



International.

The Loyalty of the Army Was Probably the Deciding Factor in Crushing the Recent Revolt.

FORCE RULES ONCE MORE IN CUBA

Distrust of Factions for One Another as Well as for Washington Has Wrecked the Democratic Principle

By CHARLES A. THOMSON.

Cuba's discontent once again has flared into open conflict. Last week a general strike gripped Havana. Bombs occasionally answered government rifles and machine guns, but the major attack of the opposition was waged with non-violent weapons. The strikers faced the authorities with folded arms.

President Mendieta and Colonel Batista, head of the army, met this challenge to their rule with repressive measures, which surpassed even those employed by the Machado dictatorship. These measures brought apparent success, and soon many of the workers were reported returning to their jobs. When they did so, however, hundreds were arrested and lodged in prison.

History of Revolt.

The strike movement had been gathering momentum since the middle of February, when a walkout of teachers and students, numbering 300,000, according to some estimates, closed every school on the island, from the kindergarten to the university. Government employes later swelled the ranks of the strikers, and finally organized labor was drawn into the struggle.

The striking students and teachers early formulated five principal demands: (1) abolition of military rule, (2) restoration of democratic methods of government, (3) release of all political prisoners, (4) abolition of summary courts (Tribunales de Urgencia) and (5) larger expenditures on education. To gain the desired reforms, the strike leaders demanded the resignation of both President Mendieta and Colonel Batista.

Although estimates placed the total number of strikers at between 400,000 and 500,000, President Mendieta, in a statement, termed the movement "the work of a small minority who realize they would not obtain the support of the people in an election and wish to triumph through violence." He declared that the strike was directed not so much against his government "as against the very foundations of the republic." He reiterated his intention to hold fair elections at the earliest possible moment, and said he would not resign until this had been accomplished.

Mendieta's Rule.

Under the Mendieta régime some economic improvement has taken place, thanks in large part to the sugar and tariff policies of the Roosevelt administration. The price of sugar has been steadily if slowly rising; laborers are receiving higher wages than for some time past. Regular budget revenues of the government have markedly increased and for the first seven months of the present fiscal year

total \$29,000,000, a larger sum than for any year since 1932. However, this year's budget of expenditures has been raised, by the voting of extraordinary credits, to \$67,000,000, a figure 50 per cent greater than last year's. Competent critics have charged the government with disorderly financial administration, and fear that present policies are producing a mounting deficit.

While opposition politicians in the recent strike undoubtedly fanned the flame of discontent, their efforts would have been fruitless had not the popular temper been restless and dissatisfied. The overthrow of the hated Machado dicta-

VICTOR



New York Times Studios. President Mendieta of Cuba.

torship in August, 1933, it had been expected, would usher in a "new Cuba" characterized by social justice and greater economic and political independence. No fundamental reform has been achieved.

State of Disillusionment.

It is the old politicians who control the government; Machado's former party, the Liberals, is rapidly winning back its strength; the island seems to be slipping downhill toward another dictatorship, possibly more ironclad than that of Machado. The urge for a new deal in the island has been balked. In consequence bitter disillusionment reigns.

"Nobody believes in anybody," declares one Cuban writer, and the statement is almost literally true. The opposition does not believe that Mendieta will hold fair elections. Mendieta and Batista doubt the good faith of the opposition groups. Few Cubans believe in the sincerity of Washington's announced policy of non-intervention.

It is this state of smoldering resentment and frustrated ambition which fostered the development of the strike movement. It was backed in truth by a loose and heterogeneous array of groups. There was the United Front of Public Employes, allegedly representing 50,000 government clerks and officeholders and 9,000 school teachers, which claimed leadership of the anti-government drive.

The Labor Battalions.

Next there was labor. Its battalions included not only the unions of the Communist-led National Confederation of Labor, but also the conservative railway brotherhood and in addition many independent organizations.

Moreover, several political parties actively sympathized with the movement. First, the semi-Fascist ABC society, a middle-class organization with probably a more intelligent leadership than any other group in Cuba; its representatives sat in the Mendieta Cabinet for the first six months of its rule. Second, the auténticos, followers of former President Grau San Martín; they claimed last Summer a large following in the rural districts and among Cuba's Negroes and unemployed masses, but within recent months have lost ground.

A third party, "Young Cuba," has drawn off from the auténticos their most aggressive spirits. In contrast with the latter party, whose goal is a liberal democracy, "Young Cuba" would establish a Socialist State; it openly advocates violent revolution.

Confronting this diverse and disparate group of oppositionists stood

President Mendieta. An old-style caudillo but honest and practical, he had gathered about him, when he entered office in January, 1934, a strong coalition Cabinet. But one by one his supporting parties have dropped away—the ABC, the Menocal Conservatives, the National Republicans of Miguel Mariano Gómez. There remained finally only members of his own party, the Unión Nacionalista. From that remnant, moreover, there have been nine Cabinet resignations since the strike began. In consequence President Mendieta today is a man without political backing. The Menocalistas and the Liberals have offered him support in the present crisis; none the less, his government would have fallen long ere this had it not been for two factors. One is Colonel Batista.

Batista's Strength.

Colonel Fulgencio Batista now commands 13,000 soldiers, 3,000 marines and 3,000 national police. He has whipped a disorganized army into a highly efficient military machine, and as long as he retains army loyalty he is unquestionably the centre of power in present-day Cuba. I talked with him for an hour a few weeks ago; he possesses energy, intelligence and personal magnetism. His black eyes sparkle as he speaks, and flashes of eloquence lighten even a private conversation.

Batista recognizes the need of fundamental reform in Cuba; he recognizes also his own power. Yet, paradoxically, he declares: "I cannot do what I would." He feels that social and economic progress is thwarted by political factionalism and reactionary self-interest; that until some equilibrium is achieved the army must stand as the bulwark of order. He believes he has been "appointed by destiny" to serve Cuba.

Washington has constituted the second main prop of Mendieta. It viewed his accession to power with evident satisfaction. It was expected that his coalition government would prove the representative and middle-of-the-road agency for channeling, in accordance with the Welles policy, the Cuban revolution into orderly and constitutional courses.

Actions by Washington.

Mendieta's government was recognized within five days, although the preceding Grau régime had been denied recognition for more than four months. In May the Platt Amendment was abrogated; in August the United States signed a reciprocity pact with Cuba. These measures largely failed to improve Cuban-American relations in general, because they were interpreted on the island as special favors to an increasingly unpopular régime.

Decisively as Mendieta appears to have crushed the opposition thrust, his victory may prove Pyrrhic. The use of repressive measures of unprecedented severity has robbed his government of whatever democratic prestige it still possessed. He is now more completely dependent on Batista and the military than ever before.

Batista himself might take over the Presidency with ease. But rather than affront local and international opinion with an open military dictatorship, he may prefer to continue to exercise his decisive influence from the background. In any case, military dominance seems destined to continue; and as long as it lasts, talk of elections is but pious futility.

A Sharper Division.

The recent test of power may result in a more clear-cut division between Cuba's right and left forces. On one side, allied with Batista and the army, now stand the island's conservative economic interests and the political parties which symbolize the old régime—Machado's former Liberals, Menocal's Conservatives, Mendieta's Nationalists. On the other are ranged labor and those "revolutionary" groups which seek fundamental reform—the ABC, the auténticos, "Young Cuba."

It remains to be seen to what extent these latter groups can achieve sufficient working unity to oppose the dictatorial tendencies of the military, or to become themselves a constructive force. For the present the prospects for their success are not bright.