

Calles and Mexico's "Reformation"

By MANUEL GOMEZ.

ARTICLE V.

EVERY local riot of hysterical Catholic women in Mexico is magnified by imaginative American newspapers into a "battle with the police."

One such "battle" is reported graphically, under a six-column scarehead, in yesterday's Chicago Tribune. It is supposed to have taken place at Torreon but the "war correspondent" who describes it wires his story from a desk in Mexico City, 1,135 kilometers away. Exceptional reliability is therefore hardly to be expected. Nevertheless, even in this obviously biased account, one discovers reading between the lines that the battle consisted of an altercation between a knot of lamenting ladies and some soldiers; the latter fired a few shots into the air and the bejewelled "mob" seems to have dispersed.

Contrary to the ill-disguised hopes of U. S. imperialism, civil war has not broken out in Mexico on the heels of the clerical rebellion.

Boycott, Diversion of the Rich.

The boycott, or buyers' strike on luxuries, still continues and might unquestionably have a certain nagging effectiveness for some time to come. But it is only a pin-prick. It is exclusively a diversion of the rich. A few chauffeurs have been discharged, perfume sales may have fallen off somewhat, etc. Luxury buying is too insignificant a factor in the internal economy of Mexico for even a 100 per cent effective boycott to have any decisive influence.

In the face of renewed papal imprecations, President Calles has reiterated the intention of his government "to enforce, without fearing interdicts or supernatural punishments," the anti-clerical provisions of the Mexican constitution.

This has the true revolutionary ring. It recalls to mind the proud Jacobinism of the French Revolution.

It does Calles little honor to defend him, according to the manner of American Liberals, as an impartial executive merely carrying out the constitution he has sworn to administer. He has set out resolutely to smash the political power of the church.

Mexico's "Reformation."

Some have characterized the disestablishment of the church in 1857 together with the anti-clerical constitutional provisions of 1917 as Mexico's "Reformation." The analogy is all right if it is not pushed too far. "Reformation" in Mexico was so long impeded that when the hour of realization came it was necessary to take extraordinary measures to wipe out the accumulated structural ramifications of the old Catholicism. But something more was needed too, and is still needed. The intervening years have created a situation where it is evident that Mexico cannot have a classic "Reformation" upon the European model. It can no longer be simply a clearing of the way for capitalism. The numerical and economic weakness of the Mexican bourgeoisie

is only one obvious factor. Coincident with this there is the fact that the struggle of the poor peasants for the land, the rise of the Mexican proletariat and the aspirations of the strategically placed petty-bourgeoisie all flowed necessarily into the stream of national resistance to the imperialist aggression of the United States.

The "Reformation" became merged with the Mexican Revolution, which became more and more predominantly a struggle against American imperialism for the preservation of the national resources. Such a struggle, to be successful in the long run, requires that Mexico make herself economically independent of Wall Street. A constructive program is necessary which will provide the basis for a national accumulation of capital and the development of an independent national economy. In a country where there is no present accumulation and where the co-relation of social forces is what it is in Mexico, this program cannot be based exclusively upon the capitalist class.

Calles' Constructive Program.

The course of the revolution itself has indicated the general line a constructive revolutionary-nationalism in Mexico must take, and under President Calles a systematic program has been worked out which does not meet the needs of the situation but which is nevertheless an important step in that direction.

Calles' economic program may be characterized by the following accomplishments of his administration, which I outlined, in part, in a recent article for the Workers' Monthly:

1. "economy" program—reduction of the army—balancing of the budget—resumption of interest payments on the foreign debt.
2. Establishment of the National Bank of Mexico as the sole bank of issue.
3. Establishment of farm-loan banks.
4. Anti-monopoly laws.
5. Oil and land laws (under Article 27 of the constitution)—"Ley de Extranjeria."
6. Law exempting from all taxes Mexican business concerns formed with a capital of 5,000 pesos or less.
7. Establishment of peasant co-operatives.
8. Establishment of oil distributive co-operatives.
9. Distribution of permanent titles to lands partitioned out in "ejidos" (peasant communities).
10. "Ley del Patrimonio de Familia"—step toward individual peasant land ownership as against the "ejido."
11. Irrigation work, on co-operative basis or under government control.
12. Local road-building program.

In the realm of international relations, Calles strives to hold off U. S. imperialism while maintaining an alliance with the American Federation of Labor and at the same time orientating his policy toward the nations of Central and South America.

Weaknesses of the Program.

In Mexico Calles tries to base himself on workers, peasants and petty-bourgeoisie under the patronage of a Jacobinical state machine but the latter are always uppermost in his mind. The weakness of his program is that affords too prominent a role to the petty-bourgeoisie. Under his influence and that of Luis N. Morones, the official Labor Party and the CROM are being consciously poisoned with bourgeois ideology and all other than CROM unions are bitterly fought. In addition to hostilizing working-class, and peasant elements vitally necessary to success, his program requires him to compromise too freely with the demands of U. S. imperialism.

Calles and the A. F. of L.

Moreover, he is attempting to retain the support of the labor-fakers of the A. F. of L. against imperialism by a certain process of deception as to the "bona fide" capitalist nature of his regime, and partly for this reason he is obliged to engage in fitful attacks against the Communists. But the A. F. of L. will not be fooled, while his attacks on the radical labor elements at home only serve to undermine confidence in him among the masses who must be made the strongest supporters of his regime. No successful revolutionary-nationalist program can be carried out on the basis of the narrow circle of Mexican petty-bourgeois and their friends among the labor-fakers.

As for his advances to the A. F. of L. Calles is of course correct in trying to maintain close contact with the labor movement in the United States, the home country of American imperialism. Indeed it goes far to prove his fundamental revolutionary-nationalist sincerity. Nevertheless, the executive council has not issued a single word of comfort to Mexico in the present crisis, and has not even made any public reply to the request for support cabled to it by Ricardo Trevino of the CROM. Class conscious trade unionists must take this issue up in their organizations and insist upon support for Mexico! If the A. F. of L. carries on any real anti-imperialist activities at any time it will have to be under the pressure of the revolutionary minority.

Where the Church Comes In.

Calles' attitude toward the church is determined by his conception of revolutionary-nationalist needs and by his general constructive program. It is a necessary part of that program. Ideas of a classic "Reformation" must be adjusted to a situation where a Jacobinical people's government is trying to mold a new social system along the lines indicated above. Every stronghold of reactionary landed aristocracy, and of "stockholders' capitalism" and of imperialism, must be rooted out. The ideology that supports them must be rooted out. The organization that is the Catholic church must be incapacitated for rendering important service to any one of them.

Thus, in forbidding religious periodicals to discuss politics or to criticize the government in any way, Calles goes even beyond the specific provisions

of the constitution of 1917, but he is following the sound policy of destroying manifestly counter-revolutionary organs. Calles will be firm in this policy as all who know him must realize. His answer to President Leguia of Peru, printed in yesterday's papers, shows his determination.

An Imperialist Tool Answered.

It was but natural that Leguia, the dictator of Peru, should attempt to meddle in the Mexican situation and bring about an "understanding" with the Catholic church. Leguia is one of the most shameless tools of U. S. imperialism in Latin America. He wired President Calles asking him to comply with "the high duty of bending your strong will for the re-establishment of harmony between the Mexican government and the church and avoiding calamities worse than war."

Calles answered him in the following strain:

"I can only take the message of your excellency as to the expression in no way signifies the mixing of of a purely personal opinion which the affairs of a foreign nation with affairs solely belonging to the domestic government of my country. Let me inform your excellency that in this case you are badly informed on the attitude of my government toward the Catholic clergy; otherwise, your good sense would have seen that the right is on the side of the Mexican government . . ."

After the Victory.

The present clerical rebellion offers Calles the best possible opportunity to strengthen the national-revolutionary forces in Mexico. When the rebellion is put down, as it will be put down, it is to be hoped that he will grasp hold of the possibilities of the situation with characteristic firmness, enlightened by all recent experiences. He will be in a position to proceed energetically against the enemies of the revolution.

What he will do if he is wise will be to destroy the last vestiges of church power, root out the enemies of the revolution in strategic places, break up the reactionary "Sindicato de Agricultura" (landowners' league) and send General Arnulfo Gomes on a long diplomatic trip to Europe.

Without breaking his bonds with the petty-bourgeoisie, he should orientate himself more and more toward labor. He should adopt new policy calculated to win the important support of the railroad workers, who are now dangerously hostilized. He should cease his warfare against the other independent unions, notably the oil workers in the Tampico region, and he should refrain from attacks against the Communists. Above all, he must come to an understanding with the peasants, whose organization has alienated by covertly supporting the jurisdictional superiority of the CROM in the latter's efforts to absorb them.

If he follows such a course, basing himself thus securely on the active masses of the Mexican population, he can then face American imperialism with a united national-revolutionary force at his back.