

"Tell me, Senor, why did you spit on my Vice-President?"

by ANTHONY N. D'ELIA

REPEATEDLY, we, the Latin American students, and others, have pointed at the mistakes your country has made in the field of Latin American economic relations. All we get in reply is slogans, cliches, novelities like "the law of supply and demand," originalities like "the free enterprise system," or insults like "aren't we giving you enough money?"

But don't you want money?

Now, we do not want gifts, except in catastrophe areas. We are not spitting on people for money. We have inherited all the defects of the Spanish soul, but also some of its virtues. We are proud, however poor. We have dignity, in the Spanish sense of the word, which means self-respect.

Well, then, what do you want?

What we want is fair payment for the sweat of our people, and for the juices of our soil, when they supply a need of another country. With that we would live, and build up our own capital, and develop. As long as the weight of the advanced economies is allowed to tip the scale, permitting the rich countries to buy cheap and sell dear, we shall continue to be poor, and you will not have a growing market for your exports.

Are you suggesting that we should have freer trade with Latin-America?

Yes. This injustice against us and this suicidal practise against the U.S. economy are being practised in the name of the tired slogan "free trade," which however does not apply when our goods have to go through the

American custom houses. When we try to stabilize the prices of our products at a fair level that will permit us to live and to grow, and to buy your electronic gadgets, we are labeled "pink," or "socialistic," or whatever may be in vogue. "Free enterprise" has to mean feast or famine for our people, and more famine than feast.

Can you give me an actual example?

When my tiny country buys in the United States, as it does every year, \$5,000,000 worth of wheat, because we are not in the wheat latitude, we pay a price that has been stabilized for years, by means of an International Wheat Agreement, because it would not be fair for our people to eat bread at the expense of the American farmer.

If there were no International Wheat Agreement what do you think would happen to the American farmer?

He, the U.S. farmer, producing the wheat we eat, might have to send his daughter to the university to study advanced sociology, in a Chevrolet some years, instead of a Cadillac, if the blind forces of supply and demand were allowed to flow, like uncontrolled floods. Personally, I wish he could send her in a Rolls Royce, to study Psychokinetics, or cosmic rays. If this can be accomplished by raising the price of wheat half a cent, we have no choice, we will just have to pay it.

I've been told that you have just finished an economic survey of Yuca-

tan. Will you tell me about it?

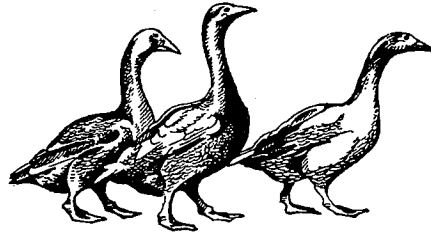
Yes. It is a unique case study. Probably the best example you could find of a country dealing almost exclusively with the United States, and mainly in one product: sisal fibres and twines for U.S. agriculture. However, I know of no other product being exported, so unprotected against the "one way" blind forces of the "law of supply and demand." On a well run farm used as the case study, the work is done by 45 men and 30 mules. Since even misery has its own system of priorities, the mules are less under-fed than the men, mules are expensive, men are cheap. All men and all mules, together, cost the employer \$40 a day. Nevertheless, the owner is losing money. When his decorticator breaks down, and he orders spare parts from the U.S., two American mechanics at \$2.50 an hour will earn as much money as the entire 75 living persons on his farm.

Should American foreign policy concern itself with Yucatan's economy?

Of course, Out of self-interest, if for no other reason. Your Wisconsin farmer can buy baler twine at eleven cents a pound Cif. New Orleans, and probably saves about one thousandth of a cent on every ten pounds of butter. And then his son cannot get a job in an automobile factory, because people in Yucatan cannot even afford shoes, let alone automobiles. And then you have a surplus of 750,000 cars in the United States, because the internal market can buy no more. You forget that 170 million Latin Americans south of the border, if the prices of their exports were adequate, could make Detroit run 36 hours a day.

Let's get back to my original question, "Why did you and your people spit on my Vice-President?"

It wasn't your Vice-President we spat at, it was something abstract, called, "policies." However, this is strictly a discussion within the family of American republics. The time has come when we should start thinking, not—my country, right or wrong, but my civilization, right or wrong.



They clap in Gaol the man or woman
Who steals the goose fom off the
common;
But let the bigger knave go loose
Who steals the common from the
goose.

(Postcard received from an English Georgist)