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Communism *in* Mexico

By

M. R. MADDEN

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COMMUNISM IN MEXICO

I. Objectives of Mexican Communism *

IN surveying the activities of Communists it is necessary to keep in mind a certain definite point of view which will help us to perceive the unity in all their divergent and often confusing actions and which will help us to detect just what is Communist propaganda. For it often appears to be the opposite of what it is. . . . Such a point of view is expressed very well in the Exercises of St. Ignatius in the meditation on Two Standards, that of Jesus Christ and that of Lucifer. These present two opposing ideals ever in conflict and the final victory though not in doubt, will not come until the end. Communism presents the ideals of Lucifer—material riches, material honors, material pleasures, and all the good it promises comes under the head of material and physical satisfactions. I am not saying, however, that every individual Communist understands that these are the ideals of Lucifer and so chooses him, for quite often individuals take up Communist activities from a really noble motive to lift man out of miserable conditions. The concentration on the physical aspect of these conditions eventually prevents him from distinguishing between the abuse of a thing and the thing itself and thus binds him to the destructive character of the remedy proposed. All of us can easily fall into the same error unless we criticize constantly the objectives and methods of Communism in the light of the standards of Christ.

According to Communist writings, teachings and actions, the great objective of Communism is to detach man from God and to make him self-sufficient, interested in material satisfactions. In short, to de-supernaturalize him. The Communist problem of how to achieve this aim varies with the particular society and the actual conditions. . . . Usually it is a case of putting over the ideas that:

* Address delivered at the College of New Rochelle at a Symposium on Communism held under the auspices of the College Bureau, New York State Chapter of the International Federation of Catholic Alumnae, February 9, 1935.

1. Man is purely a natural being. Therefore everything in accordance with nature and natural functions is to be followed.

2. The institutions of society must be secularized, that is, disconnected from everything that savors of religion and which emphasizes the supernatural and man's relation to God.

Hence the propaganda must be directed:

1. To secure an educational system based on the idea that man is a purely natural being.

2. To supersede the corporate social institutions such as the family, the State and the Church. These are based upon integrated and universal relationships which are natural to man in the sense of being in accord with his nature but which are not natural in the sense of being purely material or perhaps material and intellectual but never spiritual. For these institutions the Communist wishes to substitute the group which is a mere aggregation of human beings united for *action in common* to satisfy a particular interest. It is from this last idea—action in common—that this propaganda gets its popular name, Communism.

These are not new ideas; in fact, they are quite old but are never found developed in any highly civilized societies and are never really popular in the sense of being supported by the majority in a civilization. Communism flourishes best in a decadent, dying or weary society, but it crops up every few generations as an anti-movement, according to the health of the society in which it operates. It is always unimportant and quiescent in a Catholic social order where the social institutions are so firmly established that man is not at a loose end and so easily to be detached. Nevertheless it is never entirely absent even in a Catholic society, for the reason given by St. Ignatius. The world is the theater of the tremendous drama of the free will of man and therefore even in a Catholic society, we observe the Communist phenomenon rising to the surface and taking on a new life. Today Communism is intensely active in Russia and Hispanic America, particularly in Mexico, but such intense activity is not the product of one gen-

eration. So far as Hispanic America is concerned, this present Communism is a growth of about two hundred years and has come to its climax since the turn of the twentieth century. Looking back, we can trace and mark each step of the way . . . which is the classic way of all Communist activity.

I have said that the problem was to implant an idea—to detach man from God and the acknowledgment of his relationship to God, and also to detach him from his social institutions which have the function of fostering this relationship. The best method of securing this is to destroy the institution if possible, if not, to weaken it and to substitute for the active life of the institution the life of the group. Hence we must notice that there will be an attack on the institution and a parallel propaganda for the substitute, the group. We might note in this connection how much American sociological thought is preoccupied with the group. In fact Sorokin in a study recently made of trends in modern sociology calls attention to this preoccupation and does not hesitate to say that sociology in the United States is the study of the group or it is nothing.

Now the institutions most characteristic of the nature of man are the family, from which he takes his life, the State, from which he receives his protection, the institutions connected with private property from which he receives his support, and the institution of the Church which cherishes his soul and through which he receives his final explanation and destiny. All these institutions are socially so closely interconnected and psychologically so integrated that their interpenetrations can only be explained by an analogy of the interpenetration of the spiritual, the intellectual and the physical in the nature of man. To attack one is to attack all, and this is just what the Communist does. But there is a certain order in which these are arranged in a Catholic society and the Communist makes his attack on the institutions as a rule in this order.

At the head of society are the twin institutions of the Church and the State, cooperating in their special fields but not united. Then come the institutions of

private property and the family. This is the traditional organization according to the natural law, found in all societies which pretend to civilization, but only to be found perfected since the revelations of the Catholic religion and Church established by Christ and where this religion is sincerely practiced by the majority.

The Communist propaganda aims to destroy the relation between Church and State. First, by weakening the respect for religion and in Catholic societies by raising the doubt: Is the Church, the true Church, or is it possible to know truth at all?

Secondly, the organization of the Church is attacked by destroying the sub-institutions, the Religious Orders, the charitable endowments, confraternities, schools, etc. This so circumscribes the activity of the Church that it can hardly be said to exist at all, and therefore may be disregarded if not ignored.

Thirdly, to attack the existing institutions of private property by crippling them or destroying them entirely.

Fourthly, to attack the curriculum of the school, philosophy, languages, religion courses, anything that is a medium for preserving traditions.

Fifthly, to attack the political institutions.

Sixthly, to attack the solidarity of the family unity.

Today we find the emphasis most strongly placed on the schools and the family because the other institutions are considered by the Communists to be so definitely weakened that they have little influence.

The technique of carrying out these objectives will vary with the psychology of the people and according to the degree of stability these organizations may have. It will be both indirect and direct: indirect by a propaganda through the press, lectures, the arts, aiming always to establish the view that man has no supernatural interests or possibilities, and to confuse the people; direct, by abolishing the institution in a frontal attack. All of this activity is presented first so as not to alarm the people, and thus to arouse their effective opposition. So it starts out by stressing real abuses if these exist; if not they manufacture or exaggerate them. The same vocabulary of the victims and opponents is used, but

with a changed meaning not at first apparent. It upholds the same ends. Sometimes it even has the boldness to take over the very program. It claims only to destroy abuses and to build on reforms. It wins over the unthinking by the vocabulary, the sincere by stressing abuses, especially very patent abuses while ignoring or minimizing the good achievements.

The history of Hispanic America gives us the most complete picture of how all this was done and the attempt made to destroy the Catholic social order. Mexico and Peru where the most orderly societies, and the most Catholic, were established suffered this attack in the most bitter form, though all the Spanish possessions were affected. Mexico, because of accidental circumstances such as climate, resources, nearness to world trade routes, and the character of the Indians, was the most successful and the most Catholic of all the centers and where the ruin is now the most complete. This process can best be studied in Mexico, where a Catholic social order had been firmly established.

II. What Happened in Mexico

WE have just studied the general outlines of the Communist plan, the great objectives of which are to detach man from God and make him self-sufficient, interested exclusively in material satisfactions. We saw there how the working out of this plan varies with the particular society and the actual conditions. Applied to Hispanic America, the program was particularly successful in Mexico due to accidental circumstances.

We must keep in mind these facts:

1. In Mexico the Spaniards established firmly a Catholic social order, with all the institutions developed and functioning according to the circumstances of time, place and people. All of the country was not won over by 1750, but there was no doubt at all, humanly speaking, it would be won over in time. There was the Church and the State working in harmony, there was the Catholic school and the Catholic curriculum. There were

the economic institutions sufficiently developed to make Mexico the most prosperous of all the possessions (with a surplus). There were the Catholic missions of the frontier, extending the civilization; there were the Indian towns to take care of their special interests; there was the Catholic family solidarity. So that we can say Mexico was Catholic.

Mexico, however, was governed from Spain and was constantly receiving Spanish influences. Even before 1750 the Communist activity was appearing in Spain, only not under that name of course. It was the propaganda of the Italian, French, and English Free Masons who took the slogan of enlightenment, liberation of the human spirit, a free State, a free Church, but it planned to turn the State against the Church and to detach the people from the Church. The attack was first to get rid of the teaching Orders, then the charitable Orders and the charitable foundations. It was assumed that the State would take over these functions and be disinterested, by which was meant free from abuses such as might be found in a particular bishop or priest, or Religious Order.

Circumstances were favorable for this. Some bishops were won over to approve these encroachments of the State through peculiar abuses in the Patronato. The king's conscience was easily stifled because of the caliber of particular kings then ruling. The Inquisition was distorted, attacked, weakened. New eighteenth-century literature prepared the minds of the people to accept these changes.

The first blow was the suppression of the Society of Jesus in 1767. At one stroke this destroyed practically all the secondary and university education in the Spanish colonies and was one of the primary causes of the break with Spain. The most disastrous effect after this in South America perhaps was the destruction of the missions in the Banda Oriental, now Uruguay, and Paraguay. Both of these places were so ruined they have hardly yet recovered and therefore became fruitful fields for Communist propaganda in time, particularly Uruguay. So for two generations, between 1767 and 1821,

this Catholic society lacked a strong educational system and there were really no leaders to take over the independent countries in a truly intelligent way.

The second blow was the confiscation of the charitable endowments. This called in the mortgages and disrupted the economic relationships and the land system, introducing poverty and disorder. The confiscations were then extended to the properties of the Church, the Indian towns and the missions, disrupting all these social and economic relationships.

The third blow was the spread of revolutionary ideas on equality making it a thing of quantity, man equal *to* man, instead of man equal *with* because of the same nature, origin and final destiny. This idea of equality prepared the way for the new Constitutions for the independent Mexico on a basis of French Revolution ideas instead of the old Catholic social and political theory. This had the twofold effect of destroying the balanced relation of Church and State and of weakening the institution of the State itself. One unfortunate result of all this was to introduce the influence of the United States through Masonic lodges which advocated a federal form of government on a basis of artificially created territorial States. This was so totally un-Mexican and indeed un-Spanish-American generally that it secured the support of only the worst elements in the country, the poverty stricken, the adventurers, the uneducated and disturbers generally who neither understood the problems of government nor cared. It is this element with which the United States has so often cooperated misled by their vocabulary. This situation also produced an opposing group, usually called conservative, but also un-Mexican and anti-traditionalist, though some were honest Liberals who really respected the Church and wished to leave her alone. This group stood for a centralized organization of government but on the French plan, not on that of the old Spanish Code of Laws for the Indies, which was entirely scrapped. This group was more often indifferent than actively anti-Catholic. The struggle between these two groups went on continually between 1821 and 1857.

During this period appears a distinct Jacobin element who were under the influence of Jacobin ideas from the French Revolution. These worked openly for what is now called Socialism and Communism. The conservative group divided into the eighteenth-century Liberals, out for enlightenment and a free State and a free Church, and French Socialists on the theories of August Comte and the humanitarians of the nineteenth century. These leaders aimed to secularize the State, the schools and the institutions of private property, and marriage, though they did not otherwise touch the family and had no intention of destroying private property. In the Constitution of 1857 they succeeded in obtaining these secular aims. A long argument, however, went on as to whether the Constitution should not embody laws reforming social and economic abuses and not confine itself to political questions. The Jacobins wanted this, but the majority of Liberals did not, and fortunately from the point of view of educating us in the technique of Communism, the Constitution of 1857 confined itself to political matters so called. This Constitution has a great deal to say about the rights of man. It lists fifty-four, copying them from the Spanish Constitution of 1812, but as no guarantees were provided the list was an empty form.

This Constitution planted firmly several ideas in the minds of many Mexicans:

1. Rights of men are absolute, Liberty is absolute. Therefore no religious vow may be taken (Article 5). This disposed of Religious Orders and the Sacrament of Matrimony.

2. Rights can be determined by society and any government can offer a new list.

3. The State may intervene in matters of religious worship and external discipline (Article 123). This disposes of religious freedom.

These ideas practically eliminated for Mexicans religion, the Church and the influence of the Church. But during the Administration of Diaz the country was so exhausted, the laws were not enforced. The Liberals satisfied turned to taking up the fine points of the in-

dustrial revolution and prepared for a greater economic ruin which encouraged the Jacobin-Red elements. The Church had a chance to recover in a mild way during this breathing space, but with no possibility of taking the initiative in the restoration of the social order. It concentrated on rebuilding a school system for the middle classes but the whole system of the missions and the Indian towns had been so destroyed that the clergy had almost lost the technique of handling these problems and indeed the laws did not permit of their proper management. Nevertheless progress for the Church and the Catholic culture was not inconsiderable as can be seen from the programs of the Catholic Congresses held in 1903.

This alarmed the Liberal-Jacobin elements. By this time also the United States had a dominant economic interest in the country and was in a fair way to take it over. The Catholic program would interfere with this development. Intelligent Mexicans saw this also and there were preparations for a Catholic political party. This was too much for the Reds and so they turned to the United States for aid, representing to Americans the bases for their common interests, using a vocabulary with which Americans were familiar, such as separation of Church and State, secular compulsory education, universal suffrage, a humanitarian program for improving health and living conditions, labor reforms, etc. In particular there was a great enthusiasm for humanity and this attracted the support of various Protestants who were not familiar with the actual conditions. At the same time there was a revival of the campaign against the character of the Catholic clergy for the most part copied from radical news sheets of the forties, fifties and sixties. Human nature being what it is, this campaign attracted Catholic attention. Many Catholics who knew as little about conditions as their fellow Protestants fell for it and rather gathered the impression that the clergy had interfered very much at some time or other in the affairs of State. All this was very vague but it had its effect and sympathy was alienated from the Catholics struggling in Mexico for

their rights. Thus the stage was prepared for the Revolution of 1910, and the Constitution of 1917 was put over and has been kept in power ever since.

This Constitution repeats all the features of the Constitution of 1857 and in addition many of the social and socialistic ideas which had been advocated for the past hundred years by the radical groups. But unexpectedly a check appeared in the resurrection of the Catholic spirit and revolt of the educated Mexicans against the Communist program for socializing the land and labor. Patriotic Mexicans suddenly saw that a combination of Communism and United States penetration would certainly ruin their country once and for all. What could be the only basis of support for a counter attack? Certainly something which would have to be traditional, true, permanent and constructive. The Catholic program alone had these elements and this began to take hold of the people. It is this Catholic revival that has turned the Communist element to the present stage of active persecution.

Two important things should be noted here. This Catholic revival has appeared not only in Mexico. Since the War it has been remarkable in Spain, in France, in Italy, in Germany, attracting some of the best minds and most influential leaders of the time. Certainly this could have repercussions in Mexico. Also Communist action since the triumph in Russia has secured a base from which it can effectively operate throughout the rest of the world. It has been able to strengthen its affiliations with Communists in other countries and to establish headquarters in important centers. Established in Russia as a going concern it could now speak with more authority and decision, and its propaganda changed its key. Addressing, now, people, weary, discouraged from the War and its aftermath, it speaks of an organization to end chaos, of discipline, of security, of control of wealth and privilege, of considering the forgotten poor and downtrodden. The only other organized group in the western world which also speaks of ending chaos, of discipline, control of wealth and privilege is the Catholic group. Hence if the Communist is

not to lose ground, which he is bound to do as the true story of events in Russia filter out to a wider circle, he must attack the Catholic, where possible, as in Spain, Mexico.

So in Mexico, the decision was taken to enforce most strictly the Constitution of 1917, leading to the events which culminated in the years 1926-30. The half truce of 1930 revealed to the Mexican Communist a change in the sympathy of the United States. This was primarily due to the laws affecting mineral and oil land and the confiscation of properties as well as the labor laws which were fast making it impossible for business men to operate in Mexico. But this only determined the more the Communists to put into operation their complete socialistic program. This would reduce the country to such a state that perhaps the United States would be forced to take it over or to withdraw. They do not expect the United States to take over the country for they count on a sufficiently large public opinion to sympathize with their general aims.

They profess to admire American educational theory, the progressive school and the preschool educational movement. They cooperate with various movements here to further friendly relations with Latin America such as the Committee on Cultural Relations with Latin America which runs a summer school in Mexico City. Certain American sociologists are interested in the anthropological approach to sociology and meet with great support in their study of early American Indian life. Publicists like Stuart Chase have taken up with enthusiasm the study of the native Indian culture, the handicrafts, finding it refreshing after a study of present industrial conditions. This enthusiasm for the native culture is fostered by every agency of the Mexican Government who see in it an opportunity to belittle the European elements in Mexican life and can use it as a smoke screen to minimize the Catholic contributions. As a general rule, people in this country prominent in business and political affairs are not well educated in anything else. This explains why some have been carried away by the work

of such men as Diego Rivera. Their unusual choice of subjects has won over the Americans who are fascinated by what seems to them originality and skill because they have no standards by which to evaluate this and no experience to help them. They miss in all the Communist art, or attempts at art the decadent note which is the deliberate cult of the ugly and the false. It is important for us to notice that of all groups in the United States sympathetic to the Mexican ideas, the most sympathetic are the professional educators, chiefly because in this field Americans are least conspicuous for success but very active, very numerous in every community and very anxious to succeed with the new.

The Communists in Mexico have estimated all these situations and therefore at the present moment have narrowed their campaign down to two fundamental points in which they hope to receive the maximum American support and sympathy.

First in the field of education. This system has every shibboleth and every fad which has been urged by some one or other in the United States at some time during the last generation, though not always of course put into practice so that we have plenty of talk about these theories though not so much experience with their actual operation. Not living in Mexico, we miss all this. However there seems to be a common interest here. Under all the talk and pretense of high ideals and humanitarian endeavor the Communist educational program in Mexico is intended to degrade and confuse the people so as to leave them really uneducated and the real aim of the whole program is planned to destroy the traditional view of the family and to remove from the minds of the people any religious ideas. This propaganda is very direct.

The second point in their campaign is not to permit any Catholic propaganda whatsoever, whether from the Hierarchy officially or from the laity.

But all this is done in such a way that it will not appear on the surface to be what it really is. There will be, and there is, the appeal to words and statements but not to facts.

We are now witnessing the last effort of Communism to obtain in Mexico the original objectives I mentioned at the beginning of this paper—to detach man from God and to destroy all the corporate social institutions such as the family, the Church and the State and private property. If the educational program continues, the people will become so corrupt that true family life will be impossible; if the economic program continues private property will be swallowed up in monopolies, the State will disappear. In fact it has disappeared and in its place is the tyranny of a powerful minority group ruling by force. This is not government in any civilized meaning of the word. Man will be permanently detached from God and the Church will disappear,—because all the Mexicans will be dead.

But this I do not believe will happen, because as I said this is the *last* effort of Communism. How soon the reaction will have its first effect, I cannot prophesy. I can only point out to you and summarize what I said in the beginning. Communism never flourishes in a true social order sincerely managed. It is always destructive, it always works along the lines I have indicated—to upset the balance of society by destroying the effective cooperation of Church and State, secularizing the institutions, then destroying them, especially the family, the State and the private property institutions, taking private property away from the many, or rendering it useless to the many, destroying corporate activity by installing monopolies whether public or private, and setting man against man by regimenting him in groups or masses. When you see these signs, know that Communism is at hand and choose under which standard you will stand, that of Lucifer, or that of Christ.

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