

VI. THE PAN-AMERICAN CONFERENCE

ON JULY 20 there meets in Havana a conference of the twenty-one American republics, called on the initiative of the Roosevelt Administration. The declared purpose of the conference is to achieve a common approach of the Americas to the problems raised by the imperialist war.

Certainly there are common interests of the peoples of the twenty-one American republics; and equally certain it is that these common interests are placed in special jeopardy by the chaotic world conditions. It is therefore a very immediate and real set of problems which furnish the setting for the Havana conference, problems which will increasingly affect directly the lives of close to a quarter billion population, and indirectly the course of world history.

Secretary of State Cordell Hull is reported by the newspapers to have issued an angry warning to Nazi Germany to keep its hands off the Havana conference. It is freely declared in the capitalist newspapers that Nazi influences threaten to create difficulties in the conference.

How is it possible that German influence can become the central issue within a conference of the twenty-one American republics?

There are two chief factors which make this possible. They are, first, conflicting interests between the Government of the United States, on the one hand, which reflects the interests of United States finance capital, and the Latin American countries, on the other hand, whose governments reflect interests within their own countries in conflict with the aims and policies of Washington. Second, there is a broad range of differences and conflicts within

Latin America itself, which are more or less clearly reflected in the policies of their governments which will be represented in Havana. It is because of the existence of these contradictions and conflicts among the twenty-one American republics that German and other non-American influences are a major problem in Havana.

Let us examine these two main sources of conflict in Havana in more detail, taking up first that between the United States and the Latin American countries as a whole.

A glance at the historical background of United States-Latin American relations will throw much light upon our own immediate problems. These relations have developed for over a hundred years under the Monroe Doctrine, which is supposed to indicate a long-time uniform policy. But surface uniformity only hides the most deep-going historical transformations that have changed the contents of the policy into the opposite of what it was originally.

During the nineteenth century, the chief significance of the Monroe Doctrine lay in its character as a support to the national liberation movement of the Latin American peoples, in their struggles to break away from the old European semi-feudal empires. It was an instrument of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. But the most complete and successful bourgeois-democratic system, the U. S. A., rapidly came under the dominance of finance-capital, of monopoly. The turning point marking the emergence of the United States as a modern imperialist power was characterized by the twin events: the Spanish-American War and the formation of the U. S. Steel Corporation.

From that time on, the Monroe Doctrine was merely the historical costume used to dress up the new policy of imperial conquest of Wall Street, of finance capital, of monopoly, constantly extending its power over the earth, but first of all and most ruthlessly into Latin America. The high-handed, illegal seizure of Panama was an outstanding example, covering up the most reactionary political and social consequences with the glories of the great technical achievement of the Panama Canal. The cruel fate of Puerto Rico as a United States possession after its seizure from Spain disclosed mod-

ern imperialism as even more ruthless than the old semi-feudal empires, because of its more far-reaching economic consequences.

The shelling of Vera Cruz by Woodrow Wilson's order in 1916, and the invasion of Mexico by John J. Pershing's army, left a deep wound in the relations between the United States and all Latin America, as did the occupation of Haiti, the war against Sandino in Nicaragua, the imposition of the Platt Amendment upon Cuba—to mention only a few of the most well-known and dramatic phases of United States conquest over Latin America, which expressed and carried forward the more pervasive penetration of U. S. capital and the conquest of Latin American economic life.

It was not out of imagination, but from prolonged bitter experience, that the Latin American people raised their slogans against "Yankee Imperialism" and the "Colossus of the North."

If today the agents and spokesmen of Nazi Germany can conjure up these powerful spirits against Pan-American unity at Havana, for their own ends, let us clearly understand that the United States is paying the inevitable price for the crimes of its own imperialist masters. It is no remedy to do as Secretary Hull and the U. S. press are doing—to curse the Germans and denounce as Nazi helpers all those who mention these historical sore spots in U. S.-Latin American relations. So long as these problems are denied or ignored they will become only worse, not better. If Havana is to mark a step in the direction of a real Pan-American unity in the interests of the peoples, that can be achieved only if decisive steps are taken away from the old policies of exploitation by the United States.

If the United States were ready to demonstrate by its policies and deeds that it is really opening a new chapter of helpful interrelations among the American peoples, then it would have nothing to fear from the manipulation of old grievances by any non-American power. But the very fear and hysteria displayed in Washington at the prospect of such non-American influences is itself a sign that Washington has no intention of further developing a "good neighbor" policy, but on the contrary intends more decisively than ever to drive ahead on the old imperialist lines. Wash-

ington's fears are primarily fears of the results of its own policies.

When we turn to examination of the concrete proposals which have been given to the press by Washington, in anticipation of the Havana conference, we are confirmed in our presumption that the Roosevelt Administration has plumped hook, line and sinker for an intensified imperialist policy.

The chief proposal publicly mentioned has been the formation of a huge Pan-American Bank together with a marketing monopoly to handle all Latin American export surpluses.

Clearly, these interrelated projects are extremely desirable from the point of view of U. S. ruling circles, the banks and industrial monopolies. By the mere weight of their financial and economic resources, they would thereby grasp at once such power over all the Americas as they now exercise over the U. S. But by the same token, the Latin American peoples will approach these proposals with the utmost reserve. Latin America needs the help of the United States, even as we need the co-operation of Latin America, but the peoples of all the Americas will suffer deeply from such crude and obvious projects of monopoly exploitation as the proposed Bank and Marketing Cartel under the Wall Street domination.

Even if it should be assumed that the projects are practically feasible, in their broadest economic aspect, which is more than doubtful in view of the collapse of all U. S. schemes for handling its own surplus products, they would inevitably subordinate Latin American national economies to that of the United States.

Is that line of development in the interests of the Latin American nations and peoples? Clearly it is not, but rather the opposite. The only salvation of the Latin American nations lies in the direction of a progressively increasing economic independence, to be achieved through (1) their own industrialization and reclaiming their economies from foreign ownership; (2) a more balanced agriculture; (3) the development of foreign trade between the Latin American countries; and, (4) prevention at all costs that any one of the great capitalist powers should secure monopoly over their foreign trade with the rest of the world.

These are the indispensable conditions which the Latin American people must secure in any large-scale and long-time agreements with the United States. These conditions have been given no consideration as yet in the proposals from Washington. That is the primary difficulty facing the Havana conference.

It is worthy of special note that on this issue, the interests of the people of the United States, as distinct from those of the financiers and monopolists, coincide with the interests of the Latin American peoples. We in the United States cannot successfully break the chains of monopoly over our own life if we help to bind Latin America in similar but even heavier chains. Wall Street's super-profits from Latin America only help to grind down the people of the United States into deeper poverty and oppression.

It must be further noted that the present foreign trade of Latin America is necessarily directed in the first place, not to the United States, but to Europe and Asia. The United States is a competitor with, not a market for, the main body of Latin American exports. If the United States proposes to take over the marketing of those exports, it is not at all to find a market within the United States, but rather in order to control the relations of Latin America with the rest of the world, to assume a guardianship or protectorate over Latin America. But Latin American interests, so long as we are operating under the capitalist system, cannot be merged thus with those of the United States Colossus, without irremediable harm to all the peoples involved. Faced with a series of great capitalist imperialist powers, British, German, Italian, Japanese and United States, the Latin American nations must first of all strive unitedly for their freedom from domination by any one of them, preserving their economic and political freedom of action to utilize the contradictions between them to defeat them all in their efforts at domination. Latin America cannot afford to trade this freedom for paper guarantees by the United States, which have a validity equal to, but no more than, the British guarantees to Czechoslovakia, Austria, Norway, Belgium, Holland, France and China.

The Latin American peoples should make their voices heard at

Havana, placing these demands and considerations before the world, and specifically before the United States. If the U. S. Government can be brought to a policy which places Latin America firmly on the road to its own independence and progress, in contrast to that now operative, then and then only will we be moving toward that Pan-American unity which all the peoples need and strive for; then and then only can ever closer economic relations with the United States serve the cause of all the peoples.

Most sinister and dangerous of all the hidden motives at work behind the scenes at Havana is the determination of American imperialists to harness Latin America to their war plans, to their preparations to plunge the Americas into the armed struggle for the redivision of the world.

The imperialist war creates a real threat to Latin America. But the most immediate danger arising from the war is the danger that the Americas will be dragged into the slaughter by the Wall Street forces represented by the Roosevelt Administration and equally by the Republican nominee for the Presidency, Wendell Willkie. The Havana conference is intended as a step in this direction. The peoples must look to the Latin Americans to defeat the war-making objectives in the conference. This danger has not disappeared with Roosevelt's "pledge" not to send American soldiers to Europe, which came only after the last possibility of doing so had disappeared. There is more than one way of plunging the Americas into the world war, and Washington will try all of them.

The recent furore and shouting about the Monroe Doctrine was directed mainly to the attention of Germany. But history has perpetrated one of her little ironies, by presenting the first concrete case in the form of the British violation of French sovereignty in the West Indies, in the attempt to head off American planes from reaching France and being used against Britain. This is of one piece with that great joke history has played, in which Roosevelt's great campaign to arm the Allies has resulted in Hitler's possession of more American fighting planes than the U. S. army itself possesses.

At Havana the Latin Americans should establish more firmly the

principle that the Monroe Doctrine has no longer any validity except as the expression of voluntary agreements of the American republics; these should establish the means of self-determination for the peoples of territories now held as colonies. Only thus can the Americas be closed against the European war.

Finally, it is necessary to note that the Latin American Governments are themselves of such widely variegated political character as to promise much confusion and a minimum of agreement at Havana. Formally all twenty-one governments represented are republics; but few represent popular and democratic regimes. Many are crude minority dictatorships, representing small privileged classes of bourgeoisie and landlords. Brazil and Argentina, with some smaller republics, are dominated by British capital, with strong German influences, and in the event of a British-German settlement, will in all probability plump wholeheartedly for a place in the European fascist alignment.

This is the real nightmare of the U. S. imperialist circles, which really fear German penetration of Latin America only when it is combined with the British. The only really popular and democratic regimes in Latin America, even in a limited sense, are those of Cuba, Chile and Mexico, although there are promising democratic movements in several other countries. It would therefore be utopian to expect the Havana conference to give more than a distorted expression to the interests and needs of Latin America, while the people of the United States will be completely misrepresented, probably in the person of our American Ribbentrop, Sumner Welles.

The Havana conference can and must be the occasion, however, for a great campaign of education of the peoples on the conditions for and problems of a real people's Pan-American unity.

Out of such a people's movement alone will come the salvation of the Americas from imperialist domination and war, and the building of the Americas as a stronghold of progress, prosperity and peace.