

McCARTHYISM--MEXICAN STYLE

The USLA Justice Committee has been publishing information on political prisoners in Latin American countries. Most North Americans are not too surprised to learn of repressions of political opponents in Guatemala, Bolivia, and other countries where brutal dictatorships prevail; but they tend to think of Mexico as one of the few democratic republics in Latin America--where freedom of thought and expression are the standard way of life. But times have changed in Mexico. In the past period the activities of the government against political opposition have begun to resemble the barbarous practices of the worst regimes in Latin America.

The New York Times of July 20, 1967, reported that the Mexican government "had foiled a plot financed from Communist China to establish a 'popular Socialist' regime in Mexico." Just ten days earlier, an editorial in the Times said: "The stability of Mexico--unique in Latin America--has been proved again in the election just held in which the P.R.I. seems to have gained 177 of the 178 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and won all seven state governorships." James Reston, in his July 23 column in the same newspaper, said the government was making "a demonstration ...warning...the Communist activists of Latin America who are now passing through here to Cuba..."

What the Times fails to report is that Mexico is in the midst of a witch-hunt which began last spring. The latest arrests, which run to seventy, have led to an atmosphere of intimidation. Even the conservative Mexican newspaper Excelsior, commenting on the charges against the accused on July 20, said, "Something which appears greatly exaggerated since thirteen individuals could never endanger the regime." The Mexican daily El Dia pointed out that the prisoners all "...affirmed that they had been tortured over a period of days, abused and beaten while their hands were tied and their eyes covered, threatened with death and with the death of their families, in order to make them sign the confessions which they repudiated yesterday." In spite of this information, the newspapers of Mexico gave credence to the charges outlined at a press conference by the Assistant Attorney General, Julio Sanchez Vargas.

The Berkeley Barb of July 28-August 3 ran a story by Pete Camejo, brother of one of the accused, Daniel Camejo Guanche. Mr. Camejo wrote: "The secret police...concocted such an incredible frame-up that they need 'confessions' for 'proof.'"

"The DFS kidnapped their victims, one at a time, beginning July 12, took them to a secret house or headquarters of the DFS and there got 'confessions.'"

"Paul Contreras Alcantara, for instance, testified he was kidnapped, had his hands tied, was blindfolded and driven to a house July 13. There he was beaten for days and starved. No one knew what had happened to him until it was announced a week later in the daily papers. Of course, Contreras 'confessed.'"

"Eduardo Fuentes de la Fuente, 19 years old, was held for four days and received the same treatment as Contreras except he also had cigarettes burned on his arms and back.

"Manuel Mendez Bravo, 25 years old, was beaten so badly he had to be hospitalized.

"Most of the prisoners were forced to sit up for 48 hours, some like my brother, not blindfolded but with a light shining in their eyes.

"Adrian Campos Diaz, a peasant from the State of Guerrero who does not know how to read or write, was coughing blood when the lawyer first saw him. At least one prisoner was beaten until he was unconscious.

"What is their crime? The government and the widely quoted 'confessions' claim Red China was slipping the 13 \$1,600 a month to organize 'urban and rural guerrillas' to overthrow the 'democratic' government of Diaz Ordaz.

"Along with financial help, they claim China was sending all kinds of literature including pictures of Lenin, Mao, Stalin and Marx. Pictures of Castro also appeared.

"...The Assistant Attorney General, Julio Sanchez Vargas, also announced that the thirteen planned to rob a bank to get funds for arms. Apparently the Mexican Government was embarrassed over the Chinese only spending \$1,600 a month to overthrow them and so they decided to add a little more working capital to their 'plot.'

"Who are the so-called plotters? Adan Nieto Castillo, the supposed leader of the group, is a lawyer for the truckdrivers union.

"A couple of unions have stuck up for Nieto in spite of the government pressure. Nieto is the oldest of those arrested. He has stated that he does not know any of the other twelve arrested.

"Contreras, Fuente..., Miguel Angel Flores Bernal and Silvestre Enrique Marence Martinez all worked in a progressive bookstore which sells pro-Marxist works, all legal under Mexical law, or sold books for a living.

"My brother was picked up to add a Venezuelan coloration to the frameup and help give it an international touch.

Of prime importance in the widely publicized evidence against him is a Vietnam film called 'Time of the Locust' and a film on Venezuelan social conditions and guerrilla movement called 'FALN.'

"Both films have been shown throughout the United States and in the Mexico University.

"...All the defendants denied the charges against them. The formal charges include conspiracy, 'inviting' (not inciting) to rebellion, 'contemplating' robbery and damaging property of others and criminal association.

"The hearing before a judge July 21 was under the heaviest guard in Mexican judicial history according to court officials. Each defendant stated how the confessions had been forced from them. The judge just listened.

"...July 23, I was at last permitted to see my brother for an hour. During his interrogation the secret police produced files containing information only the United States government could have provided them....

"Danny told me all the prisoners have to sleep on concrete slabs. Although this is Mexico it gets quite cold at night because of the altitude....

"I had brought clothing and blankets with me but the police refused to give them to the prisoners....We hope by next week to get some blankets into the priosn.*

"...He described how they held a pistol to his head and told him he would be killed if he didn't sign the 'confession' they made up for him and the papers permitting the police to search his apartment.

*Pete Camejo had his visa and all official papers removed by the authorities and was forced to leave the country.

"As I was leaving the jail I saw Adolfo Gilly and we waved at each other. Gilly is the writer who spoke at Berkeley last year under the auspices of Ramparts magazine. Gilly has been in prison for over a year on a similar 'plot' frame-up. He is still 'waiting' for his trial to begin.

"Like Gilly the thirteen arrested last week cannot get bail. Mexican law does not permit bail for anyone facing a sentence of over 5 years."

Gilly, who is an Argentine journalist, and members of the Partido Obrero Revolucionario were thrown into jail as scapegoats for the strike at the University of Mexico in the spring of 1966. Another group of prisoners was arrested in the State of Sinaloa; in August, Dr. Raul Ugalde, and organizer of the Independent Peasants Unions and founder of the Electoral Front of the People; Victor Rico Galan, noted writer for the magazine Siempre, along with 26 companions were arrested on similar charges. In April of this year, Angel Gutierrez and Ramon Danzos Palomino, both of the National Liberation Movement, were arrested in the State of Sonora. Mr. Danzos had run against Gustavo Diaz Ordaz in the presidential elections of 1964.

Reports have also reached the U.S. about repressions at the University of Morelia and arrests in Vera Cruz. There is always the pattern of arrest, charges of "Communist plot," and the prisoners mistreated and then languishing in prison for a far-off trial. We are witnessing the first stages of Mexican McCarthyism. However, since tourism is Mexico's primary source of dollars, the Mexican Government is extremely vulnerable to U.S. public opinion. Protests against the arbitrary arrests and lack of due legal process can help ease the plight of the dozens of political prisoners in Mexico.

Send your letter to Lic. Gustavo Diaz Ordaz, Presidente de la Republica Mexicana, Palacio Nacional, Mexico 1, D.F. Mexico; and to Lic. Jesus Paron Vasconcelos, Juez Segundo de Distrito en Material Penal, Bucareli 22, Mexico 1, D.F. Mexico.

Funds to help the case of the 13 may be sent to P.O. Box 1208, Berkeley, California.

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