

The Evolution of Senor Calles

By Manuel Gomez

FIFTEEN months ago Calles meant protection for the toiling Mexican masses against clerical and foreign domination; today he means governmental oppression, compromise with the native and foreign enemies of labor, disillusion and continued suffering for the peasants.



The change has come about so quickly that it hard to realize even in Mexico.

General Calles was an avowed labor candidate. His platform, unclear and contradictory though it was, appealed directly to the workers and peons. Mexican labor was a unit in his support. For the most part this support was unqualified; only the Communists, who joined loyally in the united labor front behind Calles, took occasion to point out the limitations and dangers of the callista policy. Gen. Calles went before labor unions and peasant leagues. He delivered impassioned speeches against "the crime of capitalist exploitation," winding up with a pilgrimage to the tomb of Emiliano Zapata, the heroic and almost legendary Indian agrarian chieftain, where he declared that the policies of Zapata were his policies and pledged himself to carry out Zapata's program for the confiscation of large estates and their distribution among the peons. The Mexican capitalist newspapers were furious. And far more uncontrolled, because further removed from the presence of vengeful callistas, was the wrath of the kept press in the United States. "Narrow, stupid nationalism," and "intolerable Bolshevism" were the mildest of the epithets used. The Calles' program clearly did not augur well for the plan of American imperialists to dominate Mexico politically and economically. In the emergency of Calles' almost certain election, the Chicago Tribune came forward with a scheme for the "plattising" of Mexico—reducing Mexico to the present status of Cuba.

A Sudden Chorus of Praise.

But the newspapers have changed their tune. As far as the Mexican press is concerned this might not mean so much, for Calles is now President of Mexico and Mexican papers are accustomed to mind their step when it comes to criticizing the President. With the American papers the case is different. Their comment is much more significant.

On December 19, 1920, the New York Journal of Commerce opined that President Calles was "going to be a pleasant surprise," and on the following day the Wall Street Journal printed the following:

"Composition of the Calles' cabinet has, in general, been well received and caused an optimistic impression among industrialists. Disregarding their personalities, and their clearly indicated labor tendencies, the view locally is that they are sound and not likely to advance any too progressive labor measures without due consideration."

On January 1, 1925, the Wall Street Journal declared:

"There is evident a constantly increasing sentiment of confidence towards the new government in both financial and commercial circles."

On February 1, the New York Times declared:

"The International Committee of Bankers on Mexico has found the new Mexican government entirely friendly and discussions have belied the previous intimations that General Calles had radical tendencies."

Two days later the Chicago Tribune printed a despatch from its Mexico City correspondent:

"The government will prevent unjust strikes, eliminate professional strike agitators and convert the committee of arbitration into a formal court which will be guaranteed by congress and the laws of the nation and against whose decisions there will be no appeal."

Peons Disillusioned.

While the native bourgeoisie and the American imperialists have been finding hitherto undiscovered virtues in Calles, his supporters among the Mexican workers and peons have been leaving him one by one. The Communists, who never had any illusions about the "pro-labor" general, have now come out openly against him. The trust of the workers in the government is dissipated. Union labor has been subjected to a whole series of attacks. The peons have already been completely betrayed.

The opposition grows. Except perhaps for the little group of Communists, it is a bewildered, thwarted opposition, not knowing what to hope for next. The Mexican workers have been betrayed so many, many times. They had resolved at last to back only a labor government. And now this! Is there a way out for Mexico or is it only a mirage?

And the average American worker who has been trying to puzzle his way along through the tangle of Mexican events will be even more confused. What is this crazy Mexican drama? he will ask himself. Is there no end to it at all?

Ask Ed. Doheny of Teapot Dome fame, president of the Mexican Petroleum Company, who has just lent the Calles government 6,000,000 pesos. Ask Thomas W. Lamont of J. P. Morgan & Co., head of the International Committee of Bankers. Ask Hearst.

The De la Huerta Rebellion.

To be able ourselves to answer these questions: how Calles once represented something which he represents no more; how this man who was the real point of attack in the reactionary uprising of Adolfo De la Huerta is now becoming increasingly satisfactory to the reactionaries—we must first know something of the ill-starred Da la Huerta movement, the history of which has never been written.

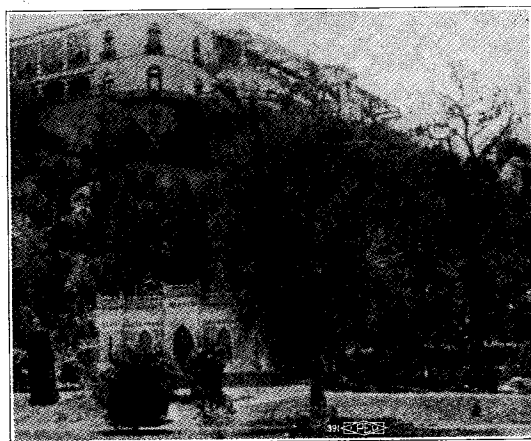
Such a revolution never was, on sea or land.

When before have there been disturbances in Mexico, capable, perhaps, of unseating the President, while at the same time no great cry went up from the big American financial interests which own hundreds of millions of dollars worth of Mexican property? As events progressed the comparative tranquility of our American financiers seemed almost incredible, for it persisted whether the armies of (then) President

Obregon met with victory or defeat. Prominent capitalists, when asked as to Mexico, smiled quizzically and said that everything was as it should be. The evidence of their faith was the firmness of the security markets. The five per cent bonds of the republic remained within one point of the price prevailing on December 6, 1923, when the rebellion broke out. Most important of all, vast quantities of new capital found their way into Mexico while the combat raged! While timid "outsiders" were getting rid of their Mexican investments the big fellows were gobbling them up.

What is the hidden mystery back of this state of affairs?

That Wall Street should have been prepared to greet with equanimity and quiet joy the prospect of a De la Huerta regime in Mexico was of course a surprise to no one familiar with the coming and goings of Adolpho De la Huerta while he



CHAPULTEPEC CASTLE, MEXICO CITY, OFFICIAL RESIDENCE OF PRESIDENT CALLES

was still Minister of Finance under Obregon. It was through the De la Huerta-Lamont and the De la Huerta-Doheny-Sinclair-Standard Oil agreements, which preceded American recognition of the Obregon government, that Wall Street's economic rule in Mexico had been consolidated. There remained the question of political control. De la Huerta's counter-revolutionary "pronunciamiento" aimed at the establishment of a reactionary regime based on the landowning and military classes, and dominated by foreign capital. It would have given the "golpe de gracia" to the policy of splitting up the large estates—and at the same time, politically, would have made Mexico a solid link in a homogeneous American empire stretching from the Rio Grande to the southern plateau of Bolivia.

There is a common belief that the De la Huerta episode was an anti-American, pro-English affair, backed by the British oil interests. There does not appear to be any warrant for this belief, except of course, that Obregon was not on any too good terms with the Britishers. An official of the American-owned International Banking Corporation said in Mexico City shortly after the De la Huerta rebellion broke out: "The political difficulties of the nation are being solved for the last time by the De la Huerta uprising. After this there will never be another revolution. Affairs will be settled right, and Americans who are in touch with the situation know it." (The Mexican World, Jan. 1, 1924.)

But the financiers of this country did not support De la Huerta as the weeks went by! They supported Obregon! That is a contradiction which reveals the whole course of the revolution as it developed.

A Change of Front.

While Wall Street and Washington were outspoken in their praise of "the accomplished Senor De la Huerta" (as the Washington Post called him during the first days of the rebel movement), they very soon shifted their position. There was no attempt at concealment. The United States government openly facilitated the triumphs of Obregon, not only by sanctioning a large loan but by allowing the Mexican federals to cross U. S. territory—by shipping Obregon arms and ammunition while denying them to the rebels, etc., etc. All of which, we are told, was an earnest of our government's sudden devotion to constitutionalism in Latin America.

The lines of combat in Mexico were tightly drawn. On one side the allied forces of blackest reaction—De la Huertistas. On the other side the great majority of the Mexican population, including workers, peasants and petty bourgeoisie—Obregonistas.

Yet few are so naive to suppose that the United States government backed Obregon out of regard for the workers, peasants and nationalist petty bourgeoisie.

The insurrection burst suddenly on the outside world, but in Mexico it was long preparing. It was a result of the growing aggressiveness of the Mexican landowners and stockholders, together with the resolute determination of the American imperialists to secure political as well as economic control of the republic on the south. A social basis had been forming in Mexico to link up and make solid the conquest of Mexico by foreign capital. It manifested itself in proclamations that "perpetual radicalism" in Mexican affairs could no longer be endured by the solid men of the country. It found more militant expression—in attacks on the workers, the spread of the open shop movement, outrages in Vera Cruz and Puebla, the rise of fascism and the organization by the big landowners of the notorious "Sindicato de Agricultores." This tendency picked De la Huerta as its candidate for the presidency against his ertwhile friend Calles.

From Ballots to Bullets.

But it soon developed that Calles could not be beaten. The social basis of the De la Huerta movement was not such as to make elections its strongest point. Mexican peons can be fooled, but they cannot be fooled in the name of reaction. Thus "democracy," as a method, was ruled out for the reactionaries. On the other hand, there was considerable dissension among the officers of the army, finding voice in the "juntas de protesta," etc., which suggested the possibility of a recourse to arms. One-fifth of the army was actually won over in the revolt.

The De la Huerta publicity bureaus explained the rebellion on the grounds that Obregon was showing undue partiality to Calles in the election campaign. The real foe was not Obregon but Calles.

In the actual fighting De la Huerta got no support except from the disaffected military, who were no match for the rest of the army backed by spontaneously formed regiments of workers and peasants. Within a couple of weeks it was plain that the revolt had missed fire. It was then that Wall Street deserted De la Huerta as a bad bet, while the English capitalists remained friendly to him in the vain hope that he

might win after all and thus put them in an advantageous position with regard to the competing American interests. Wall Street switched to Obregon—that is to Calles. And the workers and peasants who were fighting beneath the Obregon-Calles banner suddenly acquired a strange ally, whose powerful support was an important factor in helping Obregon to pacify the country.

Wall Street's Solution.

This was the cheapest if not the most favorable way out for Wall Street. It did not mean the immediate and complete subordination of Mexico that the De la Huertista reaction had promised, but a De la Huerta victory was out of the question. Armed intervention by the United States was a possible alternative, but this would have been a long, tedious and expensive task, which would not have been worth the cost, when the other alternatives of the situation are considered. An early peace, restoration of Law and Order in Mexico, were urgent necessities for the foreign investors. Intervention is to be put off indefinitely; it remains an effective threat, but the date of its actual occurrence will depend on the development of the various "peace offensives" in relation to the consolidation of Mexico with Central America and the islands of the Caribbean as the Latin American base of American imperialism.

Thus De la Huerta's ambition went glimmering. Already he is almost forgotten.

With the falling off in oil production in the United States and the probability of considerably increased production in Mexico during the present year, Mexican oil assumes an extraordinary importance for Wall Street. Even last year, when many wells were "pinched in," and output was systematically curtailed, Mexico produced more than 13 per cent of the world's total supply. The military-strategic as well as the economic-business value of this oil to American imperialism is so great that it is bound to be a central factor in American policy toward Mexico.

Calles has shown himself extremely friendly toward the oil interests—so friendly indeed as to secure that 6,000,000 peso loan from Doheny. Strikes in the oil region around Tampico have been ruthlessly opposed by the government and everything from armed force to bribery has been used to break them. The United States government did not support Calles for nothing!

Calles and the Bankers.

The President has declared his unequivocal determination to carry out the monstrous agreement with the International Committee of Bankers, which provides, among other things, for heavy interest payments on the national debt, reorganization of the National Bank of Mexico under Morgan domination, and return of the National Railways of Mexico to private ownership.

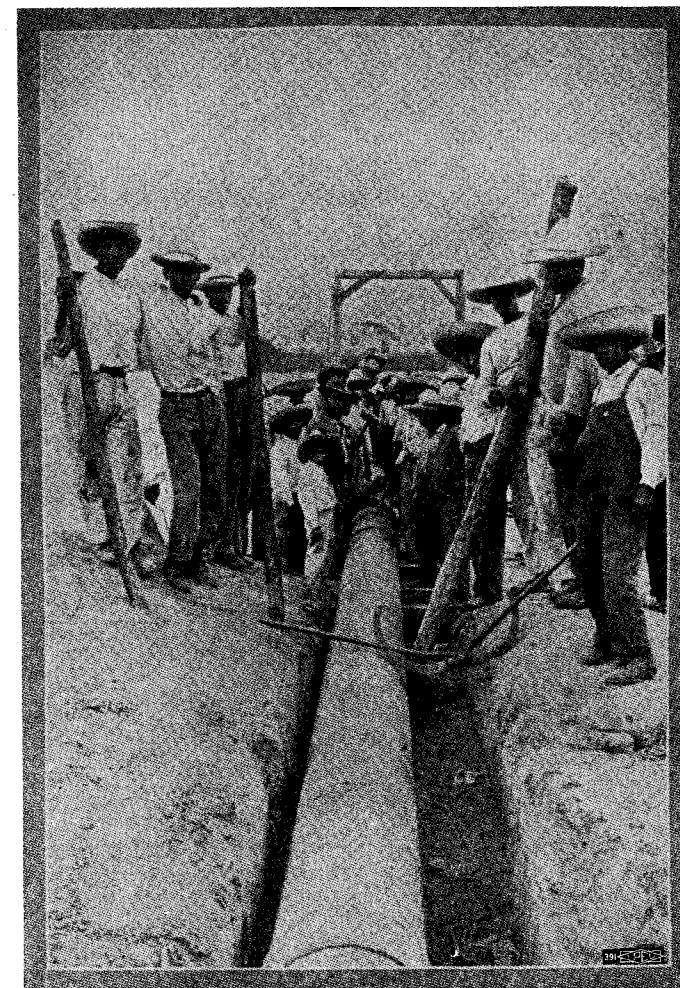
Apropos of the railroads, the following significant paragraph appeared in the Wall Street Journal of February 26:

"The situation was considerably relieved following announcement of the administration that henceforth the National Railways, previously operated autonomously, would be a direct dependency of the government under the Department of Communications and Public Works. THIS IS REGARDED AS A CLEVER MOVE BY PRESIDENT CALLES. IT MAKES THE LINES DIRECTLY RESPONSIBLE TO THE GOVERNMENT, THUS AVOIDING LABOR QUESTIONS

AND STRIKES AND OPENING A CLEAR WAY FOR A READJUSTMENT PLAN." (Following in the footsteps of Obregon, Calles refuses to tolerate strikes among any section of government employes).

Introducing the Next President.

The connecting link of the Calles government with the Mexican masses is Luis N. Morones, Minister of Commerce, Labor and Industry, who is also, characteristically enough a connecting link with American imperialism, through the so-called Pan-American Federation of Labor which was established on the bed rock of the Morones-Gompers alliance. Morones is the big man of the Calles cabinet. He, and not the President, is the real power in the government. His career has been nothing short of remarkable. A few years ago he was going around to dirty, out-of-the-way meeting halls, talking to every little group of workers who would listen to him. He did not scorn to attend the most insignificant convention. A shrewd and decidedly capable opportunist, he has taken advantage of the shifting political background of Mexico to climb step by step to power by means of the immature and developing labor movement, inside of which he has succeeded in building up a potent personal



PEONS LAYING A PIPE LINE FROM ONE OF MR. DOHENY'S OIL WELLS

machine. Today, when the rank and file of workers and peasants have at last found him out and learned to hate him, the machine holds him in power. He is slated to follow Calles as President of Mexico.

As vice-president of the Pan-American Federation of Labor, he has allowed that body to become an out-and-out agency of American imperialism, upholding American military rule in Nicaragua and Santo Domingo, and muffling every voice of protest against Wall Street from the other Latin American delegates. In Mexico itself, he has carried out the Gompers policy of expelling Communists from the trade unions. He has also become a professional disrupter of "outlaw" strikes. Lately he has carried his strikebreaking activities into the Regional Federation of Labor (C. R. O. M.) itself. The climax came a few months ago when the federation issued a ukase to all local unions to the effect that it would not countenance any strike at all unless the matter was first submitted to the federation.

Open Betrayal.

But the most clear-cut betrayal by the Calles' regime is seen in the case of the peasants. Their arms have been taken away from them. Their attempts at organization have been interfered with. The agrarian program of the government has become a miserable farce, and the spontaneous attempts of peons to take possession of the land have been

brutally put down. In this way did President Calles fulfill his solemn pledge by the tomb of Emiliano Zapata!

The Calles-Morones elements do not relish the idea of becoming mere mannikins in the hands of Wall Street. They have a certain petty bourgeois pride and certain petty bourgeois interests of their own. They would like to play an independent role in Mexican affairs. But the only forces they can count on in such a policy are the working class and the peasantry and they have neither the resolution nor the desire to serve as sincere leaders of the workers and peasants. So they have come to terms with American imperialism.

Opposition to the treacherous tactics of the government is steadily accumulating among the masses especially in the trade unions. It lacks leadership, however. The Communists furnish the only intelligent and courageous guidance and they are very weak.

Nevertheless, the present situation cannot continue. Concessions to American capitalism mean eventual alliance with it, particularly when they go hand in hand with persecution of radicals in Mexico. This is a path along which the Mexican workers and peasants will not allow themselves to be led. Once again it will be shown that some other method than "democracy" must be used to force reaction upon the Mexican masses.