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"We want bread";

"We have bread."

Hotel Copacabana

La Paz

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:

Just a short time ago, the Panamerican Circus, currently performing in La Paz, trotted its animals through the streets - dusty tired lions in flimsy cages, a small raisin wrinkled elephant and a noisy baboon on a purplish mule. They managed to stop traffic and crowd the curbs with delighted spectators. Someone remarked that it was the most exotic sight he'd ever seen in the city.

He was mistaken, however, for with the arrival of the representations of the 43 countries attending the inauguration of Hernán Siles Suazo as president of Bolivia, the exotic became commonplace, for the ministers, the attachés and the special representatives were not only of varied racial backgrounds but were dressed in their most spectacular plumage for the event. Although most wandered about in morning coats and striped trousers, and later tails, the colored sashes and ribbons and the sparkling medals they bore brought them to a par with the ornate uniforms of the military contingents. The comings and goings of the diplomats were assiduously watched by clots of people outside the city's two largest hotels - the Copacabana and the Sucre Palace.

The Bolivians in town for the inauguration did not suffer in this side show, for the highland indian can produce a thoroughly unique costume when the moment demands. As well, bright blobs of color - the helmets of the miners - glowed in the clear sunlight of this city two and a half miles above the sea.

The government did not stint itself and parade after parade marched through the center of town, speeches and receptions abounded, and the indigenous aspect of the celebrations culminated in native dances in the national stadium. The municipality, not to be outdone, erected awesomely complex structures of fireworks on the Prado, the one square in town which is nearly level, and late one evening fired them to the delight and danger of the townsman and visitor alike. All in all, the festivities were a time of pleasure and relaxation,

and it seemed as if the country was united in putting on a show worthy of the occasion.

Today, however, as the new president prepared to take the oath of office and the foreign guests seemed to blossom out in even greater splendor, a small but vociferous bubble of discontent rose to the glittering surface, bearing the weight of opposition to the MNR and calculated to make a public display of this sentiment during the one time when the city was overflowing with outsiders.

A group of university students, partisans of the Falange Party, which ran Oscar Unzaga against Siles Suazo in the elections of last July 17, banded together into a manifestation which shouted for Unzaga, decried the MNR and demanded liberty for the nation. They picked up a number of sympathizers - who were not all falangistas but were against the MNR - and the chant of "liberty, liberty, liberty" and "We want bread" alternated with that for Unzaga.

The Prado is like the shaft of a dumbbell with the Plaza Venezuela on the north and the Plaza del Estudiante (Square of the Student) on the south as its bells. The former is the site of the Ministry of Campesino Affairs and the latter stands just above the university buildings. The demonstrators at one point filled the Plaza del Estudiante and trapped in their numbers several trucks carrying miners. The miners made the V-sign of the MNR and shouted insults to the students but resisted (wisely) any suggestions to get down from the trucks and make a more vigorous protest.

Although the crowd was made up of MNR adherents as well as falangistas and independents, when the miners' trucks moved off everyone joined in whistles (the Latin catcall) and raised their hands in a charming gesture, a sort of clutching at the air with the fingers of one hand rather like the way we imitate the clawing of a cat in the United States and which means here "coward," "thief" and other less polite words. Political differences notwithstanding it seems as if any Bolivian crowd is solid in its deprecation of the man who runs away.

After this the protestors moved along the Prado and demonstrated in front of the Copacaban and the Sucre Palace, directing their shouts to the foreign representatives. One man in the crowd next to me said, "Now they'll know that there is real discontent in Bolivia. Long live Bolivia." As loud as the group was, it was peaceful at heart, and only one student lost his temper when the press forced him against a tree. He was ready to fight when he recovered but little

attention was paid to him beyond comments which suggested he cool off. There was one brief surge toward the Plaza Venezuela where thick mobs of campesinos and miners were gathered but the leaders turned this back and ordered the group to disband - which they did with alacrity. A potentially ugly clash between the students and the campesinos and miners was thereby avoided, and the protest registered without violence.

There were no indians among these demonstrators. Instead they were students and white collar workers of the city: anyone who could be said to fit into the urban middle class in Bolivia. The phrase "We want bread" expresses one of this group's basic objections to the four year regime of Paz Estenssoro and the MNR: the rising cost of living and the diminished purchasing power of the currency. For some families it is difficult to maintain an adequate table since the price of basic commodities has gone up and up, their salaries have risen but little and whatever gains were made in this respect have been wiped out by inflation. They are the squeezed in the "National Revolution," and feel keenly that the MNR is favoring the rural farmer and miner to their detriment.

In a more general way, the urban disaffected criticize the MNR for its frank cultivation of rural tastes and demands. With a distrust which seems inevitable in cities everywhere in the world and throughout history, the citizen of La Paz or Cochabamba despises the rural populations. Since 1952 and its sequel saw the arming of the campesinos' and miners' syndicates, fear has been added to the initial distaste. The two together work up to a deep emotional hatred of the man of the countryside and of "his" party, the MNR.

In short, these urban groups feel left out of the party's program and see it as favoring the hated figure who mines tin or tills the soil.

These generalized feelings find expression in sets of attitudes which are the concrete symbols of fear and hatred. An office worker in La Paz works out his aggressions in long denunciations of the MNR leaders. If they are not "thieves, enriching themselves at everyone's expense," he asserts that they are "gutless, emptyheaded, and what they know about governing a country wouldn't fit on the head of a pin."

A taxi driver in Cochabamba takes the campesino as his target. "Why ever since the revolution, the campesino has stopped working. Everyone of them passes the day gambling and getting drunk. So, naturally we can't feed ourselves." He added later, "Now that they've got guns, they think everybody has to knuckle down to them. It's

gotten so that I don't want to make trips outside Cochabamba - the less I see of the campesino the better for both of us."

As a final example, among the urban groups there is almost general agreement that the elections of July 17 were a fraud. They make this statement as casually as if they were discussing the weather, although they rarely offer specific details to prove it. It seems as if their disillusionment with the MNR is so deep that they take for granted any depravity on its part. Of course, rigged elections are among the traditional political techniques in Latin American history so that this attitude may come from more general considerations than the specific actions of the MNR.

The frustrations of these groups burn even stronger now that the second term of the MNR has begun under Siles. Denied, they claim, any effective protest through the ballot since the elections they say were carefully manipulated by the MNR, they haven't even the hope of booting that party out of power by force, for the arms are in the hands of the rural partisans of Paz, Siles, Chavez and Lechin. At first hearing there is something shocking about this talk of the eviction of the current government by force of arms, and a natural reaction is to feel that it's just so much wordy objection.

In the Bolivian context it becomes something else again. Over and over, listening to the life histories of MNR members whom I have met, the striking fact has emerged that these men have been jailed time and time again under hostile regimes, and that they took to the gun as a baby takes to the bottle to defend not only their political ideals but also their personal liberty. It has been said that the Latin American becomes a revolutionary, especially in the university, for there is always some group which threatens freedom of action against which to strike, and that this experience (often hardened by jailing and physical punishment) colors his conception thereafter of how the political process works. Recourse to revolution becomes an accepted item in political change. As well as the MNR people, the present opposition has had its day in prison and its use of bullets, so they are not unprepared for violence to achieve their ends.

In any case, the opponents of the MNR feel hamstrung and their manifestation of today represents an attempt to impress their opposition on the outside world through its visiting representatives. It was carried off too in the correct belief that the government wouldn't attempt to break up a non-violent demonstration during this period of foreign visiting.

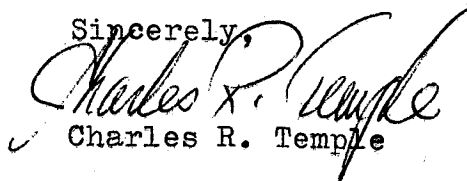
If one listened long enough to the falangistas and all the other MNR opposition, he would soon come to believe that the government

was acting maliciously against their interests. But, like all other extreme beliefs, the facts do not support it. Statements made to me by MNR officials and sympathizers recognize the justness of the urban middle classes' basic complaint that they cannot live by any decent standard under the current economic developments. The problem is that the inflation which hurts these people so much is bound up with the entire economic process of the nation. This last is not a function alone of the satisfaction of the desires of special groups but rather of such items as the world price of tin, the nation's present dependency upon imports even of foodstuffs which under ideal conditions could all be produced locally, or its lack of capital to finance long term projects to improve agricultural performance and augment industrialization. The cry of "We want bread" is a condemnation of the whole by virtue of dissatisfaction with but a part.

On the other hand, the MNR doesn't have much more justification when it condemns in toto the criticisms of its opponents. There is, for example, an extraordinary amount of favoritism of the rural groups, in terms of subsidies through social security programs, increased and impractical wage raises among the miners, price supported sales of foodstuffs to the farmer, and, above this, the symbolic exaltation of the rural man into the role of The Bolivian, The Future and the like. This last is particularly offensive to the urban unhappy who not only feel themselves to be Bolivians, but also read, write, wear white shirts and shoes, bathe with some regularity and in other ways fulfill their conception of what a "cultured man" should be. They hardly see the indian miner or farmer as coming anywhere near this concept.

Whatever the right and wrong on either side, whether it be summed up in "We want bread," or, as a campesino said to me last year, "Now, we have bread," the future of Bolivia can hardly be predicated upon a "victory" for one group or the other. One of the best comments on the total situation I have heard so far ran: "This is one of those times when all sides have to win, or all sides lose."

Sincerely,



Charles R. Temple