

AMERO
Continued

With a cigarette and a memory for a very tired tyro, the man who once went to classes with Rivera ends a class of his own.



ET TU, VENEZUELA?

Like so many other Latin countries in recent years, Venezuela has chased a tyrant into exile and formed a new government. How does this affect Americans?

LATE IN THIS PAST January an explosion was felt in South America and heard round the world. Scene of the explosion was Venezuela. Its cause was tyranny, and its main ingredient a short, violent and perhaps successful revolution. Consequences: not yet completely known.

By this date the Venezuelan revolt is history. Most news-conscious Americans—and persons everywhere, for that matter—have read every word about the action in many detailed accounts. But the South American country, which lies just north of the Equator along with Colombia and the three Guianas still is news. And every story concerning it seems dominated by a giant question mark: it's just too soon to know in which direction Venezuela may head, what her new government and obviously changing economy may mean to neighbors and customers such as the United States.

Venezuelans haven't been strangers to the University of Oklahoma for many years now. Every semester a good-sized number of young people from that nation study at O. U., mostly in areas of engineering. And every year American graduates of O. U. accept jobs with oil and steel firms which send them to Venezuela to work and live; most often their families accompany them.

Therefore, it was with unease that some Americans read of the January revolution. Many wondered and worried about relatives or friends there, dwelling within sound of machine gun fire and in sight of burning buildings. These newscasts were very different from letters received in the past from American friends, letters making the country out to be progressive and a Latin paradise of sorts. True, it had a dictatorship, but didn't the people appear to be satisfied with it?

There was little doubt that Venezuela was progressive. Caracas, the capital, has seen startling growth in the past several years, and other cities—Maracay, Camana, Margarita, Barinas, Merida—are following suit. Dense jungles, some of them the homes of deadly natives, no longer encroach quite so closely upon communities

sprouting good roads, modern hotels. A railroad now is under construction through the rugged mountains.

The reason for Venezuela's sudden change in appearance lies, first, in the fact that the country is oil rich, and, secondly, in a stiff governmental policy which has been in effect for some time. More than two-thirds of her annual revenue is derived from petroleum sales, and the government has insisted upon plowing a huge portion of it back into the roads and great buildings lately materializing.

This "progressive" policy was, strangely, one of the two or three most important causes for the revolt against and overthrow of Dictator Marcos Perez Jimenez. This man—in power since 1948—consistently maintained that his country was not yet ready for democracy; finally he learned the hard way that a people enchained is not going to be satisfied with merely a prosperous nation.

Jimenez challenged unemployment in much the same manner as that of the U. S.'s public works administrations during the Great Depression. Latins were provided jobs building monuments, post offices, recreation clubs, plush hotels, cable car lines, and the like. The jungle was being pushed back. Plaguing insects were being wiped out of the populous areas. Few starved any longer, few wore rags.

Few, too, could miss seeing that most still lived in shacks, however, while the small band of Jimenez and Company occupied the mansions. Political freedom hardly existed: votes turned into fiascos, and the press was carefully controlled.

Things came to a head in December, 1957. Voters were asked to "choose" their leader—again—from a one-man ticket. All took the Jimenez abuse as a direct insult, and one military group staged a small revolt. It was crushed, but it was the beginning of the end for the dictator. An underground organization went to work, laid plans, and scarcely a month later came into the open, ready for battle.

A general strike (lawless) was touched

off by the blaring of automobile horns (also lawless). Police fanned out in Caracas with machine guns, bayonets, water hoses and other weapons with which they hoped to quash sudden riots. Stones flew and gasoline drenched structures burned. General havoc reigned in at least seven cities.

As the sun set over in the direction of Colombia, the fighting in Caracas went on into the night, becoming more fierce by the hour. Soon 300 were dead and about 1,000 wounded. Military forces, though not outfought, suddenly found their stomachs turned by so much blood and decided to finish things in the only possible way: they placed Jimenez on a plane and sent him winging to the Dominican Republic for sanctuary (where, by the way, he was met by Juan Peron, former dictator of Argentina).

Before all grew quiet again, mobs went after the long-hated security police; some of the latter were killed. The former mansions of Jimenez and other government men were looted, as were some embassies. Practically demolished was the newspaper *El Herald*, which had supported the dictator and made a mockery of obligations of the press.

The United States was not shocked by the revolution. Next-door neighbors of Mexico, Americans watched similar uprisings in that country for years before the latter cooled and quieted down. More important, during the past 15 years dictators have come flying out of Central and South America at a dizzy rate.

For example: Brazilians overthrew Getulio Vargas in 1945 (he had been in power for 15 years). Then, beginning in 1955, eight other strongmen—Jimenez included—lost their hold on nearby countries; these were Juan Peron (Argentina, 1943–55), Jose Remon (Panama, 1947–55), Anastasio Somoza (Nicaragua, 1933–56), Julio Lozano (Honduras, 1954–56), Paul Magloire (Haiti, 1950–56), Manuel Odria (Peru,

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1948-56), and Gustavo Pinilla (Colombia, 1954-57). Four of the preceding are dead now: one by suicide, two by assassination, one by a heart attack.

Only two dictators remain in this part of the world. They are Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic, and Fulgencio Batista of Cuba, and at least one of them—Batista—has been slightly irritated by rebels recently.

Venezuela has known practically nothing but dictators for the past 128 years. Now that freedom seemed finally to have come, jittery American steel and oil executives wondered just what the country would do with the U. S.'s \$3 billion of investments there. They had reason to wonder: Venezuelans never particularly liked the fact that the U. S. and Jimenez were friendly.

THIS IS WHAT happened after Jimenez made a run for it:

The head of the country's navy, Rear Admiral Wolfgang Larrazabal, set out immediately to set up a new government. The junta was mainly military, but it included also a manufacturer, Eugenio Mendoza, and a university professor, Blas Lamberti. In addition, a cabinet of 13 was organized with only one military man included.

Another factor against the U. S., as far as Venezuelans are concerned, is the maze of restrictions Americans have placed on imports of oil. In the past two years Venezuela has found a steadily dropping world oil market, and U. S. restrictions have accounted for a large measure of the situation. As recently as March, 1958, the U. S. Congress was planning to continue tightening said restrictions.

"Unless all Venezuela understands the facts of the dropping oil market," reported *Time Magazine*, "restrictions may seem like U. S. disapproval of Venezuela's democratic trend."

And it may be very difficult to understand, indeed. Venezuela feels rather that its hand has been slapped, the hand which it extended in friendship when it promised, following the revolt, fulfillment of all lawful commitments, guaranteed political freedom, and insured protection of foreign investments.

At about the same time as the U. S. Congress was moving to further clamp down on petroleum imports, Venezuela's brand new government decided it must move to attempt to strengthen its position in world oil affairs. Dr. Jose Prado, a chemist and

professor, had gamely held down the position of Minister of Mines and Hydrocarbons—or, Oil Chief—since the January 23 revolt. (Prado is a former student of the University of Oklahoma.) Now he was replaced by Perez de la Cova, who graduated from the University of Tulsa in 1941 with a petroleum engineering degree; he has represented his country's oil interests in London, in Washington, D. C., and at The Hague, and he is internationally known in his field.

The country's Bureau of Hydrocarbons—faced, of course, with the same problems as Chief de la Cova—is headed by Dr. Gustavo Thery Fombona, a man whom Wanda Jablonski of the magazine *Petroleum Week* calls Venezuela's "Oil Watchdog." This man has served his particular department for more than 25 years, and he has three able assistants, each of whom has put in about 20 years at his job: Dr. J. Abel Monsalve, head of concession mapping and topography, who received his engineering degree in 1933 from the University of Oklahoma, and Drs. Luis Plaz (conservation) and Luis Cordero (production and fiscalization), both of whom also received engineering degrees from universities in Oklahoma.

"They stay strictly out of politics," Miss Jablonski said of the three.

As Venezuela's politics shift, the oil industry goes on, almost blind to the whims of dictators or wishes of presidents through the years. It must. This is the nation's life blood.

The largest "vein" of this blood is found at Maracaibo, the richest part of the country. The Bolivar Coastal Oil Field lies beneath the Lake of Maracaibo, and it is a huge field, studded with derricks and yielding almost all the oil produced by Creole Petroleum, an American corporation which probably is the biggest of its kind in this part of South America.

Companies such as Creole have been running at maximum production for years. It was not a question of wanting to, but of having to: the government insisted. However, departments such as those already mentioned keep close watch over oil reserves. At present there is no danger of the reserves disappearing, so it would appear that oil is still being pumped out of the jungle floor at the same rate. Getting it out of the ground is no problem. Getting it out of the country, now that the outside world has cut down its orders for the oil, is a very real problem. Still highly progressive—and free, now, as well—Venezuela is counting on the administrators of its four-month-old government to find an answer to the problem.

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