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Revolution Revisited

Hotel Hamburgo

Chulumani

Bolivia

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Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

When I left Bolivia last year, I carried away impressions of social forces newly released being directed by the energies of men who had participated in a political revolution. The latter had come first, then, almost without conscious manipulation, this outburst of energy had expanded into a profound social upheaval, leaving politicians to cope with the new drives to social change.

There seemed to be parallels here to what had happened in Mexico in 1910, where too the initial phases of what proved to be a deep reorientation of social life were politically inspired, and only after the controls of the Diaz regime had been swept away did the forces of social change manifest themselves. In Bolivia, as in Mexico, the men who assumed leadership had to reckon with the demands of social justice made by hitherto inarticulate men who had long stood outside the power structure which determined their lives. The leaders were not necessarily prepared to deal with this phenomenon but had to make do when the opportunity forced itself upon them.

Not all the Mexican revolutionaries were unaware of what might happen for previous signs of human discontent had appeared often. In their brilliant pictorial essay, The Wind that Swept Mexico, Brenner and Leighton show clearly the dissatisfaction and violence which moved darkly under the superficially tough and glittering surface of the Diaz dictatorship, and in the documents and studies which have come out of the Mexican Revolution it is evident that many men who surrounded the leaders knew of this and were ready to take advantage of it.

Since 1952, varied commentators, especially Dick Patch in his newsletters and doctoral thesis, have examined the antecedents of the social changes taking place in Bolivia and have found similar warnings. Several Bolivians have pointed out to me that while many of these events were frustrated at the time they forecast the response of the miners, industrial workers and farmers once a vehicle of change was provided, and that the MNR (National Revolutionary Movement) revo-

lution of 1952 was just such a vehicle.

Also, within the varied intellectual bases of the MNR was the principle of social justice, and this quickly became part of the party's efforts to gain the support of the hitherto ignored masses. Their overwhelming reaction to this elucidation took even some of its most partisan adherents by surprise, and they were faced overnight with the need to actualize what was promised in theory.

This general unpreparedness has not helped the government to capitalize on the willingness to change which the worker and farmer have demonstrated. They have in effect found as yet no way to control adequately these drives so as to maximize the benefits for Bolivia. It has turned out that, in addition to the continued political struggle with its opponents, the MNR has had to battle with the rural populations which want swifter institutionalization of their new role than the government can provide.

In Mexico during the decade after 1910, this problem dissipated itself to some extent in the continued power struggle between leaders who took to arms against their opponents and exhausted the country with their wars. Even such an obvious symbol of social protest as Zapata was assassinated because of the political implications of his peasant army. When eventually the revolutionaries made a formalized statement of intention (in a constitution) and created a political party, the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution, they could in some leisure attempt to concretize the demands for social change. Their major advantage was that they were relatively free of pressures from beneath and could function without having to fight continuously with the benefitted masses as well as their opponents.

The MNR seems to anticipate this formal conclusion at a time when neither it nor the developments of the last four years have solved the problem of an overly eager rank and file which seems as disposed to destroy the MNR as anything else which does not meet their demands quickly.

"But what can we do?" one young party member asked somewhat despairingly. "The farmers and the miners expect a paradise at once, never realizing that their demands are not in line with economic necessities."

In essence, this may turn out to be the major problem of the MNR and the 1952 Revolution. The miners, industrial workers and farmers have been led to believe that social advances and personal prosperity are produced with governmental control of the nation's economy. What is not yet apprehended is that these several processes are not always in harmony, and that in many instances the development of the national economy may mean immediate personal loss - both in self determination

and in income.

Lilo Linke in her Journey into a Revolution (published in Spanish by the Casa de la Cultura in Quito, Ecuador) cites instance after instance of the confusion of these things in the miner's mind. He had been told that once the mines were nationalized and when he was no longer a "slave of exploiting foreigners" life would be rosy for him. Yet, the mines have been nationalized and his lot has not substantially improved. The disposition of the mines is a tough problem for the government as the price of tin fluctuates with world market demands and the quality of the ore mined decreases. This is not a new situation, however, for the private ownership of Patiño, Hochschild and Aramayo was plagued by the same considerations. The point with regard to the miner is his conviction that nationalization was the key to his future opulence and he is restless and suspicious that this has not proven so.

Among the farmers the agrarian reform has brought forth similar results. The reform has gone through, and as many farmers as possible are now fully titled land owners, but the agricultural product has not grown and the farmer is economically not much better off than before the revolution.

He is at least the partial master of his own destiny, however, and his desire for self determination and its exercise has led him to certain actions which work against overall economic health in the country. For example, there is the often cited taking over of lands which do not come under the terms of expropriation by the campesino. These are properties of medium size or those which were highly mechanized and exemplary agricultural properties. Illegally occupying these farms, the campesino has failed to continue their development along successful lines and has thereby literally taken them out of production. Nonetheless it is hard for him to see that any other action would have been just for he was told that only when he was the owner of the nation's soil would the bright future be fulfilled.

In some ways the miner or farmer is a purer revolutionary than the men who made the revolution, and his reasoning is simple and clear: give me control and the future is assured - any step back is a violation of this principle and I will fight against it.

The government at this time seems to recognize that it alone cannot accomplish economic miracles, and that it will have to take at least two unpopular steps to certify its continued existence. One is the introduction of private capital into the country and the other is a restriction upon give away programs which breed a false sense of prosperity among the rural populations. Allowing private enterprise a guaranteed hand, however, will inevitably evoke the ghost of foreign exploitation and the party rank and file may object violently. Unable

to offer social security for all may cause farmer and miner to cancel their support for the MNR - which has become symbolically the "giver" - and what might result is anybody's guess.

Perhaps the single most unpredictable element in the future are the miners and workers syndicates formed under Juan Lechin. There is a growing belief that they are no longer under his strict control, and that he can continue to be the leader of these groups only as long as he opposes what they consider wrong measures but that should he fail to do this his influence would disappear. "And these are just the people who have to be disciplined, who have to be made to realize that sacrifices are necessary before the promised land arrives. Right now even the smallest grievance provokes a work stoppage and many workers refuse to work longer than a few hours. This has got to stop, but how to tell them that they have misinterpreted many of the things which the party has said?"

The Bolivian who told me the above did not mention an even more unsettling element: the presence in the syndicates of men who seem more interested in personal power than in the goals of the revolution or Bolivia's future. They continue agitating and exciting with inflammatory phrases taken from the party's ample vocabulary, reiterating the myth of the bright tomorrow if the workers go on scheduling their own actions, by which is meant that the speaker should take on this responsibility. Last year an informant of Dick Patch's labeled this type a "gangster" and was frankly worried about how they were to be dealt with. Today, it is felt by many that their nonsense has done and can do irreparable harm to a less fiery and more rational concept of future governmental activity.

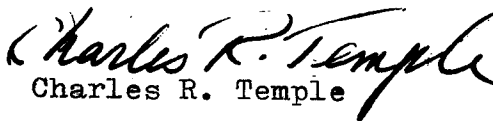
The general struggle between the opposing demands of a social philosophy and practical realities, and between the men who are attempting to fulfill the promises of the revolution they underwrote and the men to whom the promises were made has produced a curious phenomenon within the MNR. Perhaps it is best described as battle fatigue. Several instances have been cited to me of MNR workers who have come to prefer the cultivation of their own limited gardens rather than the grander tracts of the revolution. They seem to be exhausted by the continued friction and struggle within the party itself, between the party and the worker-farmer and with political opponents outside the MNR. The almost frenetic energy of the early days of the revolution has diminished through personal consent. "A man simply cannot go on fighting forever, less so for ideals than personal survival," was one explanation I heard.

It was suggested to me that, whatever the reasons behind this fatigue are, it is certain to have a conservative effect upon the activities of the MNR leaders which may be the introduction of that phase of the revolution which stabilizes disruptive tendencies and allows a more

measured appraisal of problems and possibilities. If this is so, it may be that the decided basic social gains among the indian worker-farmers will be reinforced by a time of political tranquility and the elaboration of a more robust economic base for the nation than at present.

One party member told me, "We have slowed down but not to a halt, and that's the best thing that could have happened to us. Maybe now we can make good on our promises. As a matter of fact, we've got to."

Sincerely,

  
Charles R. Temple

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