

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY:
DEEP WOMB, DARK FLOWER

Latin America's growth in the twentieth century rests upon roots which reach deep into the past, and those roots have just begun to put on the leaf and flower of modern life. Nowhere have the southern countries yet produced the mature fruits of democracy, industrialization, a superior standard of living, honest elections, educational systems of first rank, an enlightened public opinion. Despite the tremendous differences which exist between one region and another, everywhere the old semi-feudal, semi-colonial society persists. There are new names, new social battle-cries gauged for the best demagogic response; there is even a certain measure of political liberty granted by the paternalistic ruling classes. Yet the old relationship of master and vassal continues, sub-standards of living are the rule rather than the exception, the political outlook is highly unstable, economically the nations of Latin America still live chained to the soil which is the patrimony of the chosen few. This minority controls the destiny of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, the most advanced of the southern countries. There are bright spots which relieve the dark omnipresent shadow of the colonial past, and they are rapidly gaining in light, but so far their victory is nowhere secure. It is best to make these things perfectly clear before attempting any presentation of contemporary Latin-American life.

So many elements enter into the picture, so many countries, so many diverse geographic regions, climates, racial groups, customs, traditions, economic and cultural extremes, that no single perspective could possibly cover the entire scene. Argentina is as different from Paraguay, its next-door neighbor, as the United States is from Tibet or Afghanistan. Buenos Aires is as far ahead of Asunción as New York City is of Addis Ababa. Racially, Argentina, Peru, and Haiti are as different from each other as

are England, India, and the African Congo. All of these ethnic, historic, and geographic differences, which have been presented in detail in previous chapters, must be borne in mind as an attempt is made to strike some kind of a balance in the interpretation.

One of the most interesting aspects of Latin American life in the final quarter of the nineteenth century is the reawakening of something approaching a common spirit. The Latin countries had felt this spirit during their struggle for independence, when soldiers from all regions had fought for the common cause. Disputes among the victors and social chaos, however, then all but blotted it out. The tenuous cultured unity of colonial days seemed to disappear along with the common political desire. For many years conditions continued to be such that only local feelings could thrive.

By the 1880s, however, economic stability was at least far enough advanced to permit the conception and growth of a broad esthetic movement. A strong reaction arose against the former regional views and drew the different nations together. In literature, where the process can be most easily studied, this gave rise to the school of "modernism" which produced the most famous group of writers in Latin-American history. Among them were Rodó of Uruguay, Rubén Darío of Nicaragua, José Martí of Cuba, Gutiérrez Nájera and Amado Nervo of Mexico, José Asunción Silva of Colombia, and many others. These writers transcended their national frontiers, became known throughout all the southern countries, wrote in a manner which minimized regional differences and made the most of cultural affinities. Through them, for the first time, Latin America entered into the currents of universal literature.

"While the *modernista* movement began and grew in Spanish America, a similar one began and developed, independently, in Brazilian poetry. It was less sudden and less revolutionary."¹⁷¹ The swing away from it was also less abrupt. Machado de Assis, the greatest figure in nineteenth-century Brazilian literature, wrote much poetry which might be identified with the modernist creed, but his novels about life in Rio de Janeiro were realistic psychological studies with a middle-class milieu. No writer in Spanish America embraces as much and as varied territory as this great Brazilian.

Just after the turn of the century, in 1902, there appeared in Brazil two outstanding works which have marked out the lines literature in that country was to follow for the next several years. These were *Os Sertões*, by Euclides da Cunha, and *Canaan*, by Graça Aranha. In *Os Sertões*, Cunha tells the story of a "delirious rural mystic, Antonio Conselheiro, around whom a fanatic multitude gathered and settled down in the *sertão*." The government sent repeated military expeditions against him until finally the backlands prophet was destroyed. It is a somber story,

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"powerfully and brilliantly told"; the descriptions of the land itself and the human types which it produced have moved many critics to call this the finest book to come out of Brazil.¹⁷¹ The novel *Canaan*, by Graça Aranha, presents the other pole of Brazilian life: immigration into the vast South American crucible and the racial aptitudes in this new habitat. These two famous prose works fall outside of the modernist torrent which still flooded Latin America at that time.

The modernists, both of Brazil and of Spanish America, found inspiration in the Iberian heritage, but it was their ever-present veneration of French literature which gave their cult a new focus, started them all off in the same general direction, and lifted their art from the regional pigeonholes into which it had fallen before that time.

Rubén Darío, generally conceded to be the greatest of all Latin-American poets, symbolized the new universality of this artistic feeling in both a physical and spiritual sense. Born in tiny Nicaragua of Spanish-Indian-Negro extraction, he traveled, lived, and wrote all over Spanish America and Europe: Central America, Chile, Argentina (where he resided many years), Spain, France, then back to America again. Coming from a small backward nation, which has never had any literature or distinct culture of its own, he became the leading literary figure of all Latin America, more admired in Buenos Aires than the best known of Argentine poets. Darío and his generation achieved in literature what the generation of liberators had achieved in the political sphere: a strong continental consciousness.

It is no mere coincidence that these modernist writers crystallized the Latin-American attitude toward the United States. Rodó, Darío, Martí, José Santos Chocano, all felt strongly a cultural bond which unified them in the face of the threat of the Colossus of the North. They wrote about the imperialistic ventures of this country in terms of bitterest protest. They marshaled all of the intelligentsia of their countries behind them. They created the myth of the superiority of the Latin culture over that of the United States.

Yet the attacks of these writers were not completely one-sided. Darío himself in 1906, only three years after the "rape" of Panama, wrote a poem dedicated to the Pan-American Congress being held in Rio de Janeiro that year. He called it *Salute to the Eagle*, and the entire poem is a beautiful call for the solidarity of the hemisphere. Darío even went so far as to ask the beneficent eagle to teach its secrets to the peoples of the south: "Glory, victory, work! Bring us the secrets of the labors of the North, and teach our children how to cease being rhetoric Latins, and help them to learn from the Yankee, constancy, vigor, character." The poet even excuses North American imperialism by attributing it to the "necessity of opening the great fruitful womb of the earth so that the flow of gold and the ripening

of the grain might burst forth giving man the bread he needs to move his blood."

Many Latin-American critics have indicated that this particular poem of Darío, so different in its slant from most of his verses in which there is some reference to the United States, was written with tongue in cheek because it was more or less an official piece for the Pan-American Congress. In view of the integrity of Darío as a poet, this hardly seems likely; there was no reason for him to sell his soul so cheaply. Obviously he felt the things which he expressed in his *Salute to the Eagle*. He also felt his adverse criticisms of the United States. Every man, every writer has his different moods, his varying points of view, his changing perspective, his inconsistencies.

There were of course many other sides to "modernism" than its relatively few references to the United States. As an artistic movement it followed more or less the ivory-tower approach to life and sought to escape the unpleasant realities of its environment. It was a movement of escapism, a cult of "art for art's sake," and to this extent at least it carried on the torch of previous colonial literature which was marked by its zealous avoidance of anything approaching an interest in social betterment. The sweating masses of Latin America, the oppressed Indian, the denial of democratic government have no real place in the modernist creed.

Take, for example, the cases of Gutiérrez Nájera and Amado Nervo, two of the greatest Mexican writers of all time. Both lived in the Mexico of Porfirio Díaz. They not only managed to exist under the dictatorship, but prospered under it. The government subsidized them and helped them to live. There is no suggestion in the writings of either man that this status might have been even in the slightest degree distasteful to them. They were apart from and above such petty considerations as social welfare or governmental decency. In their ivory tower of art they created a beautiful world of their own, which most certainly was not the world of Latin-American life.

García Calderón, the Peruvian essayist, in commenting on Spanish American literature in general and on the modernist movement in particular, makes the following remarks: "He who knows [Latin] America only by its imperfect social framework, its civil wars, and its persistent barbarism sees only the outer tumult; there is a strange divorce between its turbulent politics and its refined art. If ever Taine's theory of the inevitable correspondence between art and its environment was at fault, it is in respect to these turbulent democracies which produce writers whose literary style is so precious, such refined poets and analysts."⁹²

What García Calderón fails to mention is that this kind of art, lacking in essential direction, emphasizing the erroneous separation of the artist from life around him, far too often compromising with political tyranny in the name of an esthetic creed, also did irreparable harm to the growth

of the Latin-American mental outlook and to the creation of an enlightened public opinion. Certainly all art does not have to convey a social message, but when an entire generation of writers becomes deliberately escapist, living behind a sort of "cultural façade," then the lesser folk who follow them are bound not only to fall into but to increase the same fundamental error. In so doing they deepen the fissure which has always divided the extremes of Latin-American life, preventing the emergence of a completely integrated society.

Rubén Darío, greatest of the modernists, realized this before he ceased to write. The high-water mark of Spanish American modernism is his *Prosas profanas*, which came out in the year 1896. By 1905 Darío's perspective had changed considerably. The Spanish-American War, North American imperialism in the Caribbean, the poet's own travels in Europe, and most of all the growing maturity of Darío himself were the causes of this change.

When the last great volume of Darío's verse came out in 1907 the poet began his introduction with these words: "The greatest praise recently lavished upon poetry and poets has been expressed in the Anglo-Saxon tongue by a man hitherto unsuspected of any particular affection for the nine muses. A North American. I refer to Theodore Roosevelt.

"The President of the Republic judges lyrical bards with a more enlightened will than the philosopher Plato. Not only does he crown the poet with roses; he sustains his usefulness to the state and asks for him public esteem and national recognition. Because of this you will understand that the terrible hunter is a man of excellent judgment."

Then Darío expounds his own poetic creed, which has taken an about-face from its early days of seeing in life imaginary swans and princesses, ivory towers, and blue lagoons. The work of the poet now, he says, is to build toward the future with all the inspiration which his muse's angel can bring to bear.

This last phase of the development of Darío's poetic personality has been referred to as New Worldism, an identity of the writer with the environment around him. However, as is usually the case in matters of artistic expression, the public in general did not for many years catch the new spirit of this final maturity. Instead, people continued to extol the seclusion of the modernist cloister, the art which stood above and apart from the mainsprings of everyday life. It was the perspective of Rodó's *Ariel* and of Darío's earlier verses which shaped the artistic outlook of a generation.

It has often been said that in Latin America more people read and love poetry than in the United States; that in Latin America this awareness of the higher flights of the best men's minds is keener than here; that there responsiveness is quicker, sensibilities finer. Undoubtedly there is much truth in these statements if one holds to the surface values alone. But when one penetrates the mystic veil and looks beneath for that constructive

spirit of which Darío spoke, then a very different perspective begins to appear. The Latin-American "cultural façade," now outgrown in the robust contemporary literature of those countries, still holds the boards in the general attitude toward life. Culture exists for the few. This has been one of the basic characteristics of Latin-American educational systems since colonial days. That to educate the many is to blunt the sensibilities of the few was a point of view expressed by the great Rodó as late as 1900. Consequently it is with the greatest disillusionment that the traveler from an outside country notes inside Latin America the wide wall and deep moat which separate the masses from their intellectual leadership.

Poverty and political immaturity excuse many of these failings; they do not excuse the wanton disuse of many excellent educational means which already do exist. For example, the national libraries. In country after country of Latin America there are fine collections of books which have been accumulating for the past four and a half centuries. Some of these collections are extensive and priceless. At least one of them, the National Library of Colombia at Bogotá, is housed in a beautiful modern building which is the latest creation of architectural genius, up to date in its last detail. Here as in case after case, in country after country, the books are not even catalogued. The reader, if he encounters the volume for which he is seeking, is not permitted to take it out of the library at any time. Hundreds of thousands of fine books thus lie in dust, pointed to with great pride by the intelligentsia, completely set apart from public use, serving no purpose whatsoever save to whet the minds of the fortunate minority and to accentuate the cleavage which exists between that esteemed minority and an ignorant people.

This cultural façade of the contemporary scene, raised upon the thesis of minority rule, is inseparable from the economic conditions which give it nutriment and life. Among those conditions, the concentration of land-ownership is the most notable. Everywhere the huge estate monopolizes the glut of cheap labor and holds back the path of progress. They call it the *hacienda* in Mexico, the *fundo* in Chile, the *estancia* in Argentina, the *hato* in Venezuela, the *fazenda* in Brazil, but no matter what the name, it stands for a way of economic life which has been passed down from generation to generation, accentuating the extremes of poverty and wealth. The system is reinforced by the Iberian view of landownership as a proof of a man's belonging to the socially elite class. Economically, politically, socially, this has meant the survival of a semi-colonial agriculture as the spinal column of Latin-American life. The many "revolutions" which have taken place in these regions have been, with but two exceptions, revolts of the classes which left intact this basic structure of agricultural, and later, industrial control.

The same separation exists today between the great urban centers and

the hinterlands as existed in 1845, when Sarmiento interpreted the life of his own country, Argentina, on the basis of that comparison. The city represents civilization; the hinterland, barbarism. Even the city is lifted upon that semi-feudal relation of landowner and peon which throughout history has been the dominant characteristic of the Latin economies.

In Mexico, Porfirio Díaz made the hacienda into an octopus which strangled all real national progress. In nearly all of the other southern countries the situation was analogous. Even Chile and Argentina, two of the most advanced regions, perpetuate today this same outmoded type of economy. At the present time it can be said that approximately 10 per cent of the people in Latin America own most of the productive land; the rest of the population is landless. This status within nations which are still predominantly agricultural means an impoverished majority working for pitifully low daily wages.

In Chile, where land is at a premium because of the immense northern desert, and the cold, generally neglected southernmost regions, 2.1 per cent of the estates, owned by a few hundred families, embodied 59.8 per cent of all farm land in 1988. One of these vast estates contained four hundred thousand acres. Some biased reports have made much of the paternalistic nature of a few of these great landowners who provided their tenants with schools, medical care, land for their own use, and loans. Such superficial bright spots are bound to appear in any large plantation economy and do not alter the essential outmoded nature of the setup, its relatively inefficient productivity, and the low standard of life enjoyed by the infinite majority of the tenants.

In Chile these tenants were known as *inquilinos*, and while they were not legally bound to the soil in any way and were not separated from their landlords by any difference of race as in the Indianist countries, most of them cultivated the same land in the same manner as their fathers did before them. If they were to leave the estate on which they were born, other landlords would not hire them. Their only possible refuge would be in one of Chile's half a dozen cities, where they might become factory workers or menial laborers.

Until the 1970s the *inquilino* lived in a mud hut with a thatched roof and a stone-hard adobe floor. Usually it contained but a single room. The tiny high windows let in only a bare minimum of light and fresh air. Children slept on filthy straw mats on the floor, completely free to observe their parents' intimacies. Running water and hygienic facilities were unknown; there was no heating. In order to keep smells and smoke out of the house, cooking was done outside, even in winter, usually under a low shed.

The walls were sometimes adorned with old pictures of saints, and there were a few rickety pieces of furniture. All water was taken from a nearby irrigation ditch, whether for drinking or washing. The tenant usually had

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a few domestic animals around his place, especially chickens and pigs, and he had the right to plant his own crops on a small piece of land set aside for that purpose. His living standard was so low that until 1976 more than two hundred out of every thousand children born alive in Chile died within the first year of life. These are the people who voted in a Marxist government in 1970.

In Argentina the situation is somewhat better because of the greater extent of land, the more extensive industrialization, and the greater productivity of the fertile soil. Even here the size of the estate is immense. Twenty families or corporations own nearly 7,000,000 acres. Slightly more than 2000 families or corporations own approximately 135,000,000 acres. Recently a deputy protested in the Argentine Congress that less than 2000 persons in his country owned more land than the total area of all Italy, Belgium, Holland, and Denmark combined. Fifty of the wealthiest hold estates worth over \$700,000,000.

This is in a country where land is eagerly sought after by enterprising European immigrants who make up the bulk of the tenants on these huge estates. Yet the large landowner in Argentina would no more think of subdividing his place and selling out to these people than a Southern plantation owner of the Old South would have considered moving out on his friends and turning his land over to his Negro slaves. Land is the measure of a man's pedigree even in advanced Argentina. The newly rich capitalist or industrialist is frowned upon by a large part of the best society, while the landowner, though rapidly losing out to that rising class, still regulates the social laws and formulates the policies of the Argentine Government. As this control has become increasingly difficult for him in recent years, he has increased in like measure the arbitrary fashion by which he maintains his supremacy in the national life.

In Brazil the fazenda differs somewhat from region to region. In the northern tropical sections it still has many of the characteristics of the old Big House of sugar-plantation days. Pernambuco and the north have many of these huge estates. Around the city of Bahia freed Negro slaves have set up numerous small farms which they cultivate with admirable efficiency. The slaves of this region came largely from the Sudan and seem to have been of more enterprising stock than those of the other sections of Brazil, where they have not done so well since emancipation.

The southern part of the country, in the state of São Paulo, is the expanding coffee-growing region. Here the plantations pay better wages and there is little absentee ownership, for the landlord stays on his place in order to oversee production. The high proportion of European immigrants induced to enter the country by grants of land have created a great number of small farms. In the cities they form the basis of a virile middle and working class. This is one of the four regions in South America where a real settlement expansion is taking place—that is, the frontier is being expanded

without any consequent loss of population behind it. São Paulo is one of the richest regions of all Latin America; approximately half of Brazil's total production comes from that one region, and the state pays more than one half of the total federal taxes.

The over-all picture of the concentration of landownership in Latin America, however, is extremely dark. It has meant that economically the dead have imposed their traditions upon the living, that progress is an uphill fight against history all the way, that minority rule is the accepted principle of government, and that production rests upon an impoverished people with a substandard of living, with neither the lure of frontier expansion nor the certainty of democracy to save them.

Within Latin America there are considerable variations, for prosperous Argentina stands at the opposite extreme from poor Paraguay, and Indianist Mexico is far ahead of Indianist Bolivia. Nevertheless, the perspective as a whole is covered with the black shadow of economic misery. It is impossible to make an accurate comparison between the income of agricultural workers in any two regions because frequently a certain amount of food, housing, and land goes along with a low daily wage. However, it would certainly be safe to say that the Chilean rural laborer, despite the doglike conditions under which he lived, represented his class all over Latin America until the decade 1970-80. The unskilled urban worker's income can be more accurately computed in the different countries, and the comparison immediately shows to what a tremendous extent industrialization and a large market have raised the standard of living of this group in the United States.

In the year 1990 the average unskilled worker* in the United States earned approximately \$4.00 an hour; in Buenos Aires he earned the equivalent of about \$1.55 in United States currency; in Rio de Janeiro, \$1.00; in Mexico City, only 60¢; and in Santiago, Chile, approximately \$1.00 for an hour of work. In the more accurate terms of actual purchasing power per hours of labor, the disparity is not so great, but it is still immense. Taking as a unit a food basket made up of one dozen eggs, one quart of milk, and one pound each of beans, rice, bread, and meat, the table below shows how many hours and fractions of hours the unskilled worker in each of the above places would have to work in order to purchase such a food basket:

United States	1.50 hours
Argentina	3.10 hours
Brazil	4.90 hours
Mexico	8.00 hours
Chile	4.60 hours

*In 1990 the U.S. skilled worker earned more than \$10.00 an hour.

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A worker in the United States, thus, would have to put in considerably less than half as much time in order to be able to purchase the above food basket as in Argentina, and only one third as much work as a laborer in Chile.

The difference in clothing costs is even greater. An unskilled worker in the United States must put in 8.10 hours of labor to buy a pair of shoes, and 2.05 hours to purchase a cheap shirt. The Argentine worker would have to work twenty and five hours, respectively, for these articles, or about two and one half times as much.

In terms of manufactured items such as automobiles, electric refrigerators, sewing machines, washing machines, vacuum cleaners, et cetera, the differences would be even greater, for nearly all of these articles are imported into the Latin countries. If the worker in each country laid aside 10 per cent of his annual earnings in order to purchase the cheapest automobile, it would take him only five years to save the necessary amount in the United States, but fifty years in Argentina, eighty years in Uruguay, and approximately one hundred years in both Brazil and Chile. That is, a car costs a worker in this country only one tenth as much labor as it would cost an Argentine, and only one twentieth as much as it would cost a Chilean or a Brazilian in the same job.

Further comparisons only serve to emphasize the economic impoverishment of the Latin-American nations. Brazil, which is larger than the continental United States, has only one tenth as many miles of rail lines. In the United States there is one telephone to every two persons; in Argentina one to every fifteen; and in Mexico one to every fifty. The United States has one automobile to every two persons; Argentina one to every seventeen; Chile one to every forty, Mexico one to every thirty-three, Colombia one to seventy-one. The comparison would be more or less the same in modern gas or electric stoves, refrigerators, radios, or any of the other inventions which have added so much to the standard of living, freeing man of the drudgery of long and tedious hours, giving him in the mass for the first time in his long history sufficient leisure for the enjoyment of life. In order to place himself in the shoes of the average Latin-American worker, the average citizen of the United States would have to think of what would happen to his standard of living if his own salary were cut drastically into a fraction. If it were sliced in half he would still be a little above the Argentine level. If it were cut down to about one fifth of what he earns that would place him approximately on the level of the average worker of Mexico, Colombia, or Peru. Living under such conditions becomes a mere matter of eking out an existence, keeping flesh and bones together.

Graphically indicative of this low standard of living are the following facts compiled by well-known Latin-American authorities: infant mortality in the southern countries ranges from twice the United States percentage in Argentina to more than five times the United States percentage in Bolivia; in Chile more than half the children born alive die before their

tenth year; the per capita consumption of milk in Chile is only one seventh that of the United States; in rural Colombia 50 per cent of the children drink no milk, 45 per cent eat no meat, and 75 per cent eat no eggs; 50 per cent of Brazil's industrial workers consume no milk, no fruit, no vegetables.

"We do nothing well," writes the Brazilian sociologist Afranio Peixoto, "because our people are living in a perpetual state of malnutrition." In 1969 the Brazilian Minister of Health pointed out to Nelson Rockefeller that the undernourishment of infants during the pre-natal period and first year of life often weakens the brain cells irreparably. Everywhere the productive working population is depleted by a high percentage of early deaths. In cosmopolitan Rio more than one half of the workmen die before their fortieth year, and in Buenos Aires 45.7 per cent die before age fifty. It has been estimated that such deaths represent a loss of approximately \$350,000,000 a month to Argentina in potential earnings. Malnutrition, inadequate housing, and a lack of sanitation have resulted in widespread disease. One writer estimates that at any given moment one half of Latin America's four hundred and fifty millions are ill. Except for those fortunate few who enjoy their privileged position Latin Americans generally are indeed "a sick people."

In the largest cities these conditions do not meet the eye. Every resource of the country has been centered there. The streets are crowded with automobiles; the hotels are modern; beautiful buildings rise in astonishing numbers on all sides; the stores are filled with a variety of goods. The hinterland of the country as a whole must foot the bill for these lovely cities, which are held up Atlas-fashion on the back of a miserably poor working class, and especially a supine agricultural class in region after region. Though Latin America itself is immensely rich in resources, the Latin Americans are poor. Outside of the most prosperous urban regions millions of them have not altered their standards of living in four hundred years.

This is the direct result of a historic development which has kept immigration at a low level, fostered agriculture as the principal means of production, perpetuated the concentration of landownership, and placed the control of industry and government in the hands of a favored few. The colonial economy and the colonial attitudes toward life are still deep-seated in the nations of the south and still hold back the ripe rich fruits of education and democracy. The present history of every Latin-American country is a fight to break away from these chains of the past. The future can only accentuate this process. The base upon which that future rests will be industrialization, division of lands, better government, a more equitable distribution of wealth, and a lower birth rate. When these processes have been effected there will be a great leap forward in the standard of life, a burst of democratic enthusiasm in government, a new birth of public

enlightenment in the nations of the south. Until that higher peak is achieved, such measures as are taken to better conditions will be mere stop-gaps, subject to the variable whims of economic and political instability.

In this basic framework the problem of land distribution exploded seventy years ago giving rise to the first real Latin-American revolution since the struggle for independence. This was the Mexican Revolution of 1910-20. While other regions were pursuing a policy of dodge and delay, Mexico made a frontal assault on the land problem, liquidated the old ruling caste, confiscated their large estates, and began the redistribution of millions of acres to her landless masses.

Since the Mexicans were a poor and disunited people who knew almost nothing about self-government, material progress after the revolution was painfully slow. But in placing before the nation a new sense of values, in reawakening the spirit of the native races, in creating a new artistic perspective, and in spreading throughout the vast territory of Latin America the restless zeal for social revolt, the Mexican Revolution, with all its failings, represents an experience unique in the history of the southern republics.

Porfirio Díaz was the most direct cause of the Mexican Revolution. He had hogged the land for his political favorites and had turned the Mexican masses into serfs. Yet in spite of his tremendous power, his political efficiency, and the wealth at his disposal, Díaz was never able to blot out completely the biological instinct of self-preservation among the Mexican people. This instinct continued to express itself in a growing hunger for land, a hunger for bread, and a hunger for justice.¹³⁸

Francisco Madero, a rich landowner of the north, began the revolution against Díaz. Don Porfirio had declared to the American journalist James Creelman that in his opinion Mexico was ready for democracy, and that he would welcome political opposition in the coming elections of 1910. He found such opposition in the candidacy of Francisco Madero. When the elections were held, of course Díaz was again declared president. Madero, by this time feeling the exhilaration of his own popularity, claimed that the counting had been fraudulent and rose up in arms against Mexico's perennial despot.

At first the Mexican Revolution had no program except the overthrow of Díaz. Madero himself thought purely in political terms. He did not realize that what the people wanted most of all was to raise their economic level from a state of complete hopelessness, degradation, and starvation. On one occasion a member of his opposition asked Madero why he did not distribute his own wealth among the poor folk of Mexico if he was so intensely interested in their welfare, and the leader replied: "The people are not asking for bread, they are asking for liberty."

Blinded by his vision of political democracy, Madero had missed his cue;

economically his regime soon proved a complete fiasco; he could not maintain order. When repeatedly informed that treason was being plotted against his government, Madero refused to take any steps against those responsible. He was no doubt a great idealist, a visionary. In Mexico many people still refer to him as the "Christ fool," thus indicating the strange character which Madero possessed. In any case he soon fell a victim to a more realistic demagogue, Victoriano Huerta.

The revolution continued. Madero had begun it but had never understood his mission. Neither he nor the other early revolutionary leaders had any idea of the scope of the movement they had initiated. They simply started a human ball rolling, and after that economic and social forces beyond their control took over and carried the rebellion much farther than they themselves would have liked.

In the beginning the revolution did not even have a real slogan, much less a program. Madero cried, "Effective suffrage and no re-election," but the unenlightened Mexican masses hardly cared about such abstract terms as these. They wanted land, bread, liberty. Since Madero's government had not given them these things, it was necessary to try again. The revolution burst out spontaneously in many different parts of Mexico. Villa led one group, Carranza led another, and in the region to the south of Mexico City there arose a third leader who, more than either of these, seemed to understand the real meaning behind the movement. His name was Zapata. As a young boy Zapata had scrubbed stables and curried horses for a wealthy Mexican landowner. He soon began to make comparisons between the treatment received by the horses and that meted out to the peons on the same estate. The comparison left a bitter taste in the mouth of Zapata. From that moment on the Indian boy consecrated himself to the ideal of the Mexican Revolution. His cry was: "Land and liberty!" A group of peons gathered around Zapata and blindly struck out for those ideals.

The revolution now began to take on some of the characteristics of a class struggle. The masses were fighting against the landowners, against the wealthy Church, against the political bosses, against all entrenched privilege. They erupted over the countryside like a human volcano. It was Hidalgo's mob of a hundred years previously multiplied by many thousands. The revolution became blind, vengeful, bloody, cruel, destructive, ugly. But it was almost a cosmic force, something which carried away the people of an entire country, obliterating the individual. "If you are in it," wrote one of the revolutionary soldiers, "you are no longer a man. You are a dry leaf caught in a whirlwind."

In a way this force resembled the process of birth on a vast scale. The pain was terrible, and the nation was not at all certain what it would bring forth. But the fetus was there, demanding to be born. Nothing could hold it back. The period of pregnancy was ended.

The revolutionary armies often shouted their slogan, "Land and lib-

erty!" It was a fine battle cry, but it was no program. Before many months had passed there no longer seemed alive any desire except to destroy. One of the finest Mexican writers, Mariano Azuela, who went through the revolution as a doctor in the army of Villa, described the movement in acid terms in his novel *The Underdogs* (*Los de abajo*). There is hardly a word of moralization in this book. The author has become a photographic camera taking in the scene before him. Yet sensing the cosmic proportions of the force which has swept him off his feet, erasing all moral values, Azuela gives a deep reality to the revolution. It is a perverted reality, filled with the unlovely saga of man suddenly torn loose from all civilized restraints. In spite of everything some hope does shine through, if only in the caustic self-scrutiny of the author, and through him of the Mexican people.

One character in the novel looks out over a burning village, sees white streams of rifle smoke spiral upward toward a blue sky, watches a horde of ragged women dressed in black descend on the town to strip the bodies of the dead of their belongings. Objectively, like the eye of a distant god, he is conscious of the whole scene piled against the hills beyond and with a brilliant sun above. He has become almost a personification of natural law which he sees pursuing its inexorable course there before him. Yet his reaction clearly reveals the man within:

"How beautiful is the revolution! Even in its most barbarous aspect it is beautiful," Solís said with deep feeling. Then a vague melancholy seized him, and speaking low he added:

"A pity what remains to do won't be as beautiful! We must wait awhile, until there are no men left to fight on either side, until no sound of shot rings through the air save from the mob as carrion-like it falls upon the booty; we must wait until the psychology of our race, condensed into two words, shines clear and luminous as a drop of water: Robbery! Murder! What a colossal failure we would make of it, friend, if we, who offer our enthusiasm and lives to crush a wretched tyrant, became builders of a monstrous edifice holding one hundred or two hundred thousand monsters of exactly the same sort. People without ideals! A tyrant folk! Vain bloodshed!"

Then suddenly he thought that he saw what all of that dying meant. He sketched a vast gesture and was about to put this feeling into words for the first time when there was a sharp blow in his stomach. "As though his legs were putty, he rolled off the rock. His ears buzzed . . . Then darkness . . . silence . . . Eternity. . . ." ¹³⁹

But the revolution was more than death. It became a symbol. All Mexico was ripped away from its colonial past and there was a new beginning. The old symbols of power for more than four centuries had been destroyed. As the death of vegetation in a forest feeds the trees that grow, increasing their height and girth, the death of the revolution would bring to the peo-

ple of Latin America more awareness of their social problems. It is a natural law which applies both to the life process and to history.

What the revolution did for Mexico in a measurable and material sense is not so difficult to evaluate. It gave rise to the constitution of 1917, which is an advanced social document. The Mexicans were promised their lands, their liberty. Article 27 of that constitution states that the federal government has the right to confiscate and distribute lands to the villages, after paying proper indemnification. It also proclaims that the subsoil belongs to the nation and that the nation's right to enjoy its products is inalienable. Other articles of the constitution guarantee civil liberties and embody much social legislation.

Between the year 1917 and the present time many of the aspirations expressed in the new Mexican constitution have been carried into effect. The process began on a large scale in 1920 when General Alvaro Obregón became president of Mexico. He cleared away the debris left by the revolution and undertook the task of reconstruction. Obregón started the redistribution of lands to the villages in the form of *ejidos*, or village commons. President Calles, who followed him, intensified the process. President Lázaro Cárdenas, who came still later, carried the land program to its peak. Under him more than 45,000,000 acres were given back to the native villages—a total considerably in excess of that distributed by all previous administrations. Under him also the foreign-owned oil wells were confiscated and became the property of the Mexican nation. The educational and health programs took on new zest and the country moved ponderously forward.

There is no doubt that widespread corruption and inefficiency continued. Four hundred years of servitude cannot be wiped out in a decade. The *ejido* in many instances took the place of the hacienda as a breeding place for exploitation. Politicians, bureaucrats, persons put in charge of managing these commons, a host of job seekers from the small towns and cities—all of these ate away the true purpose of the land program, which was to give a way of life back to those whose heritage had been stolen. In spite of all these things there was progress. The standard of living was slowly raised. Many *ejidos* became what their founders had hoped. Mexico did not even begin to approximate the high level of material existence in the United States, but for the first time she had a chance.

The revolution had given her that chance. One who dwells too much on the barbarous aspects of a revolution, any revolution, is very liable to lose the proper historic perspective. The French Revolution, the Russian Revolution, the Mexican Revolution were orgies in blood. It has been estimated that Mexico lost one million dead in the ten years of her devastating and cruel revolutionary conflicts. But to balance the picture properly it is necessary to ask the question: Did these deaths in the end add

up to a greater freedom for those who followed? Did they in any way increase the material benefits of the next generations?

In a sense which cannot be measured the Mexican Revolution also had effects throughout Latin America which were far reaching. It was the first case of an uprising of the submerged masses in general, the first time when the struggle was not clearly between two antagonistic groups of the small ruling class. If its results prove disillusioning in the end, it will nevertheless stand as the first great step of the Indian-mestizo millions toward a new social consciousness. This is clearly seen in what the revolution did to the feelings of the Indianist majority of the Mexican nation, and through them for the red man everywhere in the southern countries.

Now for the first time in four centuries the man of Indian blood became, through his own efforts, an equal instead of a slave. He would not suddenly be released from poverty, nor overnight become democratic, or free. But that hard-won victory meant something very real to him in a spiritual sense. Values which had been dormant for generations now came into the foreground. A new realism was brought into being, and fused with it was that indigenous folk feeling which generated the leading artistic current in contemporary Latin-American life.

The novel of the Mexican Revolution, with *The Underdogs* as its finest example, cleared away much of the purely aesthetic escapism which had preceded it. Azuela became Spanish America's best-known novelist. The clatterings of French-inspired modernism gave way to the single-purpose intensity of a new indigenous outlook on life. The oppressed red man became the primary concern of writers and artists in all the Indianist countries.

The vast scope of this new feeling can best be appreciated when one compares the great murals of Orozco, Rivera, Alfaro-Siqueiros, Guerrero Galván, and all the other fine Mexican painters of murals with the stiff work of the schools which preceded them. These men have enabled their nation to take a world lead in that Renaissance of painting which has flowered so widely and so intensely all over the globe during the past two decades. In South America, in Europe, in the United States, artists have looked to the Mexicans for inspiration and leadership in this field.

"The great mural painting was born with the Revolution," writes Jesús Guerrero Galván, one of its best-known exponents. Then going on to describe in greater detail the work of José Clemente Orozco, greatest of the painters of the revolution, he says: "The horrible is its chief strength, and, though it may seem paradoxical, its chief beauty too. By means of the eye it produces a trembling, a shudder. Instead of producing a pleasure for the eye, as the scholastics understood aesthetic enjoyment, it gives a sensation of anguish, horror, and desperation."

The Mexican Revolution thus became a spiritual and a visual thing for

the people of Latin America. Those who had never before paused to consider what the unleashing of the mass man might mean were now forced to experience some measure of his cruel might. Despite all dictatorships and corruption and inefficiencies of government this fear brought about a more honest consideration of the Indianist masses of many countries. It is doubtful if this consideration went far enough, but at least it did begin. Through the example of the Mexican Revolution the backward Indianist nations became truly social as well as political minded.

The Mexican Revolution carried its experiences beyond the pale of mere destruction. It showed that what begins as a mob movement, blind and directionless with hate, may well end as an artistic Renaissance, with a new birth of awareness to life. When the fires of killing went out in Mexico they were rekindled into fires of creation. The novel of the Mexican Revolution, the great painting of the revolution, the birth of a new Mexican music, the emergence of a powerful Indianist-mestizo social force—these are the most significant contributions of that movement in terms of Latin-American and world history. They prove that even ugliness, anguish, and death need not be hopeless for humanity at large. Some spark always survives to relight the torch of progress.

No other Latin-American country has yet experienced a revolution like that which swept Mexico. Cuba has slipped by default into Fidel Castro's communistic arms, and Bolivia has made a dramatic attempt at deep-rooted social reform but has been unable to maintain a stable civilian government. The case of Peru, the South American country most like Mexico, offers the curious parallel of a strong revolutionary party which has never really taken control of the country. Under Augusto Leguía, a Díaz-like dictator who ruled Peru from 1919 to 1930, there arose a strong Indianist opposition called the APRA. The term is made up of the first letter of each word of *Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*, or Popular Revolutionary Party of America. The ideals of this movement were essentially those of the Mexican Revolution softened by lofty spiritual values. APRA made a brave attempt to carry these ideals to all the southern countries. It also bears the ironic distinction of having twice won the presidency of Peru, each time being prevented by political fraud from placing its candidate in office. Not until its 1982 victory was APRA to govern Peru.

The principal organizer of this very indigenous-minded movement was an intellectual named Raúl Haya de la Torre. He had attended the University of Córdoba, Argentina, and was there in 1918 when the students revolted against the moth-eaten scholasticism and clericalism which still characterized that ancient institution. A few years later he went to Mexico and served as the private secretary of José Vasconcelos, one of the original Madero revolutionists.

Haya picked up the pro-Indian torch of González Prada, vitriolic essay-

ist of an earlier date, and continued the work of the little cripple, José Carlos Mariátegui, organizer of Peru's small communist party. But Haya de la Torre differed fundamentally from either of these men. He was profoundly religious and had always believed that in order to attain permanent success his political and social program must be fused with deep spiritual values. Consequently he turned away from the violent anti-Catholic stand of González Prada, and also from Mariátegui's primary concern for economic betterment. The Scripture was and is an integral part of Haya's social thinking.

Haya and the other intellectual Aprista leaders of Peru were men of such high caliber that little by little their concepts, despite the overwhelming illiteracy of the Peruvian masses, began to sift from the top downward until at last there was a widespread popular response. APRA became a kind of religion, "indigenous as the llama." Even the self-styled communist Mariátegui had made much of his belief that "myths are what have always moved men most in history."

It was necessary, therefore, to give the masses a myth, a faith to which they might cling in order to bring about their permanent redemption from misery. To Mariátegui that myth was communism. To others it was the Catholic Church. To Haya and his millions of followers it was the APRA party and program, inseparable from its religious values.

In 1923 Haya made his first large-scale demonstration against the despotism of Leguía. He was promptly exiled from Peru and for the following seven years traveled and studied in Mexico, Germany, England, Soviet Russia, and the United States. On one occasion he lectured at Harvard University in English. In 1930, when Leguía was forced out of power by Sánchez Cerro, Haya returned to Peru and the following year he ran for the presidency. All objective accounts indicate that he won the election hands down but that he was defrauded of a fair count by the incumbent, Sánchez Cerro.

An immense crowd of Apristas gathered in the bull ring at Lima, perhaps the largest gathering in the history of the country, and Haya was present to address them. From thousands of throats rose the shout, "On to the palace!" If Haya had spoken the word no one could have stopped them. The police were on their side. So was most of the army. The entire capital was in a ferment of pro-APRA zeal. But instead of leading his followers to the palace and to political victory, Haya rose and spoke soft words of peace. He refused to utilize the means of violence in order to attain his ideal of justice. Sánchez Cerro, the ruthless executioner, continued to preside in the governmental palace, and very soon Haya was rotting in prison. The great moment had come and gone; Haya had not taken the tide at the flood.

Yet APRA was not a failure because its ideals still live in the hearts of millions of Indians throughout the region of the Andes. The day has passed

when the party had dozens of branches in the different countries of Latin America and bade fair to become the most powerful international force in the southern countries. But the wheel of fortune is certain to turn again toward most of the APRA program. The name may be changed, but the necessity is omnipresent.

It is fascinating to note that both APRA and the Mexican Revolution turned back toward the Indian past for inspiration. Certainly their creeds are broader than a mere wish for Aztec or Inca living, but it is the native agricultural collectivism, the village commons, the spirit of folk cooperation and folk art, the almost religious integration of life under the indigenous peoples which both movements espoused and which enabled them to incorporate the Indian majority into their folds. It was a freedom within tradition that they sought, not any foreign political importation. They did not aspire to restore a past way of life so much as to redeem fifty millions of living people in whose veins runs the blood of the native American.

APRA, like the Mexican Revolution, did not confine itself to the social sphere alone, but also gave birth to an intense artistic movement. Throughout the Andean region the intellectual and the folk arts began to fuse in a true mestizo expression. Painters, writers, and musicians turned to indigenous themes for inspiration. In Peru, José Sabogal and his many disciples initiated a school of painting of which any nation might well feel proud. Sabogal himself stated the new feeling clearly: "I love the plastic beauty of my country, and have faith in a great artistic flourishing of Peru which will justify the parallel paths that Mexico and Peru have trodden since the most remote times."¹⁴¹

An intense Indianist school of writing also arose in the Andean region. In this field as well as in painting Peru, Ecuador, and Bolivia blossomed forth with a literature as vital in purpose as it is fine in presentation. The famous Latin-American prize novel, *Broad and Alien Is the World*, a moving epic of life in the Andes, was written by Ciro Alegría, a member of the APRA party. Dozens of other writers and artists, many of them forced into exile by reactionary governments, carried forward the great tradition of the new mestizo art.

Since the beginning of the Mexican Revolution artistic values have been turned inside out in the nations of the south. Now nearly every page and every picture is shot through with the imminence of some social problem and warm with the smell of earth and of human suffering. No longer do the lofty flights into an ivory tower obscure the horizon of Latin America's finest artistic expression.

In spite of these things the forward march of material and social progress has been tortuously, painfully slow. A great abyss still stands between the hope and the deed. Mexico alone, one of the least prepared of the southern countries, has blown off the apex of her economic pyramid and

undertaken on a broad base the redistribution of land. This is the bedrock upon which every economic activity in Latin America must rest for many years to come. Other nations better endowed for a successful solution of the problem—for example, Argentina and Chile—have sidestepped the issue, thus only delaying an inevitable crisis.

Latin America, shackled to its agricultural past, and incapable of creating large capital for industrialization, continues to export mainly raw materials in the old colonial pattern, exploited by the highly industrialized countries. This disequilibrium in the national economies has been further accentuated by dependence on one or two outstanding products. Brazil is a perfect example of this tendency. In colonial days her illusive prosperity rested on sugar; in the eighteenth century gold became king; and in the 1890s fabulous rubber profits captured the national imagination. Each product collapsed in turn and flattened out the primitive economic structure. At the present moment Brazil lives on her exports of coffee; at least this one product represents her margin between a measure of well-being and economic prostration. Nearly 70 per cent of the world's supply of coffee comes from Brazil, and a break in the international market means immediate disaster for millions of Brazilian citizens. In a like manner Cuba lives on sugar, Chile on copper and nitrates, Venezuela on oil, Honduras on bananas, Argentina and Uruguay on beef and grains, Bolivia on tin, and so on down the line. These are not the products of modern economies but of colonial territories, and until a greater diversity of products is built up hand in hand with a greater industrialization, these regions must remain primarily dependent on outside nations for their subsistence. In the 1980s, sad to say, cocaine surpassed all other exports in many countries.

Industrial progress has been held back by the same factors which have prevented a well-rounded agricultural development. The historic disdain of the proud Iberian to engage in manual labor has been perpetuated into the twentieth century. Small populations spread over immense distances and with only poor means of communication render most difficult the mechanics of modern civilization. A lack of immigrants and a lack of capital have further retarded industrial development. The first has meant a dearth of skilled workers and a lack of markets; the second has made impossible great native enterprises. This combination opened the doors to foreign investors who were interested primarily in profits and not in development. As in the colonial days, wealth which should have been reinvested or spent on the spot enriching native economies has been siphoning off into foreign coffers. It is lifeblood flowing away.

Nevertheless, the process of industrialization has been the most marked tendency in Latin-American life since the period of World War I. During the years 1914-18 the nations of the south, shut off from many of their foreign markets and unable to purchase the manufactured necessities of

modern life, became for the first time acutely aware of this gap in their national economies. Industrial development took a great spurt forward, the standard of living rose, and in many regions this was followed by a growth of democracy in government.

Industrialization is not necessarily synonymous with democracy, but the industrial society provides a friendly soil for the genesis and growth of democratic ideas. Its effect upon the social and political outlook of a nation is certain to be profound. Industrial plants pay better wages than farms or cattle estates. Such plants attract workers from the country and bring them into expanding urban centers. Here these workers become more conscious of themselves as a class, are better able to organize in defense of their rights, learn how to wield political power, receive a better education, grow more democratic minded, and exert a greater influence on the national life than was possible under their former state as isolated tenant farmers, farm hands, or share croppers.

In the years following the outbreak of World War I the ideals of social justice thus began to bear fruit in many of the southern countries. Liberalism seemed to come of age in Argentina under Irigoyen; in Mexico the regime of President Obregón at last gave that battered country a democratic peace; in Chile, Alessandri became the idol of the working class, and in Uruguay, Batlle y Ordóñez and his successors established the framework of one of the most advanced social programs of any nation.

Industry and democracy in these regions put on a modern face behind which, unfortunately, the old body persisted. Great cities arose where previously only disjointed colonial towns had stood. Some of the larger industrial centers more than tripled their population within a few years. Skyscrapers began to rise up on suddenly widened streets. Buenos Aires, São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City, Santiago, Lima, Bogotá, Havana and Caracas are all examples of this phenomenal growth. In both a material and spiritual way they represent the new industrial outlook which is bound to mean so much in the future development of Latin America.

The three most industrialized areas in Latin America are the regions that envelop Buenos Aires, São Paulo, and Mexico City. The importance of these regions in the national life of their respective countries can readily be seen in the following facts. The state of São Paulo alone produces approximately one half of the total national income of Brazil and pays approximately one half of the federal taxes. Argentina, largely because of her even greater industrialization, has 58 per cent of all the railway mileage in South America, and more telephones than the combined total of the other eight Spanish-speaking countries of that continent.

It is clear, of course, that the few widely separated industrial centers which do exist mark only the beginning of an industrialized economy. Latin America has just recently passed from a purely agrarian state into the production of consumers' goods: textiles, shoes, processed foods, and

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so forth. The machine, especially the heavy machine which is one of the great roots of the power and wealth of the United States, has made only spotty headway in Latin America. Today the per capita output of work in the United States is approximately seven times that of Argentina and Chile and about twenty times that of Brazil and Peru. The average North American worker receives wages that are so much higher because he *produces* so much more than his Latin-American counterpart.

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The process of industrial development in Latin America continued hand in hand with the growth of democratic government until the great depression of the 1930s. This economic debacle was followed by drastic changes in the political outlook everywhere. Liberal governments turned reactionary and reactionary governments became liberal. People rebelled against hard times, laid the blame on those in power, and demanded a change in government. The best change seemed to swing as far as possible to the opposite extreme.

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Even Argentina, which up to this moment had been Latin America's most articulate democracy, reacted quickly to economic deterioration, and the "radical" government of Irigoyen was forced out of power by a revolutionary coup in 1930. Shortly afterward a similar change took place in democratic Uruguay, and in Brazil the revolution of Getulio Vargas placed Brazil's first long-term dictator in power. Trujillo took over in the Dominican Republic, and the Central American states (except Costa Rica) made a like return to despotic government. Uruguay was the only one of these countries to restore democratic principles after a brief flirtation with dictatorship. In Argentina and Brazil the growing restlessness of the working class under adverse economic conditions caused the strongest apprehension in conservative quarters. Before long this resulted in even further suppression of civil liberties.

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Mexico, with her purely agrarian economy, escaped the worst phases of the depression and suffered no political change. Chile and Colombia, which were under rigidly conservative regimes when the depression struck, took the opposite course from Argentina and Brazil and put in more liberal, more democratic governments. Cuba finally got rid of her despot Machado; Leguía was forced out of power in Peru, and the tyrant Gómez died in Venezuela. All of these countries moved toward greater democracy in government while Argentina and Brazil were moving away.

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It was during this same period that the United States under Franklin Roosevelt was trying to establish its Good-Neighbor Policy toward the nations of the south. Relations between Yankee and Latin America became more cordial than at any time for the past century. The President himself, Cordell Hull, and Sumner Welles all worked laboriously to establish the principles of friendship, trust, and the sovereign integrity of nations. The last Marines were withdrawn from the Caribbean area. Non-intervention became an established policy of the North American government. Recip-

rocal trade agreements were made between the United States and the other American republics. Sumner Welles, one of the men most responsible for these changes, publicly admitted and abjured the "bullying and domineering" attitude of the United States during the previous half century. It was a far cry from the dark days of Dollar Diplomacy.

The Good-Neighbor Policy paid for itself a hundred times over when the United States was drawn into World War II. The apathy and suspicion so hard to bear during World War I did not revive with this second holocaust. Only a few weeks after the attack on Pearl Harbor the foreign ministers of the American republics met at Rio de Janeiro and recommended that the nations of this hemisphere break off diplomatic relations with the Axis powers. The Mexican Foreign Minister, Ezéquiél Padilla, made an impassioned plea for support of the United States. "Let us dictate a new Magna Charta to the free American," he said. "Let us stand together as one solid block against those who would divide and conquer us." Before many weeks had passed the United States was granted strategic bases throughout the area of Latin America and the majority of the southern countries had joined her in the war against the Axis. Toward the end of hostilities in Europe the Act of Chapultepec, drawn up at Mexico City, further affirmed the solidarity of the hemisphere and its abiding intention to remain united during the postwar years.

