

# Revolt in the Tropics

BY CARL F. WESTERBERG

## *Poverty Is the Common Denominator of Those Lands*

**I**N INDIA the revolt against British rule smolders persistently. In Latin America revolution follows revolution. However much humanitarians may have beclouded the Indian issue by the injection of political and religious shibboleths, the facts are that this revolt and the Latin American revolutions have a common origin in economic discontent. In the case of India, it is easy to blame England as an iniquitous political monster, sucking the life blood of its miserable millions; it is easy to ignore the record of history which shows that until the English came, there had been for centuries neither safety of life nor of property. But, since the Latin American nations are free and self-governing, these theories, which seem plausible when applied to India, can not be used at all. All kinds of cumbersome theories have been devised to explain the constant political turmoil reigning in these countries. Whether the writer lay the blame on racial, social, religious or medical conditions was simply a matter of choice to be governed by some personal bias. The dominant note in all these writings has been the assumption that, if a free people can succeed in maintain-

ing political stability, economic prosperity must be the inevitable consequence.

The great common characteristic of all tropical countries is poverty, of the type which exists among our Southern mountaineers. It exists in the tropics for the same reasons that it exists in this country, because the marginal lands can not produce wealth at the rate which is required to maintain our modern phase of civilization. As a whole, tropical soils are so poor that the price of their cultivation is poverty.

**T**HIS soil deficiency of the tropics is so paradoxical, so opposed to the general belief, that it deserves explanation. The layman visiting the tropics is impressed by the rank vegetation which surrounds him, and makes the almost universal mistake of concluding that only a rich soil could support such a growth. But, in the kingdom of plant life, moisture and a certain degree of warmth have always been more important than soils. The aerial species of orchids live without any soil at all excepting for such particles of dust as may fall on their roots. The rank jungle growth of the tropics is, for the most

part, a growth of weeds thriving on a lean soil.

The great commercial crops of the world, such as the cereals, require a soil which contains both humus and certain mineral salts. In the tropics, conditions for the formation of humus may, at times, be so extremely favorable that topsoils may accumulate to a depth of fifty feet or more. Such conditions are, however, relatively rare because the erosion produced by torrential rains in the rainy season and hot, dry winds in the dry season destroy the topsoil about as fast as it is formed. In the temperate zones, conditions for mineral enrichment of the soil are ideal. The shattering effect of frost breaks the rock up into small fragments, and the heaving action of alternate thaws and frosts disseminates these fragments through the soil. In the tropics these favorable factors are totally absent. The result is that tropical soils, even when they contain sufficient humus, are usually deficient in minerals.

AS LONG as agriculture was entirely a matter of hand work, the inhabitant of the temperate zones possessed no great advantage over his tropical competitor. The greater richness of the temperate soils was counterbalanced by the fact that in cold countries the farmer had to devote a great part of his efforts to the securing of clothing and shelter, both of which were of little importance in the tropics.

But the development of agricultural machinery placed an immense premium on rich lands, sufficiently level for machine cultivation. Such lands are almost entirely within the

temperate zones. In consequence, the farmer in these zones was able, for the first time in the history of the world, to produce an immense surplus of foodstuffs. The railroads became an economic possibility because the wheat growers produced enough tonnage to support them. Labor was released from agriculture into industry, and the increasing prosperity of the farmer furnished a ready market for the products of all forms of industry. However unimportant wheat may be today in the life of the average American or European, it was wheat which laid the foundation for the monstrous industrial empires today, and even now railway mileage, which is an industrial necessity, is more closely allied to the production of cereals than to industry.

THE growing of wheat in tropical countries, with the single exception of India, was gradually abandoned because the soil and topographic conditions made it impossible to grow this grain in competition with the temperate zones. Because wheat could not be produced, extensive railroad construction was impracticable, and because railroad facilities were not created, manufacturing industries could not locate themselves in that area. It is very significant to note that India, which is still a producer of wheat, is the only tropical country with any great railway mileage.

The increasing prosperity of the temperate zones created a market for certain agricultural products which were not subject to competition outside of the tropics. Of these crops, with the exception of sugar, all were of the orchard type, and the most im-

portant was coffee. From a broad economic point of view, these crops are all very undesirable because their production is based entirely on the existence of very cheap labor. Without exception, whether the crop be coffee, cacao, sisal, or rubber, the yield in pounds per acre is small and the amount of labor required is enormous. In the case of coffee, the gross value of the yield per acre is about equal to that of an acre of wheat; but a family can grow ten times as many acres of wheat as they can coffee.

**T**ROPICAL poverty is a survival of Eighteenth Century conditions in the Twentieth Century. As was the case a hundred years ago, this poverty is not characterized by actual hunger excepting where overpopulation exists. India is overpopulated as is Porto Rico, and in both places a certain portion of the people are chronically hungry. In general, Latin America is underpopulated and the condition of hunger is absent. But the processes of trade and commerce are educational, and year by year the difference in living conditions in the tropics and in the temperate zones is being emphasized. The result is perpetual discontent. In Latin America, this process has been going on for many years. No criticism of tropical affairs, whether in America or in India, can be wholly fair if the critic ignores the very existence of this form of poverty or if he fails to offer an economic solution for the problems it creates.

The economic structure of tropical nations approximates that which existed all over the world prior to the Nineteenth Century. There was an

hereditary ruling class, either financial or political, small in number but powerful, and an immense percentage of illiterate laborers. The middle class was small and unimportant because the economic conditions did not require the existence of such a class. There was none of that diffusion of wealth throughout the entire social body which seems to be requisite for the maintenance of a republican form of government. This is the condition which prevails today in the tropical countries and it is the source of their political troubles. The middle class represents a transitional stage between wealth and poverty, and where it is absent, it shows that the transition is virtually impossible through ordinary industrial or commercial activity.

**U**NDER these conditions, politics offers the most ready method of advancement in economic status. The most intelligent and ambitious men seek politics as a career and they form that vast body of office-holders, both military and civil, who, rather than a middle class, separate the owners of wealth from the peons. Since the wealth of the country is mostly in the form of agricultural investments, almost entirely non-mobile and peculiarly susceptible to seizure or destruction, the wealthy families are forced to enter politics for their own protection.

It seems impossible to divorce a republican form of government from the not necessarily related system of government by political parties. The peculiar instability of many Latin American republics arises from this association. Where employment by the Government is the most impor-

tant method of individual economic advancement, it is evident that when political parties exist, an important fraction of the more intelligent and enterprising portion of the public is at all times deprived of a means of living merely because of political affiliations. In attempting to overthrow an existing Government, these individuals are moved by economic need, which is naturally a more compelling urge than mere devotion to the ideals of a party. Since the peon is always living in a state of more or less hopeless poverty, it requires but little effort to secure his adhesion to the revolutionary cause. Under normal conditions, no political issues exist which give one party any great numerical superiority over the other, and the result is a Government in a state of perpetual equilibrium, with the wealthy class holding the balance of power.

WHEREVER chronic poverty exists as a check on individual initiative and effort, the election of Presidents by a fair popular vote almost always results in the defeat of the administration. Since the new administration, however good it may be, is unable to ameliorate the condition of chronic poverty which is entirely beyond its control, it becomes manifest even at the beginning that, if it be permitted to survive until the end of the elective term, it will be overthrown. So, it is only human nature to accelerate that overthrow by means of a revolutionary movement, which is in truth merely the anticipation of an election. This natural resentment against the continuation in office of an administration which has lost public confidence manifests

itself even in the United States by the constantly increasing demand that the interval between election and assumption of office be reduced.

Sooner or later, the everlasting alternation of administrations becomes intolerable. This is particularly true where wealth and vested interests are concerned. Out of this situation arise dictatorships. The Dictator is, in effect, an absolute monarch who has assumed control of the Government by the consent of the people. The foreign public visualizes a country under a dictatorship as a country terrorized into submission by an army. This is not true, for where the army is a political instrument, as it is in most tropical countries, it accurately reflects the sentiment of the majority of the inhabitants. In most cases, the Dictator maintains himself in power by means of changes in the Constitution which, while theoretically insuring the election of Presidents by popular vote, in effect perpetuate the rule of the Dictator. Therefore, the Dictator does not have to guard against an electoral upturn and he is free to concentrate his efforts against the contingency of violence or revolution.

ON THEORETICAL grounds, this situation may be highly repugnant to all believers in democracy. In actual practice, the only important objection is the fact that the Dictator has assumed sovereign powers without, at the same time, providing any legal means for succession to the throne. Since the Dictator is able to override or ignore laws, he can make decisions as rapidly as if he were the executive officer of a private corporation. Since he is not limited to a

specified term of office, he can work toward objectives whose attainment is far in the future.

While the Dictator may be motivated by the most sincere form of patriotism and may be more interested in the wielding of power than in personal financial gain, he can maintain his power only as long as he permits other people to make money. The one and only foundation which can maintain him is national prosperity. It is for this reason that most dictatorships are good governments in the sense that they promote the development of resources and means of transport and communication even though, at the same time, they outrage the rights of minorities.

AS LONG as a Dictator can continue to spend money, his position is almost impregnable. Not only is his rule profitable to his own supporters, but even his opponents make money, through the artificial prosperity induced by governmental expenditures. If commodity prices rise, the revenues of the Government improve and therefore increase its borrowing capacity. But, sooner or later, commodity prices will fall and the burden of service on loans will become onerous. The Dictator is compelled to retrench, and he at once loses the support of the political machine which kept him in power. The burden of taxation has increased, and in consequence the support of the wealthy class has been alienated. The permanent opposition and the wealthy classes combine with the dissenting elements of his own party, and the result is an almost bloodless revolution. Politically the event has exactly the same significance as the

overthrow of a European cabinet resulting from an adverse vote in parliament. The resulting Government may be another dictatorship or the revolutionary party may, for the sake of the sentimental effect abroad, resort to an election. The risk of submitting the issue to popular ballot is very slight, because invariably the revolution has succeeded because it truly represented the will of the people.

But, whether the new executive obtain his office by seizure or by election, he inherits the problems of his predecessor. The mere change in administration, despite the hopes of the people, can not reduce the service on the national debt nor can it raise the prices of the exportable products of the country. The fundamental poverty of the nation still exists and the degree of this poverty can be modified only by factors beyond the control of the Government. If these factors remain unfavorable, the new executive will probably fall in a short time in exactly the same way as his predecessor.

WHILE the general pattern may be slightly modified in different countries, as a whole revolutionary movements in the tropical nations are all alike. Their coming can almost always be predicted, and when they do come, they are of little real importance. Their nature is purely political and they never have the disastrous consequences of such social revolutions as the Mexican and the Russian.

With the single exception of the revolt in Argentina, all the recent revolutions in the Latin American countries have been true to type. The deposed Presidents or Dictators,

for it is very hard to tell which some of them were, all fell because of the development of world wide economic conditions which were completely beyond their control. In every case, these men were competent executives who were trying to develop the resources of their nations. Argentina is not a tropical nation and tropical poverty is not prevalent. This revolution was somewhat of a freak performance. The elected President was either mentally or physically disabled, or else deliberately refused to perform the functions of his office, so that the Government virtually ceased to operate. A similar situation might conceivably arise in the United States if a President became mentally incapacitated at the beginning of his term of office. Such a situation would present a number of very intricate legal problems. In Argentina it was settled by means of a revolution. It is most improbable that this revolution will be followed by others, as the conditions which predispose a nation toward revolutions are almost entirely absent in that country.

**I**N THEORY, at least, people can be educated to differentiate between those ills for which political parties can be blamed and those which are beyond the control of any government. In that case, they would cast their ballots in favor of general principles instead of as a blind protest against their own poverty. But, even in the United States, where mass education is the rule, political results, more often than not, are caused by factors which are beyond the control of the party which happens to be in power. Under the economic conditions which prevail in

the tropics, educational facilities in any way comparable with those which exist in the United States or in Western Europe are a financial impossibility. To expect that still higher degree of education which would enable their people to differentiate among the obscure causes of their ills, is a complete absurdity. The cost of education is such that no tropical country can support it.

**T**HE cost of the public school system of the United States amounts to about seventeen dollars per capita. This is more than the per capita incomes of most tropical countries. The service on the Peruvian national debt requires taxation amounting to about three dollars per capita. From the American point of view, such a sum is negligible, yet in Peru it was such a terrific burden that it was an important contributing factor to a revolution. No matter how low the wages of Peruvian teachers may be, Peru is financially unable to pay the cost of mass education.

Venezuela is an example of a country which is really trying to educate its people. It has a population which includes about 600,000 within the usual limits of school age. Because of the scattered nature of the population, it is probable that one teacher would be required for every twenty pupils. On this basis, if the teachers were paid as much as a clerk receives in that country, the teacher payroll would amount to more than \$35,000,000 a year. This sum is more than the entire cost of running the National Government, in spite of the fact that this is the most prosperous of all tropical nations. Under these conditions, the obstacles against even that

slight degree of education represented by the mere ability to read and write are stupenduous.

Tropical poverty is the fundamental cause of both illiteracy and political instability. While the analytic observer will readily admit the existence of this poverty, he is prone to believe that, had political or racial conditions been different, this poverty might not have existed. But as far as the tropical Americas are concerned, there is a long record of attempts at colonization by Europeans and even by Americans, all of which have ended either by the complete evacuation of the colonists or by their reversal to Indian standards of living. When the world succeeds in eliminating the physical causes of tropical poverty, it will at the same time eliminate the phenomenon of political unrest. The tropical American nations will probably continue in the future as they have in the past, with a few years of peace at a time separated by revolutions, which will always appear more important abroad than in the country where they occur.

IF INDIA succeeds in gaining her independence, she will begin her national existence under conditions far more adverse than those which confronted the tropical American nations at the time of their liberation. The latter countries were so sparsely populated that there was land in abundance and there was no food problem. As opposed to this situation, India is today overpopulated. The American nations possessed a relatively homogeneous population,

consisting in general of two races which were not separated from each other by religious barriers or inhibitions. India, on the other hand, is an incredibly complicated collection of diverse races and religions which are separated, one from the other, by the accumulated hatred of centuries. If the tropical nations of the Americas existing under conditions infinitely better than those of India have been unable to maintain a state of political stability, is there any reason to expect that India will be able to do so?

THE Indian Nationalists have based their campaign on the premise that India is economically wronged as a result of British domination. The implication is that, if India were self-governed, she would be able to maintain a standard of living better than that which now prevails. All the historical evidence seems to refute this claim and to indicate that if England abandons India the result will be complete chaos.

Against the theories of the philosophers, ministers, missionaries and humanitarians who have espoused the cause of India with little knowledge of tropical conditions, there stands the irrefutable fact that under modern conditions no tropical nation has been able to secure political stability or to support a modern standard of living. These things have not been attainable, not because the various nations which have tried to secure them have been afflicted with racial faults too great to be overcome, but because the tropics can not possibly support a modern civilization.

# How Canada Deals with Its Criminals

BY JAMES MONTAGNES

**T**wo youths, caps pulled far over their eyes, their shirts open at the neck, walked briskly into one of the small branch banks which are common in the residential parts of any Canadian city. This was in Hamilton, Ontario. They pulled out guns, ordered the teller to hand over his money, collected it and walked out. There was the usual car on hand, and away they sped. Some blocks distant an eighteen-year old Italian girl saw a car come speeding down the street and draw up to another standing parked at the curb. There was a screech of brakes, a sight of two men jumping from one car to the other, holding in their hands bundles of what looked like bills, and the car was off. But not before the girl, scenting the unusual, had taken down the number and hurried with it to the nearest police station.

Four hours later, one of the would-be bandits was captured in his own home. Twenty hours after entering the bank both youths, one of nineteen and the other twenty-one, had been sentenced to six years for robbery with arms, two years in addition for stealing a motor car, and thirty lashes to be administered to each

during the first eighteen months of their confinement in penitentiary.

The case is not out of the ordinary. It was chosen because of its recent date. It demonstrates that in Canada justice moves swiftly, and with hard sentences. To that fact is laid in part the reason why crime in the Dominion has not reached the height that it has in the United States. While Canada follows to a large extent the tendencies exhibited in the growth of civilization in the United States, as witness the Dominion's automobile traffic, talking picture theatres, radios, miniature golf courses, and current fads, there is at least one phase of this development that is not followed with equal rapidity. Crime in Canada has always existed, is perhaps more noticeable today than at the beginning of the century, but it is by no means on a par with that in the United States.

**T**HE reasons for this are several. Some go back many years. Some are lodged with the constitutional laws underlying the government of the country.

To Prohibition has been laid a large part of the blame of the present