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Warning that "communism is knocking at our very doorstep," this author elaborates on his proposals for a "hemispheric Marshall Plan," necessary for all Latin America and Venezuela in particular.

Venezuela under Betancourt

By C. A. HAUBERG

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EARLY in the nineteenth century one of the most influential reformers of all time, Jeremy Bentham, wrote in his *Catechism of Parliamentary Reform* that the purpose of government was to bring "the greatest happiness to the greatest number." In the spring of 1960 the president of Venezuela justified his new four year plan by declaring the purpose of government to be the "greatest possible well being to the greatest number."¹ A consideration of the time lag between the two pronouncements surely causes one to wonder! Why the long delay in the lands south of the Rio Grande?

To answer this question brief comparisons are necessary because the utilitarian ideal has had a lasting effect in England as well as in Anglo-America. In England this point of view was advocated by many and by 1832 it began to have a profound influence on public opinion.² Inasmuch as the Great Reform of 1832 was followed by a series of laws (Factory Act of 1833, Poor Law of 1834, and so on) directly concerned with social,

economic and political conditions, we might say that the modern social service or welfare state was born here. By this time too Adam Smith's system of *laissez faire* was no longer giving complete satisfaction. Wealth tended to be concentrated in the hands of a few, whereas masses of people worked long slavery-like hours and lived in abject poverty. Men questioned the existing system and began to advocate the more even distribution of wealth as a noble aim. After 1832, in England we begin to see the marriage of two concepts—liberty and order: local authorities and the central or national government cooperating in the various social areas (poverty, labor, and so on) to provide a reasonable amount of supervision and thus a greater total liberty. During the following generations reforms in suffrage, and labor-business relations, as well as in education, had in large measure realized Bentham's dream in England. Somewhat later, by more or less the same methods, similar results had been achieved in Anglo-North America. But why the time lag in Latin America?

In the first place there were differences. The hardy adventurers who landed in Virginia and Massachusetts on the *Sarah Constant* and the *Mayflower* came to settle in the New World for economic, political and religious reasons, whereas the Ibero-American *conquistadores* who came on the *galeones* were impelled largely by lust for conquest and gold. England had been stirred much more profoundly than Spain and Portugal by both the Renaissance and the Reformation. For example, one could rather easily trace the influence of Martin Luther's doc-

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¹ *New York Times*, April 30, 1960, p. 6: 1.

² W. E. Lunt, *History of England*, Harper's, New York, 1957, p. 643.

trine of the "priesthood of all believers" on radical sectarian movements such as the Brownists and the Separatists who before they landed at Plymouth drew up the Mayflower Compact. There is no act in Colonial Hispanic American history comparable to this. Furthermore the settlers on the North Atlantic coast brought with them a heritage that included such potentially democratic factors as the Magna Carta, the common law, and a religious attitude which would produce the Toleration Act of 1689. In Anglo-America there was no Inquisition. With such a background it is not surprising that 1776 produced many prominent men who might be labeled "born chairmen." Compare this with the Latin American colonies where the long arm of Spain held sway.³

The legacy of *Los Reyes Católicos* (Ferdinand and Isabella) was an absolute paternalism which did not encourage self-government. This also colored the mercantilism of Spain in favor of the Crown and the privileged classes. The *alcabala* was a high sales tax which killed the goose that laid the golden egg because the resulting high prices caused dishonesty and smuggling. And the kindest thing which can be said of some of the regulations would be that they were unintelligent. Latifundia (large holdings or *haciendas*) was another contribution of the mother country which has produced evil results. Spain bequeathed no healthy middle class and the privileged groups as well as the Church built up their feudal realms utilizing the *encomienda* or *repartimiento*. Literacy was low, and little was done to encourage elementary and secondary education.

If we concede that the goal of the Western Hemisphere is effective democracy for all races and nationalities, the Spanish and Portuguese colonies possessed one advantage not enjoyed by the Anglo-Americans, namely less racial prejudice. Greek, Jew, Muslim, Goth, Latin as well as Negro met and intermarried in the Iberian Peninsula previous to the period of conquest and consequently this process went on in the New World encouraged by the *conquistador* and at times the priest as well. In the long run, "Civilization may be described as the spark that ensues when opposing ethnic elements come in contact,"⁴ but in the short run such intermin-

gling brings problems. The resulting mixtures—mulattoes, zambos, mestizos, as well as gradations too difficult to classify—were as a rule relegated to an inferior caste position. When the wars of independence severed the political bonds with the mother country the privileges hitherto enjoyed by the *peninsulares* were taken over by a Creole oligarchy and "the Colonial Period lived on."⁵

Add to the above factors the tremendous geographical difficulties associated with extremely high mountains, as well as the problem of the tropical jungle infested with such diseases as malaria and yellow fever and we can visualize much better the obstacles faced by the new countries formed when Napoleon overran Spain and Portugal after 1807.

Practically all the general conditions mentioned above applied to Venezuela which broke from Gran Colombia in 1830. Long regarded as one of the poorest of Spain's colonies, Venezuela enjoyed the honor of supplying Simón Bolívar, the George Washington of the wars of independence, but she suffered from the heavy drain in men and money.

Divided by race and by geography the leaders in this area set up a national government before there was a nation and called it Venezuela.⁶ What was more unfortunate, they patterned it after the United States and made the people supreme and sovereign—so the Constitution states. Good intentions notwithstanding, "every people comes sooner or later to that kind of government which the facts demand."⁷ Although Bolívar refused all offers of a crown he apparently realized the difficulties when he stated that "The relics of the Spanish domination will last a long time before we succeed in annihilating them."

Land and People

On the map, Venezuela's 352 thousand square miles look something like a giant

³ Much of what is said of Spain holds true for Portugal as well.

⁴ Morris Jastrow, *The Civilization of Babylonia and Assyria*. Lippincott and Company, Philadelphia, 1915, p. 120.

⁵ In Latin American history *peninsular* refers to a Spaniard born in Spain whereas Creole refers to a Spaniard born in the New World.

⁶ Early explorers (1499) who first sailed into Lake Maracaibo were struck by the sight of villages built on piles along the shore. Reminded of Venice, they called the region Venezuela or "Little Venice."

⁷ James Bryce, *Modern Democracies*, Vol. I, p. 204. Quoted in Mary W. Williams, *The People and Politics of Latin America*, Ginn & Co., N.Y., 1938, p. 324.

mushroom slightly askew to the east. On the south it almost touches Brazil at the equator, is bounded on the east by British Guiana, on the north by the Caribbean Sea and to the West by Colombia. In size Venezuela is larger than the combined area of Texas and Kansas. Inasmuch as the country is wholly within the tropics and very mountainous in places, the climate is vertical rather than latitudinal. The lowest regions are *tierra caliente* (hot: 75°–80°) and around Lake Maracaibo are recorded some of the hottest averages of South America. Between 3000 and 6000 feet in elevation, the region is cooler (65°–75°) and known as *tierra templada*. This is the "zone of coffee." Above this we find the "zone of grains"—*tierra fría* 6000 to 10,000 feet (55°–65°)—with the extreme cold region, the páramos, above 10,000 feet to the snow line. The important crop found in the highest altitude is the potato, which reaches an upper limit of approximately 10,000 feet.

On the basis of population (slightly over 6.5 million), Venezuela can be divided into two regions: the inhabited and uninhabited. In the first there are above eleven persons per square mile, and in the other less than one. This distribution is caused by geographical factors which divide the country in four main regions.

In the South are the Guiana Highlands which have been associated with mineral wealth and are at present producing high grade iron ore. In Central Venezuela and north of the Orinoco River are the *llanos* (vast grassy plains) which have furnished pastures for the millions of cattle that have grazed here for centuries. In the North is the effective national part of Venezuela which includes the Federal District, Caracas, the capital, along with most of the people and most of the appurtenances of modern civilizations. In the East is found a lake area that has furnished the product which has colored the history of Venezuela in the twentieth century.⁸

Maracaibo and Oil

Until the twentieth century the low swamplands of the Lake Maracaibo region were considered one of the poorer areas of Venezuela. Here a few Indian fishermen living in villages built on poles eked out an

existence. South of the lake there were a few sugar, cacao and coconut plantations. All this was changed by the magic of oil. General Gómez was largely responsible for this. He so regulated the oil concessions, which were in great demand after 1918, that the public treasury (and Gómez) were insured a substantial share. By 1930, the revenue of the government was four times as great as in 1915 and eventually Venezuela stood second to the United States in oil production. It emerged from the depression period of the 1930's free of debt.

By way of summary we might say that Venezuela was a country rich in minerals, rich in geographical beauty, rich in racial mixtures, rich in military tradition but poor in government.

Dictators

After Bolívar's ideal of a united South America was shattered by revolt, he prophesied in despair, "Our America will fall into the hands of vulgar tyrants; only an able despotism can rule America." Bolívar proved a good prophet. Since 1830 Venezuela has had possibly a dozen and a half "strong men" who might be called tyrant dictators. How many were "able despots" depends on the measure used, but five tower above the rest as noted or notorious leaders.

José Antonio Páez, the mestizo peon, was first and undoubtedly the best of the long list. He declared for independence in 1830 and was president or bossed the presidents from that date until 1846. In 1861 he returned to his country from exile in New York and ruled as outright dictator for two years. Páez organized the government, encouraged agriculture, industry, immigration and built some schools. He is rated second to Bolívar as a national hero.

Antonio Guzmán Blanco dominated as president-dictator from 1870 to 1888. He is the only one of the early leaders whose background was that of a gentleman; he was educated in the fields of law and medicine and stressed education and culture. Nevertheless Guzmán Blanco was cruel and ruthless as a dictator and is sometimes compared to Porfirio Díaz of Mexico. As in the case of Páez,

⁸ A detailed treatment of the geography of Venezuela can be found in Preston E. James, *Latin America, Odyssey Press*, New York, 1950, Chapter II; and in Fred A. Carlson, *Latin America*, Prentice Hall Inc., New York, 1952, Chapter XVIII.

stability brought progress during this period and Blanco demanded honesty in government from lesser officials. By this time coffee was the principal item of trade and wise tariff laws promoted the product. Among other achievements Guzmán Blanco did much to beautify Caracas and might have served much longer as an "able despot" if his dissipation and philanderings had been somewhat more curtailed. On one of his frequent visits to France he stayed too long and the people revolted against the "Illustrious American" who remained in Paris, comfortably rich until his death in 1899.

Cipriano Castro (1899–1908) was possibly the least desirable of the early tyrants. For nine years he ruled in an arbitrary, absolute manner. Critics were exiled, jailed or murdered. Like Guzmán Blanco he demanded adulation, and portraits and statues of the "Supreme Chief," the "Moses of the Republic," were everywhere. More dissolute than his predecessors, he finally succumbed to his excesses, and, broken in health, sailed for Europe. His trusted lieutenant, Juan Vincent Gómez, took over after his departure.

Gómez was possibly the most "able" and also the most cruel of the Venezuelan dictators. Like Cipriano Castro and Pérez Jiménez, who comes later, he was an *Andino* (from the Andean highlands) who typified the friction which exists between the people of Caracas and the mountain Indians. For 27 years (1908–1935) Gómez ruled Venezuela with an iron hand but he never won the respect of the *Caraqueños*. Gómez had no formal education and came up the hard way as a cattle hand. Even before he entered politics he had acquired considerable wealth in cattle and land. As previously indicated Gómez, nicknamed *El Brujo* (the sorcerer), was very shrewd in his dealings with the foreign oil companies. Like some of the other dictator-presidents, he ran the country as though it were his private estate. Gómez owned ranches, haciendas, roads and industries. On one of his farms, "Maracay," he built a palace which would have incited the envy of a Louis XIV. His fortune was estimated at \$200 million when he died. It is said that Gómez neither drank nor smoked but evidently fell short of being a Puritan. Estimates of his illegitimate progeny vary from four score to several hundred.

El Brujo's rule was harsh and murderous. He used a powerful army, spies, and numerous police to crush all opposition. Critics and those who attempted revolt were often subjected to gruesome forms of torture that brought death or permanent injury, mental as well as physical. The slogan for the "Rehabilitation" program of Gómez which he hung up everywhere along with his picture was: "*Union, Paz y Trabajo*" ("Union, Peace and Work"). The *Caraqueños* translated this into "Union in the prisons, Peace in the Cemetery and Work on the *carreteras* (highways)."

The death of Gómez at 78 brought on a stormy reaction of resentment. The people of Caracas roamed the streets burning and sacking the homes of the numerous sons and henchmen of the man whom Congress had entitled *El Benemérito* (the well-deserving) but who now became *el bagre* (the catfish). The people emerged from the filthy prisons to breathe the fresh air and enjoy the sunlight.⁹

After the demise of Gómez there was a rather brief democratic interlude or trend, to be darkened again in 1948 by another *Andino*, Pérez Jiménez. A three-man army junta that had ruled from 1948 was overthrown by Jiménez in 1952, when it appeared that a "free election" was going 2 to 1 in favor of the opposition. Jiménez, the dominant member, rid himself of his associates and had himself declared president in 1953 for a five year term. On the surface, Jiménez seemed to bring much progress to Venezuela. One observer called the visual results "absolutely outstanding." Once installed at Miraflores Palace, Jiménez set in motion what was to become an efficient and ruthless dictatorship. The New National Ideal was proclaimed and this resulted in a frenzy of public works. Hotels, harbors, industrial plants and other improvements seemed to indicate progress. Some of these were useful, some ill conceived, and they all cost millions in graft and "kick backs." Like Gómez, Jiménez is believed to have acquired a fortune (approximately \$250 million); but unlike Gómez and despite millions garnered from petroleum, he left oil-rich Venezuela with a debt of hundreds of millions of dollars.

⁹ A good summary of the dictators is found in Hubert Herring, *A History of Latin America*, Alfred A. Knopf, 1953.

Critics were exiled, jailed or "silenced" à la Gómez. Furthermore, in the shadow of the beautiful hotels and other public buildings were hundreds of thousands who lived in hovels. Half of Venezuela's children had no schools.

Finally, many factors caused various groups to turn against the dictator: students, members of the army, business men and lastly powerful leaders in the Church. After a desperate attempt to hold a "plebiscite" in his favor late in 1957, Jiménez was forced to flee the country on January 23, 1958. Another period of dictatorship and cruel oppression had come to an end and the people emerged into the sunlight again.

Democratic Trends

Although Jiménez succumbed to the immediate pressure of naval and air force opposition, it is significant that the new regime which won the election held later in 1958 was civilian in nature. This democratic trend had started much earlier. In the last years of the Gómez period opposition occasionally lifted its head and often students were involved. Probably the first "exclusively liberal" movement was organized by "The Boys of '28" to oppose the continued rule of Gómez. The movement was suppressed; some of the youthful agitators were exiled, some remained in Venezuela. Practically all were later associated with leftist groups, parties or factions. One of these, Rómulo Betancourt, sought refuge in Costa Rica where he was active in the formation of the Communist party of that country. He severed his connection with this group later.

After the fall of Gómez (1935) the generals, business leaders and landholders tainted by their association with *el bagre* continued in power. There was no leader. Eleazar López Contreras assumed the presidency and put on a show of reform. He eliminated some of the sinecures and announced a three year plan, but he also rigged the election of 1940 in favor of another officer, Isaías Medina Angarita. Medina followed a moderate policy in politics, cooperated with the United States in World War II and allowed considerable freedom. As a result, opposition parties organized, the largest being *Acción Democrática* which was headed by Betancourt. Apparently con-

vinced that Medina was about to rig the election in 1945 and allow the return of López Contreras, this party rose in revolt and took over the government in the name of the people with Betancourt as provisional president.

In five months Betancourt issued 226 decrees which indicated his direct concern with the general welfare of the country. Rents were slashed, electric rates were cut, a land reform was instituted and new arrangements for a "50-50 per cent split" with the oil companies were negotiated to provide for a more just distribution of Venezuela's petroleum wealth. Furthermore, in 1947, a free and open election (the first for Venezuela) resulted in the election of Rómulo Gallegos, popular hero and novelist, by a vote of four to one. It appeared that a new era had dawned. The new president, in his inaugural address, pledged full democracy and stated that all parties were to be "allowed an open eye and a loose tongue."

But Venezuela was still plagued by the legacy of its past. Gallegos was an idealist who forgot to reckon with the old oligarchic elements—some corrupt army officers, businessmen and landowners. He was overthrown by an army coup d'état (1948) manipulated by Pérez Jiménez who was cleverly biding his time to assume the presidency for himself. Jiménez was unable to rig the election of 1952 in his favor. *Acción Democrática* had been outlawed but supported by U.R.D. (Democratic Republican Union) in the cities and a clerical party in the rural areas and the early returns showed a two to one lead for the opposition. As a result Jiménez instituted a tight censorship and announced that he had won by an overwhelming majority. The constitutional assembly handed him a five year term early in 1953. Inasmuch as his "reign" has already been characterized, we shall proceed to the democratic period which followed Jiménez.

When Jiménez was ousted in 1958 a provisional government was set up headed by Admiral Wolfgang Larrazábal. It appeared that a brighter day had dawned for democracy on a new frontier. Immediately steps were taken to eliminate the old repressive measures which characterized the brutal regime of Jiménez. Exiles began to return and parties began to operate in a democratic

manner. Attempts were made to eradicate the graft and corruption from government and government business. This was imperative because Venezuela, despite its great wealth in oil, was now in debt. All this was being done while the country prepared for its second free election; coalition possibilities were considered by various parties but did not materialize. Larrazábal was expected to win but instead Betancourt won easily in a campaign which was democratic and dignified, presumably because of pre-campaign promises that the winner would form a coalition government.

In his inaugural speech (February 14, 1959), Betancourt advocated among other things closer cooperation with the O.A.S. and good relations with the United States. He also promised many general welfare measures: diversification of industry and agriculture, deep concern for the promotion and development of iron ore and petroleum wealth, and a host of reforms of a social nature—better housing, medical aid, improved educational facilities, measures to combat unemployment as well as more friendly relations with the Church. Since the inauguration this program has been going through a period of crises. Even before Betancourt took office trouble appeared. The hallowed 50–50 split between the government and foreign oil companies was changed to a 60–40 split in favor of the government and was made retroactive for 1958. Inasmuch as this would result in a big loss to the companies it was resented and the president of the biggest company, Creole Petroleum (Harold Haight), stated that the government had “ruptured” the mutual agreement and that the climate for foreign investment was drastically altered. It augured well for the new regime that this man was replaced by Arthur T. Proudfit after Haight had been declared *persona non grata*.¹⁰ Oil was the mainstay for the economy and consequently the budget was in bad shape.

The huge short term debt resulting from the graft and unwise spending of the Jiménez period added to the burden. Furthermore Betancourt was promoting the very ambitious welfare program which we have already described. Prices were rising and much of the food was imported; in fact, 1959 saw \$152 million spent for staples such as wheat and

corn with the daily consumption of eggs costing \$30,000.¹¹ The land situation was especially bad; fewer than two per cent of the people held over 70 per cent of the land and 350,000 peasants enjoyed neither land nor work. Many lived outside the oil economy in abject poverty. Despite the obstacles, Betancourt insisted that the country “should never again witness the spectacle of two women ready to give birth occupying one bed.”

Factors beyond the control of Betancourt were partly responsible for the problem. The Suez crisis had caused Venezuela to increase its production and when the Middle East got back in the market prices went down. It has also been estimated that Venezuela might lose one-third its normal trade in oil; Cuba, for example, has gone over to Russia. Concern over this problem caused Venezuela to send a delegate, Pérez Alfonso, to the International Petroleum Accord held at Bagdad in the summer of 1960. After five days of negotiations the five oil-producing countries (Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait and Iran) formed the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries and reached almost complete accord on oil policies, especially on an agreement to maintain steady prices and to avoid dumping.

Because the success or failure of Betancourt's program depends to a large degree on facts and forces outside Venezuela, especially the attitude of foreign business interests and the United States, it should be stressed that his program, although paternalistic, is moderate. He has made it clear at various times that he does not intend to nationalize the oil industry and that he intends to maintain good relations with foreign businessmen and countries.

Although Betancourt by the spring of 1960 had achieved the honor of being the only popularly elected president of Venezuela to stay in office a full year, his future did not seem bright. There was a budget deficit, the dollar reserve was dropping, and apparently it would be necessary to arrange a loan to shore up the declining economy and promote the general welfare reforms. Throughout the summer and fall of 1960 the figure

¹⁰ *Business Week*, January 3, 1959; *Time*, February 16, 1959.

¹¹ *Time*, February 16, 1959.

needed was estimated at \$300 million, but either the financial situation worsened or plans for reform increased, because by December the figure had reached \$900 million. Apparently the loan was to be used only for productive purposes and especially in the field of industry and agriculture. Almost two million acres of land had already been distributed and more distribution was contemplated. Furthermore, specific plans were being considered to diversify agriculture, raise iron ore production, and increase the tourist trade.¹²

How Strong Is Betancourt?

Despite Betancourt's rather auspicious beginning there was opposition to his program both from within and from without. It should be remembered that the ousting of Jiménez was accomplished with the cooperation of the military forces and that they were accustomed to privileges.

The Communists have never been a strong force in Venezuela and do not seem to be so now. In the last free election they cast 160,000 votes and were not included in the coalition parties which agreed to support Betancourt after his election.¹³ Robert J. Alexander in his book, *Communism in Latin America* (1957), concluded his summary of Venezuela by stating that the Communists were at that time a truly minor element. The best ally of the Communists according to this author was the United States because:

The United States had shown a willingness not only to maintain formally friendly relations with the highly unpopular military dictatorship but to go out of its way to pay homage to this regime.

Another outside factor which must be considered is the stand taken at the O.A.S. meeting at San José, Costa Rica, relative to the condemnation of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo of the Dominican Republic for a bomb explosion (June, 1960) which killed Betancourt's aide-de-camp and wounded several others, including the president. Apparently the evidence presented by Venezuela to the investigating committee was sufficiently strong, because the conference voted for a diplomatic break and a boycott on munitions. At the same meeting the question of Cuba was considered, possibly part of a package deal. Betancourt had apparently agreed to

go along with condemnations of Cuba but his foreign minister, Ignacio Louis Arcaya, refused to cooperate unless the statement was modified to please Cuban Foreign Minister Raúl Rao.

Trujillo was condemned and this was a "sweet victory" for Venezuela at San José but it led to a party split at home. The official attitude became cool when anti-Betancourt statements issued from Cuban Finance Minister "Che" Guevara and especially after pro-Castro elements began to stage demonstrations in Venezuela. All three coalition parties (A.D., C.O.P.E.I., and U.R.D.) joined in a statement condemning the intervention of foreign groups. This did not end the trouble, however, and throughout September and October this difficulty culminated in a series of riots and disorders.

Betancourt's shaky position was made even more precarious in September when the United States Department of Agriculture announced that instead of cooperating in the economic boycott of the Dominican Republic, it would increase that country's sugar quota by 322,000 tons (part of Cuba's share). Venezuela papers carried many articles charging the United States with failure to implement the letter and spirit of the San José declaration of August, 1960. Finally a formal note of protest was sent to Washington, D.C. The United States answered the charges by claiming that it had acted in accordance with the wording of the San José agreements, which called for breaking off diplomatic relations and the stoppage of arms sales. Furthermore, the reply explained that the two cent per pound favored nation treatment had not been afforded the Dominican Republic.

The political reaction was that the United States had found a legal loophole to avoid carrying out the spirit of the sanctions, and the businessmen of Venezuela joined the political parties in a joint protest against the action of the United States. Differences of opinion over the San José declaration relative to the Cuban situation gradually grew worse and when Betancourt announced a

¹² *New York Times*, Dec. 14, 1960, p. 14; *Hispanic American Reports*, Dec., 1960, pp. 711 ff. For much of recent material these reports have been used; they are invaluable.

¹³ The three coalition parties were *Acción Democrática* (A. D.) which was the president's party, and the largest group, C.O.P.E.I. (Christian Socialists) and *Unión Republicana Democrática* (U. R. D.).

new cabinet (November 21, 1960) without any U.R.D. members, naturally that party went into opposition. This whole affair tended to encourage the leftist groups.

The riots and pro-Castro demonstrations which followed caused much trouble for Betancourt. Students and leftist groups demanded an alliance with Cuba, ouster of foreign oil companies and land reform carried out in Cuban style. A week of rioting at the end of November left 10 dead, 126 wounded and 550 arrested. Apparently the trouble was caused by a small minority of the leftist elements; even labor and student groups were divided. At any rate, the President was forced to call in the army in a "bloodless coup" to establish peace. The army proceeded to take over the university campus, opposition papers were shut down, some rioters were jailed and constitutional guarantees were temporarily suspended. Betancourt characterized the outbreak "as another step in the perfectly coordinated plan of the Communist party and the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria*" (M.I.R. or Revolutionary Movement of the Left).¹⁴

Despite the trouble both from within and from without, Betancourt ended the year 1960 on a note of confidence. Most groups seemed to support his program. After the November affair A.D. and C.O.P.E.I. students demonstrated in his favor and apparently the great mass of the people were behind him. Leaders of the coalition parties, labor unions and the armed forces also reflected this support. Even Arcaya, who had resigned as a result of the San José stand against Cuba, condemned the violence and urged the people to back the duly elected government.

Recommendations

Apparently the promotion of democracy on new frontiers is an accepted principle in the United States. Presently, communism is knocking at our very doorstep. This situation demands serious consideration of the following suggestions or recommendations.

The United States should place greater emphasis upon Latin America in general and upon Venezuela in particular. Possibly the time is ripe for a hemispheric Marshall Plan; if Betancourt is important to America we must demonstrate this immediately. Other-

wise we may expect to see either a new Communist bridgehead or a new dictatorship. Where practicable, the United States with the cooperation of the O.A.S. should openly support Betancourt. Conversely, within the bounds of protocol, we should make it clear that we are not in sympathy with his enemies, either external or internal.

In the economic field much help is needed and much could be done. The major problem in Venezuela is the low standard of living. Much of the population is hungry. United States surpluses in the form of cereal grains and dairy products could provide badly needed foodstuffs. Another problem is sub-standard housing. America could send experts to advise and make recommendations. Venezuela has negotiated with Japan regarding pre-fabricated housing; perhaps the United States could offer a better deal. A sizeable loan at favorable interest rates, if necessary, should be made to get people out of the slum areas; thus much unrest and discontent (the breeding ground of communism) could be eliminated.

Venezuelan agriculture is presently backward. Agrarian specialists could be sent to investigate, advise and thus promote increased yields in cereals as well as in the production of meat and meat products.

In the long run, industrial expansion is of primary importance. Recently a National Oil Company was organized to promote the production as well as the refining of oil in Venezuela, but in cooperation with private enterprise. This "mixed economy" has been extended to other activities but, apparently, there is no desire to expropriate industry or nationalize land other than that which might be classed as idle. If democracy takes this course in Venezuela the foreign interests should cooperate as long as there are reasonable profits and especially if such measures produce a sound, satisfied democratic society.¹⁵

These long-run recommendations are prompted by two objectives: (1) to raise the over-all standard of living, and (2) to diversify the economy and lessen the dependence on oil. Venezuela, however, is rich in oil and other resources, and the guiding prin-

¹⁴ *Hispanic American Report*, January, 1961, p. 804.

¹⁵ *Business Week*, May 7, 1960, pp. 114 ff.; *Hispanic American Report*, September, 1960, p. 463.

principle should be: to help the country utilize its own wealth to help itself—its own democratic way.

Prospect

The people of the United States should realize that the Latin American countries are not asking us to lead them in a crusade vis-à-vis Russia. They would rather have us help them in their crusade for more economic, social and political democracy. Furthermore, conditions have changed. Before World War I, a president of the United States could praise Porfirio Díaz of Mexico for his stable government without serious repercussions. But to praise men like Jiménez and favor Trujillo today shocks the democratic sentiments of Latin America—if not of the United States. The upheavals which have matured and are maturing in countries such as Mexico, Bolivia, Venezuela and Cuba are real social revolutions, and gradually the *people* are coming to feel they have a vital interest in their respective countries. The general Latin American interest in Venezuela is succinctly stated by a Brazilian paper:

The only alternative to Castroism is the democratic revolution which Betancourt started to carry out. If Betancourt is not successful other Castros will come and other Castroisms will rise in revolutions commanded by the anti-American extreme left.¹⁶

¹⁶ *New York Times*, December 4, iv, p. 9.

“The idea of a Western Hemisphere became tinged by a revulsion against the Old World’s political rule. The exiled Peruvian Jesuit Juan Pablo de Vizcardo y Guzmán in his famous ‘Carta a los Españoles Americanos’ vented these feelings sixteen years after Jefferson penned the immortal document at Philadelphia. ‘Let us, on our side, agree to be a different people; let us renounce the ridiculous system of union and of equality with our masters and tyrants. . . . Spain has been the first to break off all her duties toward us; she has broken the weak bonds that might have united and brought us closer together.’ And he added: ‘Let us again discover America for all our brothers, the inhabitants of this planet, from which ingratitude, injustice and the most insensate greed have exiled us. . . .’

“The liberation of the American continent from political rule was accompanied by the strong feeling, particularly in the United States, that the New World was a completely distinct historical entity and, as such, should go its own way in splendid isolation. . . .

“The accent was, then, on isolation, to which another accent was to be added: the accent on nationalism. Isolationism and nationalism tried, in the nineteenth century, to set apart the Western Hemisphere from all nations and continents. . . .”—*Arturo Morales Carrión, Under Secretary of State of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, September 30, 1959.*

Material progress often comes as a result of commerce and the exchange of goods as well as ideas. We use Venezuelan oil and that country buys from us about a billion dollars in consumer goods; undoubtedly both countries have prospered as a result.

Progress in the spiritual and democratic realm results from an exchange of ideas also, but this must be a two way proposition that requires “mutual respect and understanding without dictation or recrimination.” Venezuela has obviously absorbed much of our culture; American tires, autos, movies, tooth paste, and even some of our language and sports are common in Caracas. It has been said, for example, that if “O.K.” and “all right” were removed from their vocabulary the wheels of industry would grind to a halt. And baseball is apparently preferred to bullfighting. *Ball wán* (ball one), *bal tú, estrái trí* (strike three) and *chorestó* (shortstop) are common phrases in the Venezuelan dugout (*dugáo*). These people are enthusiastic and volatile, and consequently when someone at a ball game hits a *jon ron* (home run) with the bases loaded the roar is terrific and can be heard for miles.

Betancourt might be compared to a batter in a political ball game. There have been some strikes, balls and maybe a foul or two, but it might be wise for all to wish for a *jon ron* Latin American style and with the bases loaded. The roar of applause should be heard throughout this Hemisphere.