soviet Russia, the nations of Latin America are becoming increasingly important. Notwithstanding repressive measures taken recently against the Communists in Brazil and Chile, the Communist movement in Latin America remains aggressively active.

Party membership is estimated to be 300,000. If a free election were held in the twenty republics the Communists might poll a total vote of more than a million. Communists have control of important labor unions. They have won a few seats in the legislative chambers of Cuba, Venezuela, Peru, Uruguay, Colombia and Costa Rica.

What does this Communist movement mean for Latin America and for us? The answer depends on certain fundamentals in Latin-American politics which are too often forgotten: (1) the extreme poverty of a people now thoroughly resentful of that poverty; (2) a political tradition largely barren of democratic understanding; (3) a latent, deeply laid race problem; (4) Catholicism of great strength; (5) an intense and mounting nationalism, and (6) an economic situation highly favorable to collectivism.

Between the Rio Grande and Tierra del Fuego there are twenty nations. They hold sovereignty over an area greater than the United States and Europe combined. That area includes swamps and deltas, deserts and rain forests, the Andes and the pampas, coastal plains and high plateaus. Between the cane fields of Cuba and the jungles of the Amazon, the cattle kingdoms of the pampas and the fruit farms of Costa Rica, the pine forests of Chile and the coffee plantations of Guatemala, there is little similarity.

THE people are equally diverse. The Negroes of Panama, the Indians of the Bolivian plateaus, the mestizos of the Amazon, the Spanish in Costa Rica and Buenos Aires, the Portuguese aristocrats of Rio, have little in common. The culture of Brazil, nourished in slavery, liberally infused with African blood and paced to a leisurely tropical tempo, has no counterpart in the rhythm of Mexican life, half way between the conquistadores and the Aztecs and molded to the austerity of the Mexican plateau.

Comparable diversity in culture and tradition can be found everywhere. This unending variation qualifies, if it does not altogether destroy, almost every generalization about the Latin-American nations. Even so, in the six fundamentals that have been named, the Latin-American republics betray not only their common ancestry in Spain and Portugal but their common history in the New World. These six factors affect every aspect of Latin-American life, and inevitably they affect also the Communist struggle for Latin America.

Of first significance is the abject poverty of the Latin-American peoples. That poverty is beyond the comprehension of

most North Americans. It means a starvation diet of rice, fish and bananas or the local equivalents; a single-room family home of adobe or split bamboo; chronic infection from malaria, intestinal parasites and venereal disease; and no medical care. It means no schooling. This poverty is the central fact in each Latin-American nation.

Poverty in Latin America is national as well as personal. There is a notion widely held that Central and South America are rich in resources. This is largely myth. In an area of 8,000,000 square miles there is inevitably some wealth:



A Mexican boy on his way to market.

gold and silver in Mexico, for example; iron in Brazil, oil in Venezuela, copper and nitrates in Chile, tin in Bolivia and fertile plains in the Argentine, Brazil and Venezuela.

This is a record of wealth, however, only if the count is in dollars as the wealth of a man is computed. On a comparison of nations, or of the continents, as North America might be compared to South America, it is a record of near destitution. With the possible exception of Brazil, no one of the Latin-American nations can be said to have a truly abundant natural endowment.

THIS poverty extends to politics and political tradition. As individuals, South and Central Americans are ardent lovers of freedom, with a capacity for rebellion against authority which is almost unlimited. But democracy is not anarchy. Democrats must believe not only in individual freedom but in freedom tempered by majority rule. The democratic faith requires more than the willingness to struggle and sacrifice for the liberty of one's person; it requires equally vigorous efforts on behalf of every fellow-citizen. Here the Latin-American comprehension of democracy most conspicuously fails.

No Latin-American Government has yet learned to respect, day by day and year by year, the moral principle that political success imposes public responsibility. No people of Latin America has learned to demand that its statesmen consistently abide by that principle. No Latin-American Government, except in moments of rhetorical passion, believes deeply in the

sovereignty of the people. No people of Latin America, except in moments of rebellion, asserts a compelling and continuous popular sovereignty.

The failure of Central and South Americans to develop an enduring democratic tradition should cause no surprise. The nations of Latin America have not been provided with an instructor in democracy as England was instructor for this country. The conquistadores brought with them no long memory of Magna Charta or a Bill of Rights, no fresh faith in freedom of religion, of expression or of conduct.

IN the era of colonization Spain believed in blood, wealth, honor, pride, discipline and church, never in the common man, in the individual conscience, in public freedom. The Spanish rebel was no hero in the hearts of men. He was a heretic and a national disgrace. The priests and the conquerors who brought Spain to the New World came to subdue a new land, not to escape an old one, to convert the Indians to the true faith, not to preach to them freedom of choice in the worship of God.

Nor has the situation in Latin America been appreciably changed by immigration. The stream of immigrants has not been large and, in addition to Spanish and Portuguese, it has been composed chiefly of Italians, Germans and more recently Japanese. In the twentieth century it would be at least idle to argue that these people have displayed a genius for democracy.

The revolution against Spain was not the work of a rebellious humanity. The leaders, Simon Bolivar, San Martin, Moreno, Sucre, Miranda and their fellows, were frequently moved by devotion to high ideals and a fair vision of a truly democratic society. Their success, however, did not come because the citizen mass shared that devotion. The revolution did little more than to substitute the rule of the rich and well-born of Latin America for the rule of the rich and well-born of the Iberian peninsula. It changed the persons, but not the principles of government. Bolivar wrote painfully on many occasions of the failure of his people to understand democracy.

To add to their burdens our southern neighbors have a race problem. The Spanish and Portuguese, unlike the colonists of North America, did not drive the Indian from the land; they bound him to it as serf and slave. Thus through most of Latin America there is today at the foot of the social scale a large Indian population, set apart by race and without material resource, education or any significant degree of political awareness. To improve the situation of the Indian is just now a popular Latin-America project.

THE Catholicism of Latin-American republics is as characteristic and as significant as the presence of an Indian population. There is in the United States no institution which holds a position comparable to the position of the Catholic Church in Mexico and on south. The priests, with access to every home, speak each week to a large portion of the population. Violent anti-clericalism with vociferous demands that the church release its wealth and retreat from political activity seems to be a (Continued on Page 37)

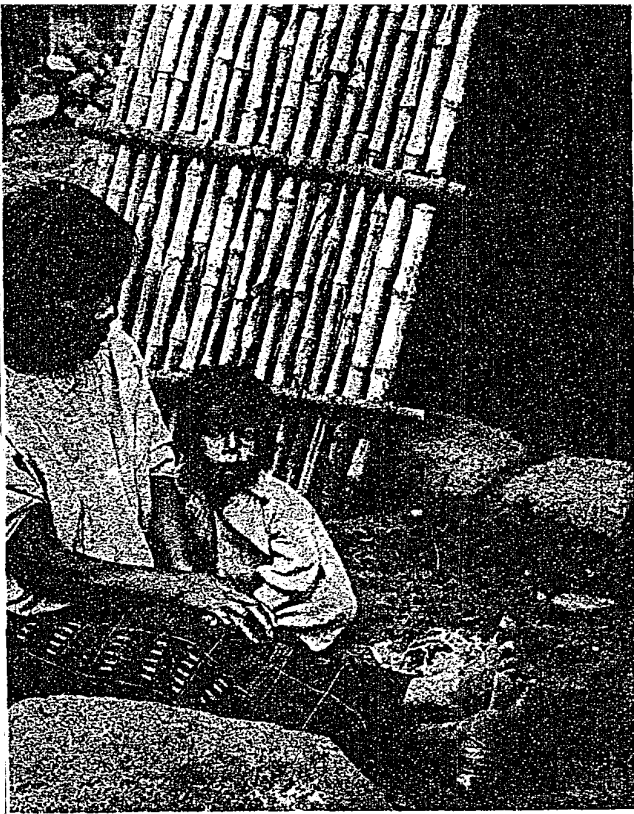


POVERTY—Three generations of an Indian family in a Guatemalan village. "The

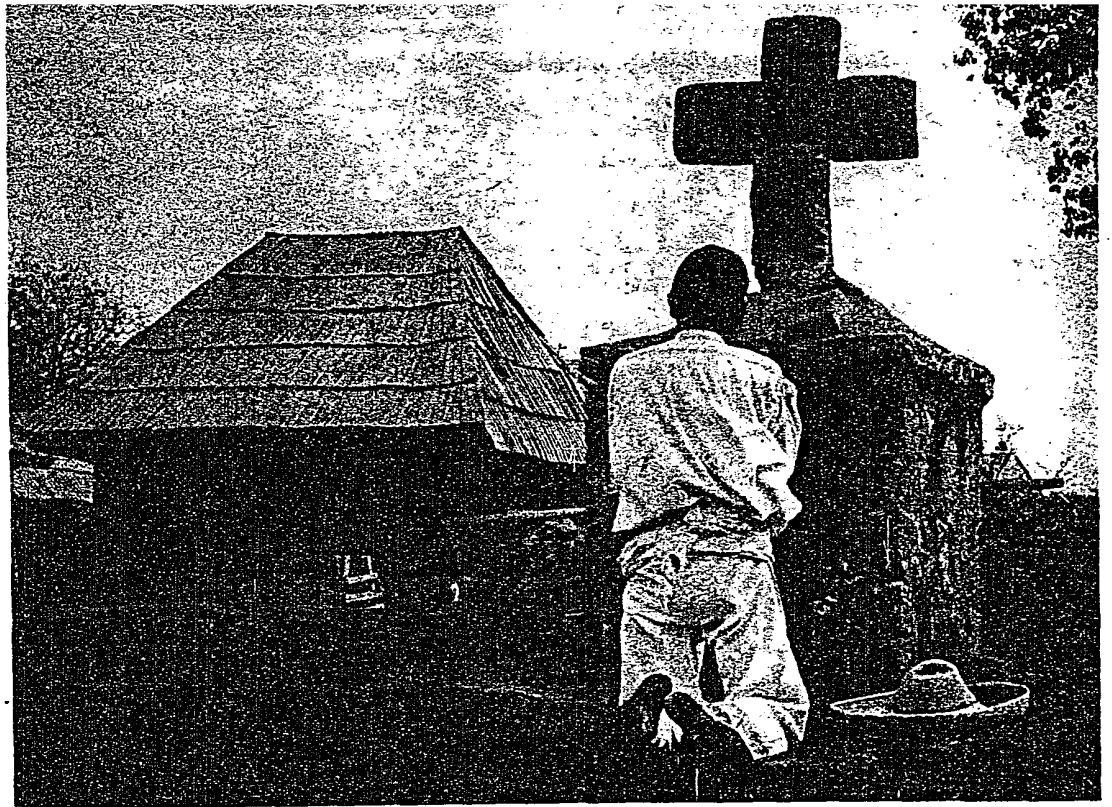


ECONOMY—A textile worker in Colombia. "Stern, economic fact will compel many

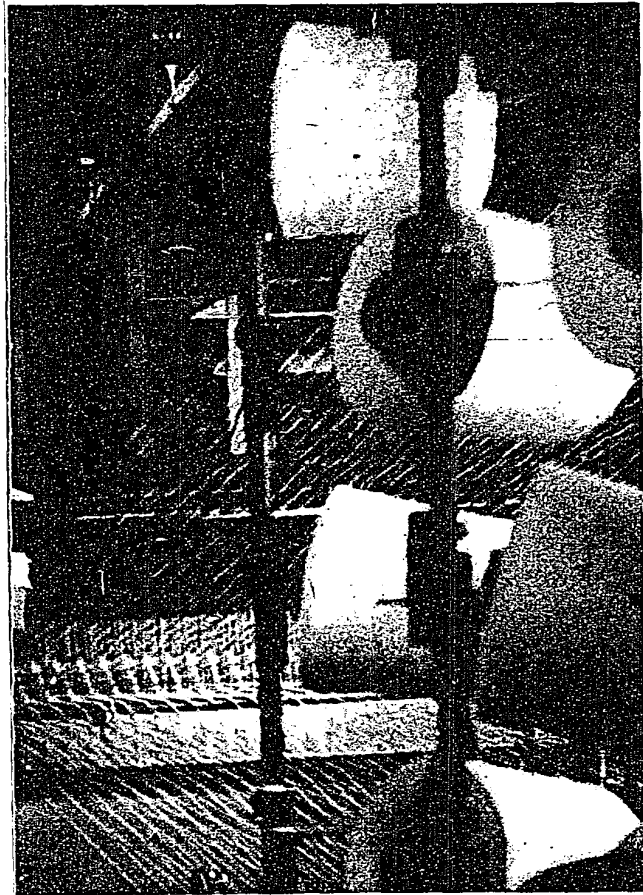
FOUR FACTORS IN LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS



abject poverty of Latin-American peoples is a factor of first significance in the struggle for and against communism."



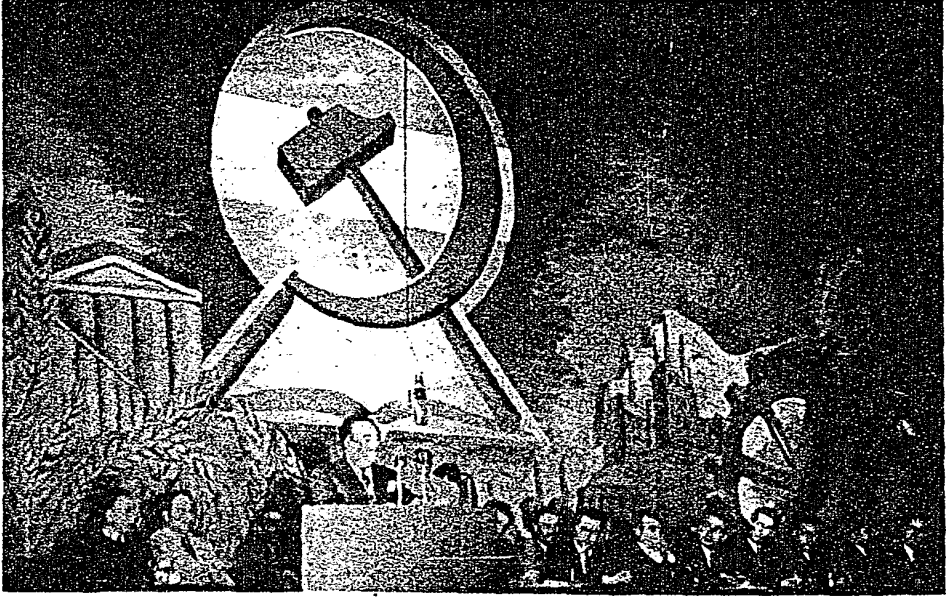
RELIGION—A farmer prays in a Mexican churchyard. "Catholicism is the most serious obstacle to the possible triumph of communism. There is no institution in the U. S. with a position comparable to that of the Church in Latin America."



Latin-American Governments to create and control industry; this is an approach to one of the minimum objectives of communism."



NATIONALISM—Panamanians protest granting air bases to the U. S. "Pride of nation is intense and constantly mounting. Communists with their Russian ties are handicapped by Latin-American repugnance against foreign domination."



"El Partido Comunista Argentino" holds a meeting.

Communism to the South of Us

(Continued from Page 10)

custom relegated to the past.

As Latin-American countries are Catholic they are nationalistic. Nationalism is a kind of worldly faith, the mundane counterpart of Catholicism. This pride of nation is not new. The rivalries between the Latin-American republics are long-standing, bitter and irrational. This nationalism, sometimes morbidly sensitive and frequently arrogant, is today enjoying a period of vigorous growth fostered by the rising tide of social reform.

FINALLY, there is the economic situation. Latin America, if there is ever to be an end to degrading poverty, must be industrialized. This is recognized by radical and reactionary alike. Industrialization in many of the republics can come only through direct government action. In earlier days industry was built largely by foreigners spending foreign money. The Latin-American investment of British and American citizens alone amounted, before the war, to about \$12.4 billion.

This money from abroad exacted of course the customary tribute: foreign management frequently at odds with national welfare and the profit, if any, flowing to foreign shores. Today, as might be expected, most Latin Americans are persuaded that profit export must be restricted and that the exploitation of Latin-American resources must be controlled by and for the benefit of Latin Americans. Thus to the discerning foreign investor Latin-American projects become increasingly unattractive. Each of the southern republics, in these circumstances, finds itself more and more dependent upon local financial resources. In many instances there is no private fi-

nance remotely adequate, in spirit or in strength, for industrialization.

The political conclusion that local resources and profits should gladden local lives is certainly understandable. That conclusion, however, does not of itself persuade local financiers to invest in large projects undertaken by home talent without technical or management skill. Latin Americans have as little difficulty as the rest of us in choosing between political theory and private welfare.

It is likely, therefore, regardless of political theory, that stern economic fact will compel many Latin-American Governments to create and control the basic industrial, communication and transportation systems upon which the welfare of the people depends. This, of course, is an approach to one of the minimum objectives of communism.

THERE are other respects in which economic reality may compel Latin America to approach the minimum objectives of communism. Housing is one example. In order to improve housing conditions Latin-American Governments are doing two things. They are compelling industry, and particularly industry under foreign dominion, to provide housing for industrial employes; and they are planning and building large housing projects for lower class nationals.

Government influence on living conditions is not confined to housing. Latin America, for example, often suffers from exchange shortage. Controls are then created to prevent capital export and to limit and select the articles which may be imported. This exchange shortage, once only casual, now threatens in many coun-

tries to become chronic. Many Latin Americans may therefore find that except for local products, their purchases will henceforth be confined to those goods selected by the Government for import.

RATE of pay in Latin America is not beyond Government influence. That influence may be exercised directly by decrees modifying salaries and wages or indirectly through heavy-handed Government intervention in collective bargaining. Or, as Perón insists, it may be through Government control of union policies. In any event the Latin American who arises from his siesta some afternoon to find his Government managing the production economy of his country, nominating the foreign goods to be sold in the market, collecting his rent and determining the amount of his pay, can scarcely claim surprise.

This steady increase in Government activity which is so characteristic of large portions of Latin America will obviously not be displeasing to the Communists. With the Government occupying most of the horizon, the leap to complete control would be much easier. There is in most Latin-American countries no native political faith to feel revulsion at Communist tactics; no articulate public opinion to protest the destruction of civil liberties; no conviction that the foundation of all government is the guarantee of individual freedoms. Moreover, most Latin Americans feel that they have, quite literally, nothing to lose by social upheaval.

Thus the absence of genuinely democratic political beliefs, the poverty of the people and the inevitability of extensive Government activity make Latin America a fertile
(Continued on Following Page)

Communism to the South of Us

(Continued from Preceding Page)
field for Communist labors. Even so there is no guarantee, or even an immediate probability, of Communist success. There are countervailing factors of great weight. There is, for instance, the caliber of Communist leadership.

The radicals of South America are more vocal than militant, more noisy than disciplined. They are totally deficient in Lenins or Trotskys. Latin America has nothing resembling the unflagging will to win, the fanatical sense of party loyalty, the contemptuous rejection of compromise which seems to have been characteristic of the Russian group. Since the efficacy of any minority ultimately depends upon the intelligence of its leaders and the zeal of its members, Latin - American Communists have not yet by any means fully exploited the strength of their position. This failure in leadership and party ardor may of course be cured by time, but the cure is nowhere in sight.

A SECOND and much more serious obstacle to Communist triumph is the Catholic Church. The church has never been friendly to communism. Without renouncing its mission it never can be. Catholic discipline controls wide areas of conduct which the church does not lightly relinquish to any totalitarian state. More important, Catholics find in church doctrine a set of values notably inconsistent with the Communist creed.

The mounting nationalism of the Latin-American peoples also works against the Communists. For many years the political "outs," for example, have vociferously contended that the political "ins" were under the thumb of the United States. The popularity of that argument never fails, not because of a cheerful dislike of the United States but because every politician understands that Latin Americans are mightily offended by the idea that they are ruled by a foreigner. The Communists with their Russian affiliation are seriously handicapped by Latin - American repugnance against foreign domination.

THE Communists are handicapped, too, by the fact that Latin Americans have no expectation of granting political power to the Indians. Lazaro Cárdenas was as true a friend as the Indians of Latin American have recently known. His agrarian reforms and the literacy program conferred great benefit upon the Indian population; but Cárdenas never planned that the future of Mexico should be in Indian hands. Not for one moment was it intended that the Indian proletariat should become master of Mexico.

Latin-American progressives generally are of a similar complexion. They agree that the

Indians are entitled to care, to land reform, to education and to a general civilizing but not, except on a day too distant for reckoning, full equality and never are they to become not only equals but masters. Thus the Communists cannot, except at the cost of solidifying their opponents, base their activity on any appeal which would elevate the Indians to political pre-eminence. They must find their strength at a higher level on the social scale. Thus the Communist groups are today most active in the trade unions.

UNIONS generally, however, are more Socialist than Communist in outlook. They are more anxious to improve wages and working conditions than to establish the dictatorship of the proletariat. There is no proof as yet that the objectives of the Latin-American unions are fundamentally more radical than this. The attempt to capture the union group is likely therefore to oblige the Communists to modify their doctrine to make it congenial to the new converts. By that modification the Communists will become increasingly in competition with the more moderate liberals who traditionally have been kindly received by the laboring classes.

The outcome of the struggle between liberalism and communism is yet to be seen, but one possible result is illustrated in Mexico. Mexican unions enjoy success and power in a position well to the left of New Deal liberalism but substantially short of communism. In that atmosphere Communists have had little success and their strength is almost negligible.

ASSUMING, however, that Communists elsewhere win victories denied to their Mexican brothers and that they succeed in capturing this second strata of society, what then are the prospects, in the face of church, nationalist and racial barriers, of a complete Communist triumph?

The final answer would depend upon the location of true power in Latin America. To locate that power has rarely been so difficult as now. Until recently it was almost always true that military power and political power were synonymous. The ruler of the army ruled the state. Today this simple system is breaking up. The consequences are nowhere fully revealed and there are wide local variations in the degree of change.

In Argentina, true enough, there is no difficulty in seeing that the old alliance of wealth, army and demagoguery works with a deadly purpose. But who can say where power lies in Cuba, in Chile, in Mexico or in Colombia? Political strength has plainly fallen
(Continued on Following Page)

Communism to The South of Us

(Continued from Preceding Page)

away from the old family combinations but how far the shift has gone, and precisely where, will be known only when there comes in each country a decisive test of power.

ONE thing, however, is comparatively plain: the decline of the conservative forces has not yet left them helpless. These forces, backed by the church, supported by the resources of private wealth and sustained by radical antipathies, are still far too strong to permit immediate Communist success.

This does not mean that Latin America is forevermore safely within the capitalist fold. Far from it. In economics the future of Latin America is indubitably Left. The demands of the people that steps be taken to relieve their poverty can no longer be ignored. That relief will require government action on many fronts and government participation in many phases of life. How far the leftward shift will be no one can positively know. Much depends on world events.

Depression in the United States would be everywhere, the best friend of world communism. Wholesale devastation of the Latin-American republics by a third world war would undoubtedly speed the leftward trend. A great Communist leader, another Lenin, could himself do much. But if one may rashly assume a reasonably orderly world the most plausible prediction for Latin America is that, with appropriate and sometimes radical local variations, the twenty republics will move toward socialism, with increasingly large areas of life gradually falling into government hands.

AMERICAN foreign policy for Latin America must therefore recognize the inevitability of this trend toward a planned society for our sister republics, remembering that communism, while a long-run possibility, has no prospects for immediate success. Most important, we must realize that it is a foolish thing for this nation, in a wave of hysteria over communism, to support the enemies of the Latin-American people. The measure of radicalism is always the strength and stupidity of reaction. The more rigid the resistance to change, the more violent and ruthless the force that breaks that resistance.

The best aid we can give to Latin-American communism is to come to the assistance of the Latin Americans who seek to maintain their private interests against the needs of their fellow-citizens. Our most effective anti-Communist policy is to support the liberals and those who would see the Latin-American peoples prosper even though socialism is the road to prosperity.