

*Not used  
as such*

DRAFT/SWW/lfw

17 February 1953

*For 18 Feb NSC  
meeting*

What is the Fundamental Trouble with Latin America?

The answer to the above question varies according to country or at least according to groups of countries. In Mexico, Central America, the Caribbean area, and the West Coast countries, other than Chile, perhaps the most fundamental problem is that of the advancement of the Indian. The Spanish conquerors started by placing the Indian in a position little better than slavery, and much of the history of these countries since that time has revolved around the progress of this racial mass. It has advanced furthest in Mexico where the descendants of the original inhabitants may be said to have asserted their position as the most predominant groups politically and economically, and a greater degree of stability has been established than is the case further south.

The masses of Indians are illiterate and require leadership. Such leadership can be in the interests of orderly economic progress in the country or it can be in the interests of special groups or foreign exploiters, or Communists. It is difficult, if not impossible, for any leadership to provide for orderly progress without eventually making some mistake and throwing the country into chaos or into the power of special interests. For many years Colombia seemed to be a country that was progressing normally. Another was Costa Rica. Yet in both of these the equilibrium was eventually upset.

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It must be taken as axiomatic that the Indian masses do progress and will continue to progress. Economic and political leadership that does not recognize this fact and make provision for it will eventually be overthrown. Examples of such happenings are the fate of Diaz in Mexico, Gomez in Venezuela, Ubico in Guatemala, and countless other more short-lived dictators throughout the Indian area. When such dictators are overthrown, it is indeed a fortunate event if the successor governments do not go to the opposite extreme and mistake license for liberty. Prior to the rise of Communism, the United States could complacently look on while a country went through the throes of fluctuating back and forth until an equilibrium was established. Now the situation has changed because the Communists are able to take advantage of the uncertain periods in the social progress of the country, either to take control as has been done in Guatemala, or at least to bring important influence to bear upon a new government and encourage its anti-Americanism. It is fortunate that Mexico, our nearest neighbor, passed through the worst stages before Communism became effective. The problem is very serious in the countries further south where the Indian is not as advanced and is more submissive to whatever leadership there may be established over him.

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Argentina and Chile are in a different category from the West Coast and more northerly countries largely because their climate had never encouraged large Indian settlements and did encourage the immigration of Europeans who would do their own work and not depend entirely upon their ability to order the natives around. Brazil is also excluded from the above analysis because of the different Portuguese tradition and the distinctive historic development of Brazil. Its racial diversity is certainly a problem, along with its geographical variations, but it is a different sort of problem from that of the countries which were inhabited by Indian civilizations in various stages of development and then were conquered by the Spaniards.

During the days of the United States "isolation" from European affairs, these developing Latin American countries, while recognizing the more advanced stage at which the United States had arrived, felt that we were a little bit of their own kind in having a sort of inferiority complex with respect to the mother countries. They felt that we, like they, were vociferously asserting our superiority without actually feeling it. Since World War II they are much chagrined at finding the United States in full and at least equal partnership with the European countries. This has had the psychological effect of increasing their own feeling of isolation, not only as before from Europe but also from the former "big brother" to whom they had looked as being one of their own kind. Thus was nationalism intensified. They were, moreover, not mature enough politically speaking to handle the economic problems involved in building up a warti e