

**SOVIET UNION AND LATIN AMERICA**  
**With Reference to the Activities of the Comintern**  
**1919—1943**

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**1919—1943**

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## PREFACE

The activities of the Comintern in Latin America between 1919 and 1945 was an important stage in the Soviet-Latin American relationship during the first half of the 20th century. As this stage of Soviet-Latin American relationship has not been subjected to proper study and assessment, I have taken it as the topic of my research. The main objective of this analysis is to make an assessment of the success and failures of the strategy of the Comintern for Latin America. The analysis deals with the origin of Communist Parties in the region under the inspiration and guidance of the Comintern, and also the tactics applied by the local Communist Parties in different periods following the instructions of the Comintern. In doing so, special attention has been given to the participation of Latin American Socialists in the formation of the Communist International and the part played by the Comintern, in turn, in establishing Communist Parties of the region. An attempt has also been made to examine in detail the Soviet leaders' intentions in Latin America and the way in which they had pursued them through the Comintern and the Latin American Communist Parties.

The present analysis is the outcome of the study of a good deal of documentary and semi-documentary material available in India. In this connexion, special mention may be made to the combined library of the Indian Council of World Affairs and the School of International

Studies at Sapra House, New Delhi, and the Libraries of the United States Information Services, and the Soviet Cultural Centre, at New Delhi.

I am thankful to the Librarians and other members of the staff of all these libraries for the courtesy and help extended to me.

I am extremely grateful to Dr R. Vaidyanath, Associate Professor, and Chairman of the Centre for Russian and East European Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, under whose prompt and able guidance I was able to complete this study. His deep interest on the topic was a constant source of inspiration and confidence. Besides, I am thankful to Mr Jayashankar, Assistant Professor at the Centre, for his valuable advice and help at various stages of writing this dissertation.

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G. Raveendran

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**CHAPTER I**

## INTRODUCTION

### COMINTERN AND LATIN AMERICA

The formation of the Communist International was the institutionalisation of the idea of a world revolution. From the very beginning the Socialist working class movement possessed international features. The call, "Workers of the World, Unite!", appeared in the Communist Manifesto with its declared aim to overthrow the "bourgeoisie" in every country. The "Communist League" organized by Karl Marx in London in the summer of 1847<sup>1</sup> was based on these ideas. The First International formed in 1864 and the Second International founded in 1889 also incorporated the same idea of internationalism. The Third, the Communist International, or Comintern, was founded at the First World Congress which opened in Moscow on March 2, 1919. It gave a new image to the idea of internationalism -- the founding of a Soviet world state. Significantly, the Executive Committee of the Comintern stated its aim, "our Third International is an international association of the proletariat of all countries for the purpose of overthrowing the bourgeoisie and of laying the foundations<sup>2</sup> for an International Soviet Republic".

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1 G.M. Stekloff, History of First International (London, 1928), p. 17.

2 "Long Live the First Of May! Long Live Communism!", April 20, 1919, Communist International (London, 1919), No. 1, British edition, p. 12.

Latin American Participation in the  
formation of the Comintern

Apart from an invitation to revolutionary groups all over the world which was published in "Pravda" on January 24, 1919, asking to send representatives to a congress that would create a new International, there was no special invitation to the Latin American socialist groups for participation in the founding congress of the Comintern from the Bolshevik leaders. Therefore there was no participant from Latin America in the founding congress of the Comintern.<sup>3</sup> Added to this the absence of proper information channel at the time of the establishment of the Comintern prevented socialist groups of Latin America from having a clear idea about the plans and programmes of the Communist leaders in Russia. Moreover due to the lack of transport facilities and the extraordinary difficulties in getting passports at that time there was little participation from outside. The only genuine delegate from abroad was Eberlein of Germany. But to give the First Congress an international composition, Lenin filled the vacant seats with some foreign radicals, who happened to be in Russia at that time and also with a few prisoners of war.

Comintern's focus on Latin America

During the last days of the First Congress of the Comintern, on March 5 and 6, 1919, the delegates approved a number of important documents.

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3 Louis E. Aguilar, Marxism in Latin America (New York, 1968), p. 5.



These documents like the "Theses on Bourgeois Democracy and Proletarian Dictatorship", contain principles of the Bolsheviks concerning the Comintern. Of the six Major statements, the Manifesto written by Trotsky was the most important in view of the objectives of the congress. But all these statements were merely a restatement of the old Marxist-Leninist ideas like the necessity of the "new and higher worker's democracy" instead of the bourgeois democracy. They promised peace and prosperity for new national states, colonial peoples and for the under privileged of all kinds. Strangely enough there was no mention of Latin America even in the statement which contained an evaluation of the current international situation and the policy of the Allied Powers.

In the Manifesto issued at the Second Congress of Comintern (July 17 - August 7, 1920), it was stated that in Latin America there was a struggle between the British imperialism and the new United States imperialism. It assumed that USA's intention was to transform the Latin American countries into its colonies.<sup>4</sup> The Congress expressed the view that in different countries, the struggle for the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat was passing through different stages and that the workers of the colonial and semi-colonial countries had only awakened.<sup>5</sup> But the Congress was not specific which were the colonial countries and semi-colonial countries. However, for centuries Latin America was under the yoke of imperialism.

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4 Leon Trotsky, The First Five Years of the Communist International (New York, 1945), vol. I, p. 105.

5 Ibid., pp. 123-4.

In the "Report on the World Economic crisis and the New Tasks of the Communist International" of the Third World Congress (June 22 - July 12, 1921) it was admitted that following the exit of England there was no competitor to the American imperialism in Latin America. Again it was emphasized that capitalism had scored great conquests during the earlier seven years in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.<sup>6</sup> It indicated that Latin America had been considered by Comintern a part of either the colonial or semi-colonial countries. The Report pointed out that the Comintern had been watching the process of replacement of British imperialism by the American imperialism in the region.

In the proceedings of the Fourth World Congress of the Comintern (November 7 - December 3, 1922) there was no specific mention of Latin America. Even at the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern (June 17 - July 8, 1924) in the Executive Committee Report there was not a single word about Latin America. Mr Wolfe, a delegate from Mexico, at the time of the discussion of the Executive Committee Report complained: "Comrade Zinoviev in his report on the American party announced its struggle against the imperialism of the United States in the Philippines, but made no mention of that country in Latin America".<sup>7</sup> In the Twenty-First session of the Congress during a discussion on "National and Colonial Question" Mr E.N. Roy declared that it was the duty of the International to support the revolutionary movement in the colonies and in backward countries as in the absence of developed capitalism there were no

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6 Ibid., p. 196.

7 Fifth Congress of the Communist International: Abridged Report of Meetings held at Moscow June 17th to July 8th 1924 (London, n.d.), p. 90.

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revolutionary proletariat in these countries. Obviously his reference to backward countries included Latin American countries also. He continued that the workers and peasants of these countries should be educated for conducting struggle against the bourgeois democratic tendencies within their respective nationalities. He divided the colonial countries into three:

- (1) Countries where feudalism was still the dominant form;
- (2) Semi-Colonial countries having the semblance of a national state, but dominated financially and militarily by imperialist countries;
- (3) Pure colonies completely dominated by imperialism.

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In the second category, for e.g., he had mentioned specifically Persia, China etc. But it could be assumed that from his description almost all Latin American countries were also included in the second group.

At the Sixth World Congress held from July 15 to September 1, 1928, the Comintern chose to focus its attention squarely on Latin America. The Congress viewed that the first imperialist world war (1914-1918) was the result of the imperialist struggle among the largest capitalist states for the redistribution of the globe. But the war shook the whole system of capitalism and started a general crisis in it. According to the Congress contradictions of capitalism had been developing on a new post-war basis, and the first World War and the October Revolution had split the world economy into two fundamentally hostile camps -- the camp of the imperialist states and the camp of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the USSR. Further it was viewed that as the inherent

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8 Ibid., p. 196.

9 Ibid.

10 Programme of the Communist International; Adopted at the Sixth Congress in 1928 (Bombay, 1948), Indian edition, pp. 10-16.

antagonisms within the capitalist sector of world economy was growing, simultaneously the antagonisms between the imperialist home countries and the semi-colonial countries were also growing. As an example the Congress pointed out:

The growth of tendencies directed against the powerful imperialism of the United States in the Latin American countries threatens to undermine the expansion of North American capital. (11)

It again stated that because of the rising for the struggle of vast masses in the colonial countries, the action of the revolutionary proletariat in the imperialist home countries, and the antagonisms and conflicts between the imperialist states, the system of world imperialism would ultimately collapse. Thus the Comintern believed that the masses of the colonial and semi-colonial countries had taken to the field of the international struggle after the first World War.

The position of Latin America in the international proletarian revolutionary processes had been described by the Congress in its programme "The period of transition from capitalism to socialism and the dictatorship of the proletariat". It stated that the colonial and semi-colonial countries like China, India etc. and the dependent countries like Argentina, Brasil etc. were only in the early stage of the capitalist development and only in some cases there were considerably developed industry. <sup>12</sup> Here the term "semi-colonial" was extended to include the so-called dependent countries of which Latin American countries were also cited as examples. In the majority of those countries conditions did not favour independent socialist construction because of the existence of feudal medieval relationship, latifundia, and foreign imperialistic exploitation. In the programme it

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11 Ibid., p. 18.

12 Ibid., p. 44.

was stated:

...in the majority of cases inadequate for independent socialist construction, with feudal medieval relationships, or "Asiatic mode of production" relationships prevailing in their economies and in their political super structures; and in which the principal industrial, commercial and banking enterprises, the principal means of transport, the large landed estates (latifundia), plantations etc. are concentrated in the hands of foreign imperialist groups. (13)

Thus the Comintern considered the Latin American countries as a whole not matured for independent socialist construction even though the continent was considered as a part of the international struggle. Here the principal task was on the one hand to organize struggle against feudalism and pre-capitalist forms of exploitation, besides developing peasant agrarian revolution. On the other hand it was necessary to direct that struggle also against foreign imperialism with a view to achieve national liberation and the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. To a majority of these countries a direct support from other countries, where proletarian dictatorship established, was necessary for the success of the revolution.<sup>14</sup>

In a thesis -- "Revolutionary Movement in the colonies and semi-colonies" -- adopted by the sixth Congress, the Comintern described Latin American position in world revolutionary movement aptly. Latin America<sup>15</sup> was included in the list of "colonial" and semi-colonial" countries. The thesis stressed the point that the growing economic and military

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13 Ibid., pp. 44-45.

14 Ibid., p. 45.

15 The other countries included in the list were India, China, Indonesia, North Africa and Syria.  
Revolutionary Movement in the colonies and semi-colonies: Thesis Adopted by the Sixth Congress of the Communist International, 1928  
(Bombay, 1948), Indian edition, pp. 1-6.

expansion of North American imperialism in Latin American countries was transforming the continent into an important meeting place of the antagonisms of the whole imperialist colonial system. The influence of Great Britain, was very decisive there before the First World War, which reduced many of the countries to the position of semi-colonies.<sup>16</sup> But after the war the United States replaced Great Britain resulting in greater dependence of the countries on the United States. Even though in its earlier pronouncements the Comintern did not define clearly the terms "colonial" and "semi-colonial", in the new thesis it was clearly stated that most of the countries of Latin America were semi-colonies and at the same time dependencies. This observation of the Comintern at the time of the Sixth World Congress shows that Latin America was in the early stages of revolutionary process.

At the time of the Seventh World Congress in 1935, the situation of Latin America had already changed. Nazism and Fascism had its effect in Latin America also at that time. So the Comintern confined itself in chalking out the tactics of the Communist parties of this area to resist the Fascist movement.

During the early years of its existence, the Soviet Union was too busy with other pressing matters to think or do much about Latin America. Important Soviet tactics in this area were, for a long time, controlling and directing the local Communist parties which considered Moscow as the centre of communism. Before World War II Latin America was only a secondary theatre to Soviet Union in its foreign relations. Even in the great 'Soviet Encyclopaedia' (1927) one finds mere 150 words about Boliver.

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16 Ibid., p. 6.

And there was only one solitary article on a Latin American theme in the official list of all historical studies undertaken in the Soviet Union between 1917 and 1942.<sup>17</sup> Lenin had declared that the South American republics, especially Argentina, were no more than neo-colonies, technically independent, but economically bound fast to Britain.<sup>18</sup> In this statement there was no mention about the American imperialism which was becoming more powerful one in that region.

However Lenin's objectives and ideas on Latin America from the beginning were vague. There was no single strategy but different strategies adopted by the Kremlin at different times on Latin America according to the exigencies of the situation. By 1943 four major stages of it had occurred. The first stage extended from the founding of the Comintern to Lenin's death in January 1924. This was the early period of Comintern's strategy in Latin America. The second covering the events from the death of Lenin to approximately 1929. This was the period during which the Comintern and the parties affiliated to it were being "Bolshevized". The third stage extended to 1935, the year in which the seventh and last Congress of the Comintern was held. This was known as the extremist period. The fourth stage, from the Seventh Comintern Congress upto the dissolution of the Comintern in 1943, was known as the Popular Front Period. These four stages in the development of Soviet Policy in Latin America will be considered in the following sections.

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17 Stephen Clissold, "The Soviet Union and Latin America", in Clandio Veliz (ed.), Latin America and the Caribbean (New York, 1968), p. 448.

18 V.I. Lenin, Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism (Moscow, 1934), p. 78 (English edition).

CHAPTER II



ESTABLISHMENT OF COMMUNIST PARTIES  
IN LATIN AMERICA, 1919-1924

In the early period of its existence the Comintern represented a genuinely co-operative effort by all Communist parties for a world revolution. But in Latin America in the beginning of this period there were only Socialist parties and Socialist groups. So the primary task of the Comintern was to bring into existence Communist parties in Latin American countries to pursue its goals. By skillfully exploiting the existing discontent among the people of the continent it sowed the seed of the Communist movement there. The situation that existed in Latin America was such that even at the end of the nineteenth century, despite political independence, the old social system was continuing in all the countries of this continent. It began to change only by the beginning of the present century.<sup>1</sup> As a result a dual form of society came into existence -- one traditional and agrarian and the other modern, urban, industrialized and aggressive. Inevitably, the region became the scene of two simultaneous revolutions -- industrial and social.<sup>2</sup> It gave way to wide-spread hostility to traditional approach and there was a growing demand among the people for an improvement in their standard of living. This gave birth to a growing discontent among the people.

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1 Joseph Maier and Richard W. Weatherhead (ed.), Politics of Change in Latin America (New York, 1964), p. 4-5.

2 Federico G. Gil, "Communism in Latin America", in Dan N. Jacobs (ed.), The New Communism (New York, 1969), p. 184.

In 1919 Michael Borodin, the First Soviet emissary to Latin America, reached Mexico. He was a Russian who lived for a number of years in the United States. According to M.N. Roy, Borodin "had come to the New World as the first emissary of the newly founded Communist International".<sup>3</sup> Mexico, to a certain extent, appeared to be the most suitable centre for communist expansion throughout Latin America, because the political ideology prevalent there was considered more or less related to communism or at least to socialism.<sup>4</sup> On the basis of its own political ideology, Mexico had undergone a revolution which had begun in 1910. Following a bitter civil war it was able to smash the power of the feudal land-owners and of the church in favour of the Indian peasantry. But the attitude of the Mexican revolutionaries towards Soviet Russia was rather ambivalent. While some of them expressed great enthusiasm about the new Soviet experiment others were already disillusioned by it.<sup>5</sup> By the time the Russian communists began sending their propagandists and their agents to the country, the Mexican Revolutionists were able to equal or even to better them. They had already carried out programmes like agrarian reform, nationalization of industry and social security under their own momentum even though their revolution grew out of anarcho-syndicalism rather than from Marxism.<sup>6</sup>

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3 M.N. Roy, Memoirs (Bombay, 1964), p. 194.

4 J.H., "Communist Strategy in Latin America", The World Today (London), vol. 4, June 1948, p. 233.

5 Ibid.

6 S. Watter Washington, "Mexican Resistance to Communism", Foreign Affairs (New York), vol. 36, April 1958, p. 504.

Borodin tried unsuccessfully to finance communist operations in the New World with smuggled crown jewels.<sup>7</sup> He got in touch with the young Indian nationalist, M.N. Roy, whom he converted to Marxism. Through Roy, Borodin was able to meet President Venustiano Carranza and the Foreign Minister of Mexico. To them, according to Roy, he had announced that the new regime in Russia was very much sympathetic towards the struggle of the Latin American peoples against imperialism and was eager to help them in every possible manner. For that a Latin American Bureau of the Communist International should be established in Mexico and the consent of the President of the Republic was needed for it.<sup>8</sup> The offer was received coolly because the Mexican Government thought that the establishment of a Latin American Bureau of the Comintern in the country would give opportunity to the Russians to create organized communist movement among the people. But the Foreign Minister granted the facility for Borodin to contact the West European Bureau of the Comintern in Holland. Borodin soon returned to Moscow and he was sent to China for playing an important role in building up the communist movement there.

It was M.N. Roy who established the Communist Party of Mexico. It was the result of a rivalry between the non-Mexicans, Linn Gale-- a radical communist from USA -- and Roy. Both of them had unsuccessfully tried to take over the tiny Mexican Socialist Party. But they were expelled from that party soon after their admission to it. Following this expulsion each of them had

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7 Borodin's mission was to smuggle a quantity of Russian Crown jewels which were to be sold for covering the expenses of the Soviet Commercial Mission in the United States and the rest to finance the Communist movement in the New World. See M.N. Roy, n. 5, p. 199.

8 Ibid., p. 206.

converted his faction into a "Communist Party". Both Parties sought affiliation with Comintern. But only the party led by Roy got recognition from the Comintern in 1920.<sup>9</sup> Since then it became the official Mexican Communist Party. But the first Communist Party of Latin America was given birth by Argentina. There the first communist organization was constituted on January 5 and 6 of 1918 in a congress under the chairmanship of Jose F. Penelon.<sup>10</sup> A Chilean communist called Luis E. Recabarren, who was said to be Lenin's right hand man in Latin America, also attended the Congress. This organization was named the International Socialist Party. This new party had welcomed the successful revolution in Russia and described the revolutionaries as the "heroic vanguard of International Socialism".<sup>11</sup> It supported the Italian Socialist Party in the founding congress of the Comintern. In December 1920 according to the instructions of the Comintern it changed its name as the Communist Party of Argentina.

After the formation of the Communist Party of Mexico with the Russian encouragement, Roy left for Moscow, together with Charles Phillips, an American communist for presenting the declaration at the Second Comintern Congress.<sup>12</sup> After the Second Comintern Congress Phillips returned to work in Mexico for some time. He was joined by two Comintern delegates -- the veteran Japanese communist, Sen Katayama, and a young Italian-American, Luis Fraina. Without achieving much Katayama left Mexico after a few months

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9 Rollie E. Poppino, International Communism in Latin America: A History of the movement 1917-1963 (London, 1964), p. 59.

10 Salvador De Madariaga, Latin America Between the Eagle and the Bear (New York, 1962), p. 140.

11 Poppino, n. 9, p. 59.

12 Roy, n. 3, pp. 216-223.

and Fraina returned to the United States.<sup>13</sup>

In the Second Comintern Congress of 1920 only one country from Latin America - Mexico - was represented by three delegates.<sup>14</sup> The Second Congress was convened at the time when the expected European revolution failed to take place. And the only communist regime to win power outside Russia headed by Belakun in Hungary (March-August 1919) had been overthrown. This had brought about a discernible change in the attitude of the Congress towards the question of building the communist movement and it emphasised the need for better discipline and a firm central leadership. The twenty one conditions for admission to the international were introduced in this Congress.<sup>15</sup> This gave rise to controversies and expulsions in the Socialist Parties of the world. In Latin America also its repercussions were apparent. Only such Socialist Parties which were ready to accept these conditions were able to get the recognition of the Comintern. These conditions paved the way for a rigid central leadership. The two subsequent Comintern Congresses held in 1921 and 1922 further tightened the discipline within the Communist movement.

Within the limit of the twenty one conditions, during 1921-22 Communist Parties were formed in Uruguay, Chile and Brazil. In Uruguay the Communist Party was formed following a split in the socialist ranks after the Russian Revolution. Before the World War I socialism and trade union

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13 Stephen Glissold (ed.), Soviet Relations with Latin America, 1918-1968: A Documentary Survey (London, 1970), p. 3.

14 James W. Hulse, The Forming of the Communist International (Stanford, 1964), p. 194.

15 Conditions (twenty one) of admission to the Communist International were approved by the Second Congress of the Comintern (August 6, 1920). See Sidney Hook (ed.), World Communism: Key Documentary Material (New York, 1926), pp. 36-42.

movement had taken root among the urban working class of Uruguay. Its people were more alert than Mexicans about the events taking place outside the hemisphere. Uruguay had been enjoying political stability under representative governments. Most of the Uruguan socialists were sympathetic to the Bolshevik endeavour to build a new kind of socio-political order in the Soviet Union after 1917. There were many socialists who identified themselves with the Russian experiment. They began to urge for the affiliation of their Party with the Comintern. This led to a debate within the Party which lasted two years. In 1919 pro-Soviet demands were mostly in the maritime unions, led by Eugenio Gomez. In September-October 1920 the Socialist Party had a private meeting in which three quarters of the members had expressed their willingness to join the International. But the main obstacle was Lenin's "twenty one conditions" for membership of a foreign communist party in the Comintern. The top leaders of the party were not willing to accept these conditions. In 1921 in the first Uruguayan communist daily newspaper, "Justicia", Gomez argued for the affiliation of the party with the Comintern.<sup>16</sup> At last in the annual convention of the Party which was held in April 1921, overwhelming majority of the delegates led by Gomez voted in favour of the affiliation of the party with the Comintern and to adopt the name Communist Party of Uruguay. Then the party celebrated October 8, 1920 as its<sup>17</sup> foundation day.

In Chile the communist movement was a product of the nation's own political and economic heritage. It was led by the Chileans themselves. So in this sense it was nationalist in origin. The Labour movement of Chile was

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<sup>16</sup> Marvin Alisky, Uruguay: A Contemporary Survey (New York, 1969), p. 61.

<sup>17</sup> Poppino, n. 9, p. 65.

well organized, large, highly self-conscious and politically alert. Luis Recabarren, a revolutionary and the leader of Chile's extremist groups in the north, became the founder of the Chilean Communist Party.<sup>18</sup> At the meeting of the International Socialist Bureau in Brussels in early 1908, Recabarren had direct contact with Lenin. A socialist workers party of Chile had been founded in 1912 by Recabarren. This party was well established having branches in most part of the country. Immediately after the founding of the Communist International in 1919, the Chilean Socialist Workers Party sought to join it, as they were attracted by the programme of the Comintern. Recabarren proposed to his colleagues that the party should be affiliated with the Comintern. But some of the other leaders were not ready for it. In a party's convention at Rancagua in December 1921 the proposal was repeated and accepted unanimously.<sup>19</sup> On January 1, 1922 it formally adopted the name, the Communist Party of Chile and became the Chilean section of the Comintern.<sup>20</sup> This was the only Socialist Party without any split which became the part of international communist movement in Latin America.

In Brazil, it was anarchism, and not socialism, which caused the communist movement. In 1918 the anarchist agitators who had already penetrated trade unions and workers associations founded in Porto Alegre a small Maximalist Union. The organization established contact with the communist groups in Montevideo and Buenos Aires. It received enough propaganda from these sources as well as directly from Moscow. Octavio Brandao, a former anarchist, converted and started the formation of small Communist groups in

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18 S. Cole Blasier, "Chile: A Communist Battle Ground", Political Science Quarterly (New York), vol. 65, pp. 354-56.

19 Poppino, n. 9, p. 68.

20 Blasier, n. 18, p. 356.

larger cities and towns. In the national capital on November 7, 1921<sup>21</sup> a communist group of twelve members was founded. But the Communist Party of Brazil was formally organized at the first party congress, held in Rio de Janeiro and Niteroi on March 25-27 of 1922. Comintern had sent a<sup>22</sup> message of greetings which was read to the delegates.

During the first few years as the Comintern was presided over by Russians and Europeans who were primarily concerned with Soviet problems and the prospects for communist expansion in other western capitalist countries, Latin American parties were given very little practical and ideological guidance. The Comintern officials for a long time regarded this region simply as another "colonial" area like China and India. The Soviet leaders initially did not force their views on the young Latin American parties. It was also not necessary because all these parties looked to Moscow as the communist Mecca. They regarded the head of the communist party of the Soviet Union as the only authentic interpreter of Marxist doctrine. Even before the struggle for Soviet leadership broke out openly in the 1920's, Latin American parties used to follow the line of the dominant faction in the Soviet Communist Party. And they used to look upon the Comintern as the final arbiter in ideological and other disputes within their organizations.

By 1922 Alfred Stierner, a Swiss, had been placed in-charge of Latin<sup>23</sup> American affairs at Comintern headquarters. The Comintern representatives at first used the Mexican Communist Party as an instrument in promoting the communist movement in other parts of Central America and the Caribbean.

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21 Poppino, n. 9, pp. 70-71.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid., p. 153.



Thus the Mexican Communist Party took the responsibility for organising the Guatemalan Communist Party which in turn organised the Communist Party in El Salvador. But in Mexico the communists made little progress. Mexico preferred to carry out its revolution in its own way. As a result the Comintern became hostile to Mexican revolutionary leaders and it declared that it was the duty of the Mexican Communist Party to destroy the illusions<sup>24</sup> of the mass about the activities of the Mexican government.

Further, the Comintern attempted to give the tactics to be followed by the Mexican Communist Party in detail. On parliamentary and revolutionary tactics the Comintern had written a letter to Mexican Communist Party on August 21, 1925.<sup>25</sup> In it the decisions of the Second Congress of the Communist International regarding parliamentarism was stated. First of all the party was to make concrete plans for parliamentary activity which was to be oriented more towards carrying on the struggle against the bourgeois system than in bringing about reforms within that system. It was stated that the aim of the working class was to smash the institution of parliament and to establish proletarian organs of power. Then it stressed the significance of the nationalist and revolutionary struggle for freedom in the central American countries. A warning was given in the letter about the stronger imperialist tendency of the U.S.A. towards the south than ever before because the purchasing power of Europe was dwindling at that time while American products were coming more and more in Latin America. The letter stressed that the political attitude of the United States towards the countries of the south was determined by the capitalists of North America

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24 International Press Correspondence (Berlin), No. 78, November 8, 1928, p. 1465.

25 US, House of Representatives, Committee on Un-American Activities, The Communist Conspiracy: Strategy and Tactics of World Communism, Pt. I: Communism Outside the United States (Washington, 1958), pp. 242-51.

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and the backward economic and social development of the countries of Latin America.

The Comintern wrote about the backward economic and social development of the Latin American countries because in this period the old style colonial exploitation of four centuries was only coming to an end and in one form or another the old political, social and cultural forms were existing in these countries. The great disparities in wealth, racial differences and habits of dictatorship were continuing. The economy of Latin American countries were predominantly agricultural. Agriculture was mostly based on big estates. So the important social problem was the peasant's need for land. But these poor people were not capable in achieving their ends. The post war population explosion and the very low income of the rural workers were other important characteristics of this backwardness. In view of such conditions the development in social and economic field of Latin American countries was very slow. In the letter which Comintern had written to the Mexican Communist Party on August 21, 1923 it was again stated that the revolutionary movement of Mexico had been suppressed by the agents of the local as well as American

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governments. But under the pressure of events the Mexican Communist Party failed to put into practice all these directions given by the Comintern.

In the meantime Moscow had been trying through its mission in Germany for the establishment of diplomatic relations with the Mexican Government. Talks were started even in the summer of 1923 in Berlin between the Soviet and Mexican Ambassadors in Germany -- N.H. Krestinsky and del Castillo respectively.

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General Alvaro Obregon, President of Mexico, proposed that

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26 Ibid.

27 B. Ponomarev, A. Gromyko and V. Khvostov (eds.), History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1945 (Moscow, 1969), Trans: David Skvirsky, pp. 228-29.



there should take place the exchange of trade missions as a first step towards diplomatic relations.<sup>28</sup> On October 16, 1923 Krestinsky forwarded this proposal to the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs. The Soviet Government replied that as there was no reciprocal material claims existing between the countries, there was a possibility of the renewal of relations on the sole condition of mutual "de jure" recognition.<sup>29</sup> It stated that it was better to settle all issues through normal diplomatic channels after exchanging envoys. But Lenin's death in January 1924 injected into the situation some uncertainty and with it the first period in Soviet relations with Latin America came to an end.

Thus in this period Soviet Union began to help in establishing communist parties in all the Latin American countries as they were the instruments through which the communist movement sought to establish its power throughout the world. The Comintern was used merely as an agent by Soviet Union for this purpose. The directives of the Comintern to the Mexican Communist Party showed that it was encouraging the local Communists of Latin America to utilise the "anti-imperialistic" attitude of the people of the region for its propaganda purposes. So also the Comintern had been attacking during this period the United States investments in the economic field of the countries of this continent. The economic and social backwardness of Latin America facilitated to some extent the growth of Communist influence among the people especially the lower classes.

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28 Ibid., p. 229.

29 Ibid.

**CHAPTER III**

## THE BOLSHEVIZATION PERIOD, 1924-1929

Between 1924-1929, as elsewhere, in Latin America too factional struggles began to crop up within Communist Parties. Of the two important reasons, the first was personal rivalries among the leaders of these communist groups. The other was the effect of the power struggle then taking place within the Communist Party of the Soviet Union itself. As a result of the struggle, first against Trotsky, then against Zinoviev and Bukharin, Stalin gradually consolidated his personal dictatorship in the Soviet Union. Consequently, by 1929 the dependence of international communism on the Soviet Union became more explicit. Simultaneously free public discussions of the Comintern policy also began to vanish. The Sixth World Congress in 1928 was the last in which differing views were expressed.

In Latin America the communist leaders had taken the side of one Russian faction or the other. Efforts to develop Trotskyism in Chile and Cuba were short-lived. The Right opposition led by Bukharin in Russia had little effect on Latin America. However, by and large, the communist activities had been less conspicuous there mainly due to the absence of centralisation on a continental scale. In fact the connection of the Communist Parties there with the Comintern was practically nil at the beginning of this period. There was also lack of organic discipline in these Parties. At the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern Zinoviev said that the Comintern had no adequate information concerning the political and social movement of Chile.<sup>1</sup> The absence of the Communist Spanish Press Service added

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1 Bertran G. Wolfe, "The Struggle Against Imperialism in Latin America", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 4, No. 48, 24 July 1924, p.4

to the difficulty in language to work in Latin America by the Comintern agents.

The ultimate aim of the Soviets in Latin America was the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat. But the immediate objectives the Soviets had set before themselves in this period in the region were the "Bolshevization" measures, fight against American imperialism, and the penetration of the communists into the trade union and peasant movements. In the Fifth World Congress of the Comintern, held between June 17 and July 8, 1924, special emphasis was given to the Bolshevization of the Communist Parties, which meant the re-organisation of the Communist Parties of the world in accordance with the political and organisational lines of the Russian Communist Party. <sup>2</sup> It may be noted that during this time the Communist Parties all over the world were being formed only in skeleton form. In the circumstances the Soviet aim was to Bolshevize these parties for getting themselves prepared to achieve the dictatorship of the proletariat. According to Zinoviev, Bolshevization was not the mechanical transfer of the experience of Russian Bolshevism to the situation of other countries. For becoming a Bolshevik first of all one had to adopt oneself to a particular concrete situation where one should work before applying the teachings of Marx and Lenin according to the social, economic and political environment of a particular country. <sup>3</sup>

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2 Jane Degras, The Communist International 1919-1943 Documents (London, 1960), vol. II, pp. 153-4.

3 G. Zinoviev, "The Bolshevizing of the Parties of the Communist International", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 5, No. 7, January 22, 1925, p. 64.

To fight against the US imperialism in Latin America, an "Anti-Imperialist League" had been formed by the Communist Parties of the United States and Mexico. This was disclosed at the meeting of the executive of the Comintern at its 14th session in Moscow (April 6, 1925).<sup>4</sup> The policy of the League was to support the growing nationalist revolutionary movement of the area, especially the Latin American countries against American imperialism and to prepare the trade unions and peasant organizations to utilize the movement to resist the American imperialism in all its forms. In the "Report on the Peasant Question" at the meeting of the Executive of the Communist International at its ninth session in April 2, 1925 it expressed the view that in the semi-colonial countries Soviets had great influence upon the peasantry while in industrial countries it was nil.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the Comintern was confident in its activities in the peasant movement in Latin America.

For the discussion of the trade union question the Executive Bureau of the Red International of Labour Unions held several meetings since November 15, 1927 with trade union representatives from Central and South America who attended the Tenth Anniversary of the October Revolution in Moscow. Delegates from Argentina, Brazil, Columbia, Cuba, Mexico, Uruguay, Chile and Ecuador participated in them. The unanimous decision of the meetings adopted on December 11 was to set up a Latin American Trade Union Secretariat to guide the trade union movement of the region.<sup>6</sup>

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4 International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 5, No. 39, April 28, 1925, p. 513.

5 International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 5, No. 35, April 20, 1925, p. 480.

6 "Towards a Latin American Trade Union Secretariat", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 7, No. 72, December 22, 1927, p. 1638.

The methods which the Soviets adopted for achieving these objectives in Latin America in this period mainly were agitation and propaganda. The decision of the Comintern was that the broad network of the sections of the Comintern should be used for propaganda of Marxism and Leninism among the party members as well as the masses outside the party. For this the central committee of every section of the Comintern should first of all draw up a time table of extensive propaganda work and then organize, supervise, and control it.<sup>7</sup> The communists in Latin America had to work chiefly beneath the surface. They mostly depended upon extra-legal means for their work.<sup>8</sup> Consequently, the agitational work could not progress well at this time. Even then revolts, like in Bolivia in 1927 of the Indians and small peasants backed by the Communists, had taken place. The landless peasants and plantation slaves had participated in the revolt. But they were suppressed by the government everywhere. The Bolivian government stated that Soviet government and "Moscow gold"<sup>9</sup> were responsible for the revolt.

In the "Theses on the Immediate Problems of the International Communist Movement" adopted at the Sixth Session of the Executive Committee of the Communist International (from February 17, to March 15, 1926), it was said that the existence of an independent, Communist Party was the

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7 "Revolution on the immediate Agitational and propaganda work of the Sections of Comintern; Adopted in the Agit prop Conference of the Enlarged Executive of the Communist International", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 5, No. 58, July 25, 1925, p. 804.

8 Octavio Brandao, "Obstacles to Communist Propaganda in Brazil", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 6, No. 61, September 9, 1926, p. 1046.

9 A.S. (Lopez), "After the Crushing of the Revolt in Bolivia", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 7, No. 55, September 29, 1927, p. 1226.



'ABC' of Marxism and Leninism and only under the banner of the Communist Party could the entire proletariat of the world be united. The task of the Communist Parties was "to penetrate still more into the every day struggle and life of the large masses of the workers" every<sup>10</sup> where, because, without revolution it was impossible to overthrow the bourgeoisie and free the world from the yoke of capitalism.

During the Bolshevikization period Communist Parties were formed in Guatemala, El Salvador, Cuba, Paraguay and Honduras and the communist-oriented groups were emerging in a majority of other Latin American republics. In Guatemala, some time after the overthrow of the dictator Estrada Cabrera in 1920, there emerged a Socialist Labour Unification which was the earliest Communist group there. The leaders of this group sought the help of the Mexican Communist Party in 1923 for converting their organization into a Communist Party. The conversion was completed<sup>11</sup> in 1924 and it was recognized by the Comintern in the same year. In 1925 the first Communist group in El Salvador emerged as a result of the work of Communist representatives from Guatemala and Mexico. The Salvadoran Communist Party therefore dated its origin from 1925. But it had been operating entirely under the cover of the labour movement and international communist-front organizations for several years. Only by 1930 or perhaps even earlier it started working with the name, the<sup>12</sup> Communist Party of El Salvador. There had been various communist groups in Cuba before the formation of the Communist Party in 1925. In August

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10 International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 6, No. 40, May 13, 1926, pp. 618-22.

11 Rollie E. Poppino, International Communism in Latin America: A History of the Movement, 1917-1965 (London, 1964), p. 79.

12 Ibid., pp. 79-80.

1925 representatives of these groups formed themselves into a single  
Communist Party following a series of meetings held in Havana.<sup>13</sup> A  
representative of the Communist Party of Mexico, Enrique Flores Magon,  
who was sent by Comintern was present in the meetings.<sup>14</sup> The Paraguayan  
Communist Party was founded in 1928 and was admitted into the Comintern  
in the same year.<sup>15</sup> In 1920's itself a communist organization was founded  
in Honduras also by Juan Pablo Wainwright. He worked in the communist  
movement in Guatemala and El Salvador. At that time the central American  
Communists were grouped into a single Party. Therefore Honduran  
Communists did not create a separate political apparatus. Only in 1929  
they formed their own Honduran Syndical Federation.<sup>16</sup> However, all these  
parties were not strong enough to work according to the directives of  
the Comintern even though its influence had a major part in their formation.

The sixth World Congress of the Communist International paid more  
attention to Latin America than the previous Congresses had done. From  
Latin America the representatives of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Columbia,  
Cuba, Ecuador, Mexico, and Uruguay participated in this Congress. Bukharin  
in his opening speech declared that "South America is for the first time  
widely entering the orbit of influence of the Communist International..."<sup>17</sup>  
He said that America was replacing British imperialism there and national  
and agrarian revolutions promised to turn into social revolutions. The

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13 Hugh Thomas, Cuba or the Pursuit of Freedom (London, 1971), pp. 576-7.

14 Ande's Sua'ra, Cuba: Castroism and Communism, 1959-1966  
(Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1967), p. 1.

15 Poppino, n. 11, p. 82.

16 Ibid., p. 84.

17 Stephen Glissold (ed.), Soviet Relations with Latin America, 1918-1968:  
A Documentary Survey (London, 1970), p. 74.

'Theses' adopted at the end of this Congress exhorted the Latin American Communists everywhere to step up activities against "the Landlord regime and imperialism" and called upon them to co-operate in this task with the petty bourgeoisie, though they "may not under any circumstances<sup>18</sup> politically subordinate themselves to their temporary ally". They were to demand outright expropriation of large estates, confiscation of foreign and domestic capitalist enterprises, the repudiation of the national debt, better working conditions for labour, the arming of workers and peasants, the conversion of regular armies into militias, and "the establishment of the Soviet power of the workers, peasants and soldiers". It was for the first time that at a Comintern Congress delegates from a large number of Latin American Communist Parties were present.

A special Latin American Secretariat had been created within the Comintern in the 1925.<sup>19</sup> It was under the direction of a Swiss, Jules Humbert-Droz. The chief Latin American member of it was Victorio Codovilla of Argentina. After three years the Latin American Secretariat was enlarged to include a Caribbean Bureau and a South American Bureau, each with headquarters in the Western Hemisphere. Caribbean headquarters was located in New York and it was largely in the hands of the Communist Party of the United States. The South American Bureau was established in Buenos Aires.

By the mid 1920's two types of Comintern agents were operating in Latin America.<sup>20</sup> One type of agents were temporary visitors. They worked

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18 Ibid., pp. 77-78.

19 Poppino, n. 11, pp. 153-4.

20 Ibid., pp. 154-5.

for resolving factional disputes and to prepare the local party leadership for a significant shift in the international Communist line. Hules Lambert-Droz was one of the important persons of this kind. He travelled widely in Brazil and in parts of Spanish America in 1928. His purpose was to arrange for the Latin American Communist Conference in Montevideo and Buenos Aires the following year. The other type of agent was the adviser who used to reside in this region indefinitely. Sometimes he had to become an official or member of the local Communist Party. Alfred Stirner was one of those who served like this in the Mexican Communist Party. He probably was also a representative of the Caribbean Bureau in the late 1920's. In Argentina, an Italian, Viltorio Vidale, served and he was known in Latin America as Carlos Contreras. Another Pole who used the name Abraham or Fabio Grobart was responsible in organizing the communist underground activities in Cuba in 1927.

Even after Lenin's death the Mexican-Soviet endeavour to establish diplomatic relations continued. In February 1924 the Soviet Mexican talks again opened in Berlin. In principle, the question was settled by June. And on August 4, 1924 the Mexican Ambassador handed the Soviet Ambassador in Berlin a memorandum establishing diplomatic relations with the USSR. S.S. Pestkovsky was appointed as the first Soviet Ambassador in Mexico. He presented his credentials to the Mexican President on November 7, 1924.

At the ceremony in which he presented his credentials, he said that Soviet people had very great interest in the success of the Mexican people in their heroic struggle for independence which had awakened sincere and profound sympathy in the minds of the Soviet workers and peasants. In the

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21 B. Ponomarev, A. Gromyko and V. Khvostov (eds.), History of Soviet Foreign Policy, 1917-1945 (Moscow, 1969), David Skvirsky (trans.), p. 229.

same month Mexican Ambassador Vadillo presented his credentials in Moscow. The establishment of a legation in Mexico city was considered as a great success for Soviet Foreign Policy in Latin America. It was a primary step for an extension of Soviet influence in the rest of the hemisphere.

Even though the establishment of the diplomatic relations with Mexico opened up fresh opportunities for Moscow in Latin America, a complicated problem followed it. It was how to reconcile activities for the development and strengthening of the friendly relations between Soviet Union and Latin American countries with Comintern's encouragement and directives of the anti-governmental actions in the region. In G.V. Chicherin's report "Mexico as a base for the extension of Soviet influence" to the third session of the CPSU Central Executive Committee, March 4, 1925, there was the indication of this dual tactics. He stated:

...We have succeeded in re-establishing diplomatic relations, which give us a political base in the new continent, with the neighbour of the United States, Mexico. The Mexican Government is based on the Right trade unions and the radical small bourgeoisie. ...Mexico gives us, thus, a very convenient political base in America for the development of our further ties. (22)

As a reaction of this statement Calles, who had succeeded Obregon as President of the Mexican Republic, reminded that the Soviet Government must not abuse the diplomatic privileges granted to it in Mexico for the purposes of propaganda and political intrigue.

Mexican irritation over Chicherin statement was aggravated by the United States' feeling that Mexico was becoming a hot-bed of Bolshevism. In a statement on January 12, 1927 the United States' Secretary, F.P. Kellog,

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22 Glissold, n. 17, p. 87.

23 Ibid., p. 4.

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made allegations to this effect. But Calles, the Mexican President rebutted it by saying that Mexican policies were entirely free from the influence of Soviet Union.<sup>25</sup> This shows that the advent of Soviet Mission in Mexico affected to a certain extent negatively the Mexico's relations with Washington. Because at that time the U.S.A. had not yet been decided to establish diplomatic relations with Moscow.

But the course of Mexican-Soviet relations themselves were far from smooth. Even before the arrival of Pestkovsky in Mexico, Moscow had refused to give permission to the most powerful Mexican labour leader Luis N. Morones, head of the "Confederacion Regional Obrera Mexicana" (CROM),<sup>26</sup> to visit the Soviet Union while he was on a tour of Europe. This action caused considerable irritation in the minds of CROM. The Soviet legation in Mexico soon became the centre for the most radical and anti-governmental forces.<sup>27</sup> Immediately after his arrival Pestkovsky began to utilize the daily press to attack the Mexican Regional Confederation of Labour (CROM) whose chief Luis N. Morones, was a member of Calles' Cabinet. Mexican labour and peasant leaders were sent off to Russia to be trained and Soviet aid was given to the striking railway workers of the country. When the Soviet railway workers in Moscow donated 50,000 pesos to the strike fund, it created ill-feeling in Mexican authorities. Various front organizations like "Friends of the Soviet Union", "The Anti-Imperialist League", and the branches of Red Aid and Young Communists were launched and flourished. When Pestkovsky cultivated tactlessly these kinds of extremist activities, CROM

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24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid., p. 5.

27 Graleton Beals, "Red Star South", Current History (New York), vol. XLIX, No. 4, December 1938, p. 28.

decided to end the Soviet influence in its organizations. In a resolution adopted at its seventh annual convention on March 6, 1926 about Soviet intervention in labour disputes it stated that Russian diplomatic representative in Mexico should abstain from lending moral and economic support to the so-called radical groups. Because those radicals were enemies of the Mexican Federation of Labour and of the Government. Again in a communication to Pestkovsky from the Central Committee of the Mexican Federation of Labour directed by its seventh Congress on March 1926 it was stated:

This Central Committee was ordered by the convention to inform you in your character as representative of Russia in Mexico that the Mexican labour movement represented by this confederation maintains the principle that the workers of each country must be organized in accordance with their opinions and necessities and that no nation has the right to impose nor to lay down for another the doctrine which must control its activities. (29)

By the end of 1926 Pestkovsky had been recalled and was replaced by Mme Aleksandra Kollantay who had taken a different line in her functioning. She was a famous revolutionary of Tsarist days. Presenting her letter of credence to President Calles on December 24, 1926 she said: "One of the most urgent tasks of my mission in Mexico is that of finding means to promote commercial activity between the United States of Mexico and the Soviet Union". In a subsequent interview with the President Calles she also expressed the hope that very soon the relations between Soviet Union and Mexico would become friendly. Even though she followed a passive policy

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28 Glissold, n. 17, p. 87.

29 Ibid.

30 Beals, n. 27, p. 28.

31 See Glissold, n. 17, pp. 87-88.

32 In a letter to Maksim Litvinov, on January 30, 1927, Mme Kollantay narrated about her interview with President Calles. See Ibid., p. 88.

of non-interference, the Mexican officials accused her of interference. Consequently, little progress had been made in the relations between the two countries because while at the official level Mme Kollantay had given assurances to improve relations with the government of President Calles and his successor Emilio Portes Gil and with its chief labour organization, CROM, on the unofficial level — through the Mexican Communist Party — Comintern had been giving directions for its own underground functions. For example when there was an endeavour to penetrate and control CROM or supersede it, efforts were made to secure its adhesion to Profintern, the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU); but this attempt failed. So a rival body — "Confederacion Sindical Unitaria de Mexico" (CSUM) — was launched and encouraged the forces to overthrow the Calles Government. 33

Before 1928 Comintern had tried to infiltrate in Labour movements and intellectual circles of the countries of Latin America. At a Profintern meeting, held in connection with the tenth anniversary of the Russian Revolution, late in 1927, the delegates stressed the need for a Latin American Communist Labour conference. <sup>34</sup> In the same year there was an announcement, issued from Moscow, about a congress of the Latin American Confederation of Labour Unions which was going to meet at Montevideo in 1929. 35 The announcement contained a warning that Latin American Communists had over estimated their strength. This was a set back to the Latin American communists in their premature revolutionary struggle. This warning indicated that in this period Moscow was pretty sure about the ineffectiveness of the communist groups of Latin America.

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33 Ibid., p. 6.

34 Poppino, n. 11, p. 157.

35 Louis E. Aguilar, Marxism in Latin America (New York, 1968), p. 20.



Even though the communists failed to make much headway in the field of labour, they had considerable following among peasantry, especially in the states of Vera Cruz, from where two peasant leaders -- Manuel Diaz Ramirez and Ursulo Galvan -- were members of the Peasant International. From the Durango state another peasant leader, Guadalupe Rodriguez participated at the tenth anniversary celebrations of the October Revolution<sup>36</sup> in Moscow in 1927.

In South America, Soviet interest at first reached the countries of the River Plate. Several times Moscow declared its readiness to enter into diplomatic relations with Argentina and the other republics. In 1925 a Soviet mission toured South America for persuading the governments to recognize Russia with a promise that Russia would purchase raw materials<sup>37</sup> from these countries. Only Uruguay was attracted by this proposal and reacted favourably by establishing diplomatic relations in 1926. Uruguay was the second (and last before Second World War) Latin American country which established diplomatic relations with Moscow. A Soviet Commercial office was also established in Montevideo in 1927. From this new Soviet Legation in Uruguay much propaganda began to go out across all South America. Underground agitations appeared in some countries and Comintern started recruitment for its future activities.

Argentina also had considerable interest in establishing political and economic relations with the USSR. Several times the USSR, through its diplomatic representatives abroad, stressed its willingness to take practical steps in this direction. Argentina's Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Commission stated that it was "premature" to recognise the USSR and officially

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<sup>36</sup> Clissold, n. 17, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Beals, n. 27, p. 28.

the Soviet Government was informed about it through the Argentinian ambassador  
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in Rome. But apparently under the British pressure Argentina could not go further in this direction. The official reason given by Argentina was that the Soviet authorities had attacked the Argentine legation in St.

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Petersburg. Nevertheless trade between the two countries increased considerably. The willingness for establishing relations with the USSR was also expressed by Brazil, Chile, Venezuela, El Salvador, Columbia and Bolivia through their diplomatic representatives abroad. But some of these countries could only establish fairly broad trade relations while others had mere contacts. In October 1925, Yuzhamtorg, the Soviet import and export firm handling trade with South America opened its office in Buenos Aires which helped to promote trade between Soviet Union and the countries of the  
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continent.

Even though communists could attract a good section of Latin American intellectuals during this period, the Comintern failed to win over any of the outstanding Latin American leaders. For example, Chile's outstanding labour organizer, Recabarren, committed suicide after his party's affiliation with the Comintern. Similarly Haya dela Torre of Peru had been under training in Moscow for sometime, but his party APRA did not follow the lines of Soviet thinking. The most brilliant writer in Latin America, Mariatogue, could not cope with the policy of the Comintern as his ideas were branded by the latter as "populist".

The Comintern believed that the revolution in the Latin American countries would first have to go through the stage of anti-imperialist

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38 Ponomaryov, n. 21, p. 230.

39 Glissold, n. 17, p. 116.

40 Ponomaryov, n. 21, p. 231.

struggle, followed by the stage of anti-feudal peasant revolution. It believed that only after a further lapse of time socialist revolution should take place.<sup>41</sup> Even though this view was probably true for China or some other Asian countries Latin American Marxists protested against this guide<sup>42</sup>line both at the Sixth Comintern Congress and later at the first conference of Latin American Communists held in 1929.<sup>42</sup> However, despite these protests, the Latin American Communists were working very hard to translate into action the decisions of the Comintern with the Soviet assistance. In Mexico the bolshevization of the Communist Party began even before the slogan was formally adopted by the Comintern. In co-operation with the American Communist Party and the anti-imperialist League, it made significant progress. With the help of the League publication was begun of an anti-imperialist united front organ -- "El Libertador" and contacts were established with the sections of the anti-imperialist League in Cuba, Guatemala, Honduras,<sup>43</sup> Salvador, Nicaragua, Venezuela and Peru. A large number of peasants were newly recruited into the 'National Peasant League' controlled by the communists.<sup>44</sup> They reorganized the party on the basis of the suggestions of the Comintern and formed a new department in the party to educate the masses.

In Uruguay in addition to the trade unions and the section of the anti-imperialist league, the communists established other proletarian

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41 Ruben Castellanos, "The October Revolution and the Communist Movement in Latin America" Peace Freedom and Socialism (London), vol. 10, No. 6, 1967, p. 13.

42 See Ibid.

43 Bertran C. Wolfe, "Bolshevization and Immediate Tasks of the Mexican Communist Party", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 5, No. 51, June 18, 1925, p. 697.

44 Janet Cork, "Class Forces in Mexico", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 8, No. 60, September 6, 1928, p. 1052.

organizations like Red Sports Federation. At the general election in 1925 the Communist Party got more than 5,000 votes. Through its newspaper Justicia, it gave wide publicity to the decisions of the Comintern. It translated almost all the writings of Lenin into Spanish. Leninist ideas reached among the workers and peasants as a guide in their revolutionary movement. Thus towards the end of 1929 the communists could advance their influence among the people in a number of countries of Latin America.

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45 L. Sala, "The Communist Movement in Uruguay", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 8, No. 80, November 16, 1928, p. 1506.

46 Ghioldi, "The Influence of Leninism in Latin America", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 8, No. 4, January 25, 1928, pp. 106-7.

**CHAPTER IV**

## THE EXTREMIST PERIOD, 1929-1935

In 1929, Molotov, Mamilsky and Kuusinen assumed control of the Comintern activities. They were the nominees of Stalin. From there onwards the Comintern became exclusively an instrument of the Soviet Union. There was no public discussion in the formation of the policy of the Comintern. The initial action of the Stalinist triumvirate in 1929 was to open a new era of "left-wing extremism". They propagated that the world economic crisis had heralded the final collapse of capitalism. Therefore, they urged that the Communist Parties should concentrate their main efforts on liquidating those parties which competed with them for the support of the working class. The Social Democrats were characterised as social fascists who worked in favour of the bourgeoisie.<sup>1</sup>

This extremism was more acceptable in Latin America than it was in countries with stabler political systems because this region had the tradition of political violence.<sup>2</sup> In his speech "The Comintern and the New Revolutionary Upsurge" delivered at the Tenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Communist International in 1929 Molotov stated that the Communist Parties all over the world should get ready for new revolutionary struggles of great magnitude. The communists should raise the sense of responsibility in the working class in regard to the mobilisation of the

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1 Denis Healey, "The Cominform and World Communism", International Affairs (London), vol. 24, July 1948, p. 340.

2 Robert J. Alexander, Communism in Latin America (New Brunswick, N.J., 1957), p. 22.

revolutionary forces for the immediate class struggles. Again on July 10, 1929 there was a discussion on the reports of Khusinen and Mamilsky in the same Plenum in which the tasks of Latin American Communists was declared as follows:

...the immediate tasks confronting the Communist Party of Mexico and the Communist Parties of Latin America are first of all the tasks of working out their programmes of immediate demands for the poor and middle peasants, and linking up these demands with the prospect of the workers and peasant revolutions, the prospects of the further development of the struggle for the Social Revolution. (4)

And it stressed the need of cleansing the Communist Parties of Latin America by throwing out the petty bourgeois and anarcho-Syndicalist elements from it. According to this decision the Latin American Communists not only expelled the bourgeois elements from their organizations but also, by and large, they remained completely isolated from all other radical and working class parties.

The Comintern claimed that it was the world party of the proletariat of all countries and only under its banner Communist objectives in every country could be achieved. <sup>5</sup> Throughout the extremist period the Comintern was confident in the growth of national liberation struggles of the colonial and the dependent countries. Therefore it gave importance to the revolutionary work of the Communist parties of these countries and warned that unless they win the mass support of the trade unions in the rural districts and in the army, it would be impossible to achieve a successful

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3 International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 9, No. 49, September 12, 1929, p. 1047.

4 International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 9, No. 51, September 17, 1929, p. 1100.

5 "Opening speech by Wilhelm Pieck in the Thirteenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 14, No. 5, January 30, 1954, p. 98.

revolution. For this purpose it was suggested that the Communists should follow the bolshevik way of mass agitation, both legal and illegal work, campaigns, and battles and to combine the economic struggle with the political struggle in bolshevik manner. Apart from this it wanted every Communist to learn how to raise a mass struggle from the less developed forms to mass political strikes.<sup>6</sup>

In 1929 the Comintern, under its auspices, organized two important gatherings in Latin America. One was a constituent Congress for the "confederacion Sindical Latino Americana in Montevideo" from 18 to 26 May 1929 and the second was the first Latin American Communist Congress held in Buenos Aires, from 1 to 12 June 1929.<sup>7</sup> At the Buenos Aires Congress, the attitudes and programmes of the Communist groups of this region were radicalized on the basis of the directives from the Comintern.

The Buenos Aires Congress was attended by thirty eight delegates<sup>8</sup> altogether and fourteen Communist Parties of Latin America participated. Even from U.S.A. and France Communist representatives came in addition to the representatives of the Comintern organizations of those countries. The political situation and the role of the Communists in major countries were reviewed.<sup>9</sup> The so-called extremist intransigence during the third period (1929-1935) was actually started in Latin America with this Congress.

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6 "Report of Kumsinen about Fascism, the Danger of War and the Tasks of the Communist Parties in the Thirteenth Plenum of the Executive Committee of the Comintern". Ibid., pp. 99-115.

7 Stephen Clissold (ed.), Soviet Relations with Latin America, 1918-1968: A Documentary Survey (London, 1970), p. 12.

8 The Communist Parties of Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Columbia, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela were participated in the congress. See Victorio Codovilla, "The ideas of Marxism Leninism in Latin America", Peace Freedom and Socialism (London), vol. 7, No. 8, p. 41.

9 Clissold, n. 7, p. 12.



The militant revolutionary tactics was introduced to the Communist Parties of the area. And it envisaged no relations with the Pseudo-progressive Governments or with reformist socialists or bourgeois nationalists. But this Congress did not analyse the chances of a revolution or the possibility of its success in Latin America.

As a result of the inspiration derived from the Congress, the Communist Party of Argentina, in 1929 and 1930, simultaneously attacked the Socialists and the radical government of Hipolito Irigoyen of the country condemning them as the allies of imperialism and "quasi-fascists".<sup>10</sup> The strikes which occurred in Columbian banana plantations in the previous year was discussed in this Congress and it came to the conclusion that the local Communist leaders failed to turn the strike into a nation-wide revolutionary movement. But the Columbian delegates blamed the Comintern for its failure in sending adequate instructions as a result of its ignorance of Columbian geographical and political situation factors.

From Peru Jose Carlos Mariategui, a brilliant Marxist writer, analysed his country's Indian problem which he later elaborated as a book -- "Siete ensayos de interpretacion de la realidad Peruana". He claimed in it that an agrarian reform which would permit the Indian's collectivist instincts would lead them towards communism. This thesis however was denounced in the Soviet Union by the leading Latin Americanist Miroshewsky, condemning<sup>11</sup> it as "populism".

The Mexican Communists also received criticism from the Congress for their attitude towards the right wing revolt which broke out in March 1929

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10 Louis E. Aguilar, Marxism in Latin America (New York, 1968), p. 21.

11 Stephen Glissold, "The Soviet Union and Latin America", in Claudio Veliz (ed.), Latin America and the Caribbean (New York, 1968), p. 452.

against the government of Portes Gil who became President after Obregon. At the time of the revolt, the peasant league, some of which were controlled by the Communists, supported the Government and helped to quell the revolt. The Comintern strongly disapproved this policy of the Peasant League and had sent directives for turning the peasant arms against the government, by fighting on two fronts with a view to precipitate a social revolution. Those peasant leaders who refused the instruction of the Comintern were expelled from the party. Others like Guade lupe Rodriques attempted to carry them out. He issued a revolutionary May-day proclamation urging the peasants to seize land and the workers to take over factories. But he was caught by the local military commander and executed. The Comintern then issued a manifesto which urged the Mexican people to start an all-out war against the "Fascist government of Mexico".<sup>13</sup> But nothing came out of this attempt to rouse the Mexican people against their government. But the criticism of the Congress was that the Mexican peasant leagues failed to form "Soviets in the region they dominated" because of their counter revolutionary activity.

These developments had affected adversely the official Mexican-Soviet relations. On July 20, 1929 the Mexican Ambassador in Moscow protested against the attacks of the Russian press and the incitements by the Comintern in Mexico. Litvinov replied that Soviet government was not responsible for the contents of articles in the press and the activity of the Comintern.<sup>14</sup>

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12 Clissold, n. 7, p. 13.

13 Jane Degras, The Communist International, 1919-1943, Documents (London), vol. III, 1929-1943, pp. 71-73.

14 Stephen Clissold, "Soviet Relations with Latin America between the Wars", in J. Gregory Oswald and Anthony J. Strover (ed.), The Soviet Union and Latin America (London, 1970), p. 18.

In January 1930 Mexican government broke off diplomatic relations with Moscow.

The Chilean Communist party also could not be free from the effect of the radicalization policy of the Buenos Aires Congress. There the Communists, right from the beginning, had increasing influence. In the 1925 election the party had secured the seats of two senators and seven deputies by supporting democratic policies. The radicalization policy now created a double crisis,<sup>15</sup> because, externally, the party broke away from the collective struggle against the dictatorship of Carlos Ibanez claiming that it alone and the isolated working class could make the revolution. And internally, there took place a split in the party into two factions. The first was that of Manuel Hidalgo, who believed in Trotskyism and rejected the necessity of attacking all the leftist organizations. The second was that of Elias Laferte, who remained faithful to the strategy of the Comintern.

The effect of the radicalization policy of the Congress continued. For example in the same year the small Communist Party of El Salvador attempted a coup against the dictator Hernandez Martinez which was drowned in blood by the dictator. In 1931 there was a naval revolt in Chile. Even though the Communists did not inspire it, they took credit for it. The Comintern considered it as a first attempt in South America's history to raise the banner of Soviet Power.<sup>16</sup> Again in November 1935 in Brazil Louis Carlos Prestes attempted to capture power by an army coup. But it was suppressed.

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15 Aguilar, n. 10, pp. 23-24.

16 "The Reds in Latin America", The Round Table (London), vol. LIII, No. 209, December 1962, pp. 9-10.

One of the best example of the effects of Communist radicalism of the period was Cuba. In that country there was a struggle against the dictatorship of Machado (1928-1933). The Communists at this time condemned all other parties, whether traditional or revolutionary, as fascists, quasi-fascists or instruments of Yankee imperialism. This continued even in the period of the revolutionary government of Ramon Grau SanMartin (September 1933--January 1934). Latin American Communist parties followed this radical policy upto 1955 creating a lot of revolutionary activities.

Mention was made in the Buenos Aires congress about the possibility of creating "Indian republics" in those countries where Indians were predominating. The Congress stressed that the U.S. imperialism was the principal enemy of the national liberation movement of the peoples of Latin America and denounced the position of Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA). While stressing the need for national liberation wars it called upon the peoples of Latin America for helping the Soviet Union in fighting against imperialism. Moreover, it played a major role in the formation of more Marxist-Leninist parties in Latin America. However, the Comintern directives clearly urged that the Communists, operating with other parties in some countries of Latin America, should endeavour to form their own full-fledged Communist organisations. Following this at a special convention held on July 17, 1950 the Socialist Revolutionary Party of Columbia converted itself into the Communist Party of Columbia. In Panama, the official Communist Party was formed in 1929 and one of its leaders, Elisio Echevez, paid a visit to Moscow also. In Ecuador in

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17 See Codovilla, n. 8, p. 42.

18 Rollie E. Poppino, International Communism in Latin America: A History of the movement 1917-1963 (London, 1964), p. 84.

19 John Donovan, Red Machete: Communist Infiltration in the Americas (New York, 1962), p. 200.

1951, the Socialist Party adopted the name the Communist Party of Ecuador.

In Peru, Jose Carlos Mariategui, a socialist, and perhaps the most original 20th century Peruvian intellectual, founded the Peruvian Communist Party. He declared that socialism would save the Indians of his country because there was necessary connection between the ways of life of the two. In 1926 he founded the review called "Amauta" which became a leading instrument of Communist propaganda by 1928. And in 1929 with a number of associates like Eudocio Ravines and Richardo Martinez dela Torre, he founded a Socialist Party which was in fact Peru's first Communist Party. In 1930 after the death of Mariategui the party became  
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a section of the Comintern.

In Costa Rica, Manuel Mora, a young intellectual established the Communist Party of Costa Rica in 1929, but this Party was not accepted as a full member of the Comintern until 1935. Similarly Marx Hudicourt and  
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Jacques Roumain founded the Communist Party of Haiti in 1930. In 1951 the Communist Party of Venezuela was founded by some Marxist revolutionaries. Joseph Kornfedder, a United States citizen who was an agent of the Comintern attended the founders' meeting. On the basis of his recommendation, the Party was first given the status of a "sympathetic" party by the Comintern. Then in the seventh Congress of the International in 1935, it was accepted  
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as a full member of the Comintern.

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20 Poppino, n. 18, p. 85.

21 Fredrick B. Pike, The Modern History of Peru (London, 1967), pp. 235-7.

22 Poppino, n. 18, p. 91.

23 Robert J. Alexander, The Communist Party of Venezuela (Stanford, California, 1969), pp. 3-5.

However, the important achievement of the Buenos Aires Congress was the creation of the Latin American Trade Union Confederation as an affiliate of the Profintern.<sup>24</sup> This Confederation claimed that it was representing labour organizations from ten Latin American countries and groups of trade unions from seven other countries except Dominican Republic, Haiti, and Nicaragua. But majority of them were paper organizations or small Communist factions which had a recent birth as a result of splits from non-Communist labour federations during the third period of radicalism. In 1935 this Confederation reached its zenith and thereafter quickly lost strength because of the general decline of the Communist influence in this region. Until the introduction of popular-front policy by the Comintern, this organization survived as the regional agency of Profintern for dispensing funds and teaching organizational techniques. In short it was another point of contact between Latin American Parties and the Soviet Union.

There was only one Soviet government official organization which served as a link between the Latin American Communists and Moscow during the decade ending in 1935. This was the Soviet Trading Corporation which had an office in New York and two offices under the name Iumtorg, in the River Plate area. Its director was Boris Kraevsky who opened the first office in Montevideo in 1925 and second one in Buenos Aires, the following year. He had persuaded the Uruguayan government for extending formal diplomatic recognition to the Soviet Union in 1926. Then in 1930 he was appointed as his country's "general representative" to Uruguay. In the meantime Kraevsky changed his headquarters to Buenos Aires and he travelled

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24 Poppino, n. 18, p. 157.

widely in Brazil and Southern South America in connection with his commercial activities. It was said that his principal function was to supply the Communist Parties propaganda materials and funds. However, within a few years, the authorities in most of the South American republics could find out his subversive activities: inciting Communist riots in Uruguay and Argentina and violence in Brazil and Paraguay. So he was denied entry into Brazil in 1930. By this time his usefulness as a Soviet agent had considerably diminished. In Argentina the Uriburu regime closed Iumtorg's Buenos Aires office in mid 1931 and arrested about 160 employees. The revolutionary Junta which seized power in June 1932 in Chile deported Kraevsky from there. However upto 1935 the South American Communists continued to receive propaganda and other support from Montevideo. But when Uruguay broke its relations with Soviet Union in the same year (1935), Iumtorg's operations came to an end.

This ultra-leftism in the Comintern policy continued until the seventh Comintern Congress (the last) at Moscow in which Popular Front tactics was introduced. From the practical point of view the extremist line was a failure in Latin America. Because after the Buenos Aires Congress, all the Latin American governments like that of Mexico, Argentina and Chile began to take stern measures against the Communists and they were practically isolated from other political groups of the area.

Thus the extremist period was by and large a period of Communist isolation, and the petty revolts engineered by Latin American Communists in obedience to the directives of the Comintern had resulted in a total failure. This new experience had necessitated a rethinking of Moscow's policies towards Latin America.

**CHAPTER V**



## THE POPULAR FRONT PERIOD, 1935-1945

By the beginning of the Popular Front Period the Comintern gradually came under the dictatorial control of Stalin. Stalin made it obligatory for Communists all over the world to defend the Soviet Union -- "the base of world revolution" and the "father land of all toilers" -- from external attack of any kind. From 1927 onwards his treatment of foreign communist parties was such that the loyalty towards Soviet Union was considered a test of proletarian internationalism. And the individual sections of the Comintern were required to obey Moscow's orders without any protest. Within the Comintern itself power was shifted from the ECCI to the Central Committee of the Communist party of the Soviet Union. Stalin became the de facto ruler of the Comintern and applied "democratic centralism" on a world wide scale.

The most important character of the time of the Seventh Congress of the Comintern was that fascism had already become a threatening force which, to a great extent, influenced the Comintern to adopt the United Front Policy. In 1934-35 period Fascism reached Chile. Hitler's men organized a Chilean Nazi Party there which was financed and supported by the German emigrants of the country.<sup>1</sup> In Brazil the Government of the country itself was receiving guidance from Hitler to struggle against

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1 M. Valdivia, "Hitler's Hand in South America", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 16, No. 11, 29th February 1936, p. 301.

communism. Several secret policemen of Brazil were sent to Nazi Germany<sup>2</sup> for getting trained in the fight against communism. Like this almost all the countries of Latin America had been under the effect of Fascist ideology. Besides this the whole continent was passing through a stage of unbridled terror and serious division in the ranks of the working class and democratic forces.<sup>3</sup> The Communists had become the main target of this terror and therefore they were badly in need of a new strategy and tactic not only for their survival but also to regain the lost ground in the politics of the Latin American countries.

The Seventh World Congress after an interval of seven years met from July 25 to August 20, 1935. This Congress merely ratified the Popular Front Policy which had started in 1934 by the ECCI on the instructions from the CPSU Politbureau. In the resolution of the Seventh Comintern Congress "on Fascism, working class unity, and the tasks of the Comintern" more emphasis was given to the threat of fascism and declared that the immediate task of the labour movement was to establish the united fighting front of the working class "for a successful struggle against the offensive of capital, against the reactionary measures of the bourgeoisie, against fascism, the bitterest enemy of all the toilers,..."<sup>4</sup> It must be noted that in most of the colonial and semi-colonial countries, because of the new united front tactics, the attitude of the Comintern towards other parties, the bourgeoisie and

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2 Octavio Brnadao, "Nazi Germany's Penetration of Brazil", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 17, No. 29, 10th July 1937, p. 655.

3 R.A. Martinez, "Latin America -- Three Years after the Seventh World Congress", International Press Correspondence (Vienna), vol. 18, No. 41, 27th August 1938, pp. 963-4.

4 Jane Degras, The Communist International, 1919-1943, Documents (London), vol. III, 1929-1943, pp. 361-2.

nationalism changed remarkably. It proved highly beneficial to the Latin American Communist Parties. Even before the Seventh Congress, in Brazil, a National Liberation Alliance was formed. Dimitrov in his report to the Congress stated:

In Brazil, the Communist Party having laid a correct foundation for the development of the united anti-Fascist front by the establishment of the National Liberation Alliance, has to make every effort to extend further this front by drawing into it first and foremost the many millions of the peasantry, leading upto the formation of units of a people's revolutionary army completely devoted to the revolution and to the establishment of the rule of the National Liberation Alliance. (5)

To the same Congress Wang Ming, the rapporteur for Latin America, reported that a movement of this kind, the National Liberation Alliance, had been formed in Brazil under the presidency of "our comrade Prestes".<sup>6</sup> And it was joined by many officers of the army and navy.

A number of Latin American Communist leaders were invited to Moscow to attend the Seventh Comintern Congress, which was scheduled to be held at the end of 1934. When it was postponed the delegates from Latin America were already on their way to Moscow. But they did not go back even when the Congress was postponed. After reaching Moscow they discussed their problems with the Comintern leaders and worked out the

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5 Stephen Clissold (ed.), Soviet Relations with Latin America, 1918-1968: A Documentary Survey (London, 1970), p. 154.

6 Stephen Clissold, "Soviet Relations with Latin America between the Wars", in J. Gregory Oswald and Anthony J. Stover (ed.), The Soviet Union and Latin America (London, 1970), p. 21. Louis Carlos Prestes began his career as a captain in the engineering corps of the Brazilian Army. He became well known first when he joined a military revolt in 1924. He was then forced into exile. Envoies of the Brazilian Communist Party and South American Secretariat had approached him and converted him to Marxism. Then he was invited, in 1931 to the Soviet Union and became a member of the ECCI in 1935. In April of the same year he returned to Brazil to lead an armed struggle. He became the President of National Liberation Alliance as directed by the Comintern.

strategy to be followed by their Parties. A Peruvian Communist, Eudocio Ravines, who attended the discussions with the Russian leaders, said that the decisions then taken represented a compromise between the views of Dimitrov, the chief proponent of the new Popular Front line and the policy of violent tactics still favoured by Manuilsky. The compromise was that only in Brazil the Popular Front Policy should be used to seize power by revolution. And in other countries of Latin America this policy was to be utilised in winning elections against Fascist or Fascist-oriented parties to get power.<sup>7</sup> An analysis of the speeches delivered at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern reveals that the idea of revolution had not been abandoned in 1935. Only because of the elasticity of method of attaining that goal the United Front Policy was adopted. The Congress ended on August 20, 1935.

In Brazil the preparations by the National Liberation Alliance for an armed struggle was in progress and in the last week of November, Prestes issued a proclamation addressed to "all the forces of popular liberties".<sup>8</sup> The revolt broke out at first in Natal and Recife and then in Rio. The revolutionaries got some initial success but later they were suppressed with bloodshed. Prestes and another German Communist, Harry Berger, who also led the revolution with many other leaders were arrested. The failure of the armed revolt was a

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<sup>7</sup> Glissold, n. 5, pp. 18-19.

<sup>8</sup> The 'Call issued by Prestes was published in "A Manha", the organ of the National Liberation Alliance, on November 27, 1935 (page 19). It was republished in Glissold, n. 5, p. 155.

great set-back to the Comintern designs in Latin America. It led to a rupture of diplomatic ties with Uruguay, the only Latin American republic which had retained the link with Moscow at that time. As a result, all Soviet diplomatic and trade efforts ended in Latin America in 1935. But this did not put an end to the clandestine operations of the Comintern in many Latin American countries which was being carried out by its secret agents. Mostly American and German Communists were working as the secret agents of the Comintern in Latin America.<sup>9</sup>

However, the new strategy of the Comintern calling for broad alliances with limited aims was soon adopted by all the Communist Parties of Latin America. These parties began to exploit, according to the circumstances of each country, the national bourgeoisie and the other non-Communist parties. As a result the history of the Communists in Latin America became one of the most extraordinary opportunism. Communist Parties without any distinction co-operated with dictators and with democratic parties of the Right as well as the Left. Often they used to split into two parties with opposing policies, out of which one collaborated with a dictator and the other with the democratic opposition. Only after the change of the particular political situation they used to reunite.<sup>10</sup>

It was during this period, for the first time, the various Latin American Communist Parties such as those of Chile, Cuba, and Mexico became important political factors. The exceptional case where communism ironically suffered at this time was in Brazil. It was because of the

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9 Carleton Beals, "Red Star South" Current History (New York), vol. XLIX, No. 4, December 1938, p. 29.

10 Ernst Halperin, Nationalism and Communism in Chile (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1965), p. 15.

terrible failure of the uprising of the National Liberation Alliance in 1935. The suppression and imprisonment of the leaders created chaos which prevented the party's further expansion. Generally, the Communist Parties of Latin America not only established working relations with other political groupings but also reduced their own radicalism and sought to legalize their political activities.

New Communist Parties were also formed in this period in Nicaragua, Bolivia and Dominican Republic. In 1937 the Socialist Party of Nicaragua was created by a minority bloc which broke away from the Workers Party. Even though it was a Communist Party it never called itself Communist till 1943.<sup>11</sup> The Bolivian Communist Party was formed by December 1940. But it had its political origin many years ago. It may be seen that in 1920's a student leader called Roberto Hinojosa had contact with the Communist International in Argentina. Another pro-Communist, Gustavo, formed a Socialist Party; and a few months later, in 1925, the Bolivian government deported him. After that the Communists managed to infiltrate labour organizations notwithstanding the government's suppression. From 1936 to 1939 two military rulers ruled Bolivia whose policy was in favour of the communists. At this time a Marxist-oriented party was formed but denied being Communist.<sup>12</sup> Following the Civil War in Spain, about nine hundred refugees came to Dominican Republic after 1939. More than one hundred of them were communists who began to set up their own front organisations and provided inspiration to the local citizens,

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11 Rollie E. Poppino, International Communism in Latin America (London, 1964), p. 88.

12 John Donovan, Red Machete: Communist Infiltration in the Americas (New York, 1962), pp. 134-5.

especially the students. Some of the students were communists and they established a separate Dominican Communist Party in 1942.<sup>13</sup>

The Russo-German Non-aggression Pact of August 1939 marked the end of the first era of Popular Front Communist strategy in Latin America. Because when the pact was signed, the Latin American communists along with all other communists of the world reversed immediately their policy of co-operation with non-communist lefts and joined with the Axis sympathizers and the native Latin American fascists to frustrate the World War II activities of the Western Allies. But when Hitler invaded the USSR in June 1941, Latin American communists as elsewhere again reversed their policy and enthusiastically revived "Popular Front" policy because at that time Soviet Union again joined with the Western Allies to fight against Nazi Germany and its allies. With this change the anti-Americanism of the Latin American communists was abandoned and almost all Latin American countries established or re-established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. This happened because of the pressure from the United States. Thus a new stage was set for strong communist advances.

It was during this second 'Popular Front' phase the communists of Latin America gained their greatest opening and direct influence. Their propaganda possibilities multiplied and their influence in the labour sectors increased. As the communists were supporting the World War II efforts of the Allies they benefited by the good feeling from all the countries of the hemisphere. For example, they abandoned strikes by which they got the blessings of the industrialists and the

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13 Poppino, n. 11, pp. 89-90.

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governmental leaders. They openly supported the objectives of U.S.A. and Britain in Latin America. In short, at this period the long standing prejudice against Communism was absent in Latin America. So communists could integrate into national leadership.

The first successful alliance of this period occurred in Chile in 1938. In 1935 Comintern had sent Eudocio Ravines, a brilliant Peruvian party organizer to Chile. His aim was to implement the new united and anti-fascist Popular Front strategy. The Chilean Communist Party formed an alliance with the radical Socialist Party, Democratic Party and the Radical Party. 15 The Radical Party's candidate was elected to the presidency. The Chilean Popular Front, unlike its European counterparts, was not anti-Fascist because the small Fascist Party of Chile supported the Popular Front candidate, Pedro Ayuirre Cerda which led to his victory in the 1938 election. 16 It was a considerable tactical success for the Chilean Communists and to the new Comintern line. But Moscow did not get much practical advantage from it.

The other Latin American country where Popular Front policy was implemented with some success was Cuba. In 1935 Blas Roca the Secretary General of the Cuban Communist Party attended the Seventh Congress of the Comintern. 17 According to the recommendations of the Comintern the Cuban Communist Party after the Congress began to abandon its extremism and to adopt a moderate position for creating popular front alliance. But this

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14 William Benton, The Voice of Latin America (New York, 1961), p. 75.

15 Horacio, "People's Front Organized in Chile", International Press Correspondence, vol. 16, No. 24, 23rd May, 1936, p. 657.

16 See Halperin, n. 10, pp. 44-46.

17 Andre Sua'rez, Cuba: Castroism and Communism: 1959-66, Loel Carmichael and Ernst Halperin (trans.), (Cambridge, 1967), p. 3.



attempt failed in the then existing circumstances in Cuba. A military leader, Fulgenico Batista, emerged in the political field and by January 1934 he had already become powerful to replace Grau-the then ruler - with Carlos Mendieta. From this time till 1940 Batista was the head of the army and was strong enough to appoint and dismiss presidents of the country. The democratic forces of the country were against Batista. They united with the Cuban Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Cubano -- PRC) which was organised by Grau after his removal from the office. As a result, a United Front of democratic parties came out in Cuba without the participation of the Communist Party. Communists failed there in making alliance with the democratic forces. Batista by this time decided to legitimize his position by assuming the presidency. He entered into an agreement with the communists and gave legal recognition to the party. In turn Batista got Communist support in the 1940 presidential election. And finally in 1945 the communists got representation in the cabinet also. Batista encouraged the Cuban workers movement in favour of the Communists. Thus the Party achieved considerable expansion.

Like in Chile and Cuba in almost all the countries of the region except Brazil, the Popular Front Period was a golden age for the communists. But this period did not last long. When Russo-German war broke out in 1941, victory over Germany was made the supreme goal of the Communist movement. The war brought about a severe restriction of the ECCI's work and the staff of the Comintern was forced to leave Moscow. The General Secretary, Dimitrov went with a small staff to Kuibyshev but there the function of the Comintern was only in name. The ECCI could not

direct and control the sections of the Comintern. Therefore it may be seen that from 1941 onwards the Comintern had been in its death-throes. The ECCI took the decision to dissolve the Comintern on May 15, 1943 but it was made known only after six days later. The decision said:

The whole development of events in the last quarter of a century and the experience accumulated by the Communist International convincingly showed that the organisational form of uniting workers chosen by the First Congress of the Communist International, answered conditions of the first stages of the working class movement, but it has been out-grown by the growth of this movement and by the complications of its problems in separate countries and has even become a drag on the further strengthening of the national working class parties. (18)

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18 Robert V. Daniels (ed.), A Documentary History of Communism (New York, 1930), vol. II, p. 150.

CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSIONS

From the foregoing analysis it is evident that during the period under review (1919-1943) the grip of the Comintern -- the supreme political and doctrinal authority of the world Communist movement controlled by the Soviet Union -- over the Communist activities in Latin America was quite substantial, even though it operated from a remote control point - Moscow. Consequently, the power and policy of the Soviet Union became a major source of strength of the Communist Parties in Latin America. This, in turn, had led them to give a dominant consideration for the Soviet Foreign policy objectives.

The main objective of the Comintern in Latin America was the formation of Communist Parties every where as a prelude to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat -- the ultimate political aim. In doing so it wanted to structure them also in the pattern of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Further, it wanted to train them to promote class struggle in the continent with a view to lead a Communist revolution. In addition, the Comintern wanted the Latin American Communist Parties as satellites of the CPSU and to use them as tools for fighting against the US imperialism in the region.

To achieve these objectives the Comintern adopted various methods through the Latin American Communist Parties. The methods were

designed primarily to capture the national sentiments of the Latin American people in favour of the Communist movement. Among the most important methods were (1) the infiltration into trade union and peasant movements; (2) systematic propaganda and agitations to popularise the idea of the class struggle; and (3) both legal and illegal means to establish a revolutionary base in every State.

Obviously, the primary objective of the Comintern in Latin America, the establishment of the Communist parties, was achieved to a considerable extent. It was able to see through that in almost all the countries of the region. The Communist parties were established during the Comintern period, even though a few had grown out of the Socialist parties existed prior to the formation of the Comintern. In countries like Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico and Uruguay, the Communist parties were formed after a split in the Socialist parties. But in countries like Chile the Socialists rechristened themselves into Communist Parties. In other countries the Communist Parties were formed under the aegis of the Comintern itself. To their credit these parties were able to popularise the Marxist-Leninist ideas among the Latin American intelligentsia, peasants and workers. To some extent they were able to influence even the non-Communist parties to agree to the Marxian theory of the inevitability of the historical process.

Despite this limited success the fact remained that the Comintern's strategy for Latin America was a general failure. The Latin American Communists' unsuccessful attempts to incite insurrections in Mexico, in 1929, in El Salvador in 1932 or in Brazil in 1935, illustrate the point.

They show that there was a serious flaw in the Comintern's assessment of the Latin American situation. One important reason that contributed to this misreading was that seldom the Comintern leaders consulted the Latin American Communists before introducing a new strategy for the region. The local Communists always remained only at the receiving end. As none of the countries of this continent then had any significant weight in world politics or to the vital concern of the Soviet Union, the Comintern had given only a low priority to this region. The contemptuous disregard shown by the Communists towards the Latin American national traditions and institutions and the Comintern's attempt to impose alien models and tactics on the Communist activities in Latin America were other reasons which generated instant dislike for the Communists among the ordinary people.

The wide gap between the Comintern's declared objective and the real objective also hastened the failure of its strategy in Latin America. In fact, the Comintern never expected Latin American Communists to seize power instantly because it thought that Latin America was not ripe for a communist revolution. Therefore, declarations like the capture of power or the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat were meant largely to keep up the tempo of Communist activities there. But in the meantime it wanted the parties to strengthen the Soviet Union's position as the leader of the world communist movement. Therefore the preservation and promotion of Soviet Union's global interests was upper most in the minds of the Comintern strategists. In these circumstances what the Comintern really wanted was to use the Communist Parties in Latin America as a useful propaganda means to influence the governments in

power to take positions favourable to Soviet foreign policy goals. But despite these efforts, at least till Hitler's attack on Russia the Latin American Communist Parties failed to turn the minds of the native governments in favour of the Soviet policies.

The situation created by the dual nature of the Soviet policy posed major difficulties to the Comintern's strategy in Latin America. It may be seen that the Soviet Union, through the Comintern, was secretly trying to promote revolutions in Latin America by underground activities. But simultaneously it was also trying to make friendly diplomatic relations with the governments of every country in the region. This dual tactic did not succeed. When the local governments of the continent discovered such tactics of the USSR, they reacted adversely. As a result, the strategy misfired without producing any tangible result.

Certain domestic factors also contributed to the failure of the Comintern's strategy in Latin America. It is true that the Latin American Communists were operating in a situation where a class conscious working class was more or less absent. This was because during the inter-war period industries were only at a developing stage. As a result the Communists could not do much since the labour movement itself was very weak. The Comintern's plan of establishing a Latin American Trade Union Secretariat to guide the trade union movement there also did not materialize. The efforts of the Communists to infiltrate into professional organizations, the civil service and other levels of power were also not fruitful. Moreover, the impact of Marxism-Leninism on the Latin American revolutionaries was also

only marginal. It could hardly free the Latin American Communist Parties from "opportunism" and a sense of "geographic fatalism" which were also dominant factors in their relations with Moscow. As a result, the Communist parties of Latin America had always remained undisciplined and unsuitable to lead an effective class struggle. Inevitably, the Comintern could not keep them strictly on the lines of Bolshevism. The effect was that when the Comintern adopted ultra-revolutionary policies during the extremist period it failed to attract enough revolutionaries also into its fold.

Politically, except during the Popular Front Period, the Communist Parties of Latin America faced isolation. Their contacts with the local people were very little. Even during the popular front period, the tactics deprived of the local Communists their radical image. The situation improved to some extent only towards the end of the Comintern period, when they began to gain the support of peasants and workers. This was largely because during this period, the labour movement was developing into a political power of growing importance. This new dimension to the Communist activities was given by a group of persons who were dissatisfied with the social, economic and political conditions prevailing in Latin America especially in countries like Chile, Ecuador and Cuba. This enabled the Communists to work among the peasants, especially of Mexico and Central America. But the drawback was that there was no outstanding indigenous revolutionary leader to shape things effectively.

The Latin American Communists had to face uphill tasks in implementing the policies of the Comintern. Their main difficulties were



the absence of enough Spanish propaganda material and the fact that in most of the countries the Communist Parties were outlawed either by legislation or by executive action. In some countries the criminal laws to protect the internal and external security of the nation and the legal provisions relating to immigration, labour, armed forces, education, political organization and public administration were directed against the Communists.

Apart from this the Communists had also to confront the Fascists, who had an effective platform with ready-made solutions for every socio-economic and political problem in Latin America. The emergence of fascist parties in most of the Latin American States proved to be an effective counter-weight to the Communists. Hitler's support and his way of dealing with the Communists encouraged military dictatorships in the area. The Roman Catholic Church and its activities were also posed real problems for the Communists.

A serious challenge faced by the Latin American Communists was the emergence of national political parties, which also possessed some socialist ideas. For example, in Peru APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana), by attracting both the intellectuals and the common people, became one of the most important parties of the country. In Venezuela the growth of the Communist Party was arrested by the emergence of the Democratic Action Party, established in 1941. In Cuba, the "Autentico" movement created an adverse situation for the Communists. Similar was the situation in Argentina also following the appearance of Peronista movement in the early 1940's.

The Soviet-Latin American relations during the Comintern period was one of limited normalization since the continent was by and large under the power and influence of the United States. The fact that the United States had serious interest in Latin America not only precluded the Soviet Union's deep involvement in the region, but also left the Latin American Communists pessimistic about a successful revolution. The pessimistic outlook that a victorious Communist revolution in Latin America would have to face a much more hostile opposition from neighbouring United States, and the possible absence of effective support from the Soviet Union, undermined the self-confidence of the Latin American Communists.

In brief, the Comintern guided the Latin American Communists with two basic objectives in view. In the first place it wanted them to serve the interests of the Soviet Union. Secondly, it wanted them to build Communist organizations to promote revolutionary activities so as to lead them to establish proletarian dictatorships in Latin America. But, not infrequently, the second objectives had been sacrificed for the first following the twists and turns of the policies of the Communist International. In other words, like other members of the Comintern, the Latin American Communists also were more subservient to Soviet policy than working as agents of Communist revolution. When the Comintern policy was for extreme isolationism and super revolutionary, as it was from 1928-1934, the Latin American Communists followed this line. When the Popular Front was the order of the day from 1935 onwards for the International Communist movement, so was it too for the Latin American Communists.

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