

Haya de la Torre: the Peruvian visionary.

Victor Raul Haya de la Torre, the Peruvian philosopher/politician, was perhaps the most brilliant individual never to have achieved the Presidency of Peru. Founder of the political party APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana) and of the corresponding ideological movement, known as Aprismo, Haya was continuously frustrated by the Peruvian military in each of his attempts at being elected. This can almost certainly be attributed to his radical anti-Americanism, anti-capitalism, and his advocacy of a gigantic politically-united Latin American state.

Source: Robert J. Alexander, ed. & trans., *Aprismo: the ideas and doctrines of Victor Raul Haya de la Torre* (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 1977), pp. 97-101, 223-229.

WHAT IS THE A.P.R.A.?

THE STRUGGLE ORGANIZED IN LATIN AMERICA AGAINST YANKEE IMPERIALISM, by means of an international united front of manual and intellectual workers with a program of common action, that is the A.P.R.A., the four initial letters of the following words: Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (Popular Revolutionary American Alliance).

Its Program

The program of international action of the A.P.R.A has five general points which serve as a basis for the national sections: (1) Action of the countries of Latin America against Yankee Imperialism. (2) The political unity of Latin America. (3) The nationalization of land and industry. (4) The Internationalization of the Panama Canal. (5) The solidarity of all the oppressed people and classes of the world.

Its Organization

The A.P.R.A is a young organization formed by the young men of the new generation of manual and intellectual workers of Latin America. It was founded in 1924 and has organized sections in various countries in Latin America and also in Europe, where the number of anti-Imperialist Latin American students is pretty large. The principal sections of the A.P.R.A. are at present working in Mexico, Buenos Aires, Central America, Paris and other places in which for political reasons the action of these sections is not publicly allowed. A Central Executive Committee directs the action of all the sections.

The United Front

The A.P.R.A. organizes the great Latin American Anti Imperialist united front and works to include in its ranks all those who in one way or another have struggled and are still struggling against the North American danger in Latin America. Until 1923 this danger was regarded as a possible struggle of races—the Saxon and the Latin races—as a “conflict of cultures,” or as a question of nationalism. From the “Gonzalez Prada” Popular University of Peru a new conception of the problem has arisen: the economic conception. In 1924 the First Pan

American Anti Imperialist League was formed in Mexico and also the Latin American Union in Buenos Aires. The Anti Imperialist Leagues were the first endeavor of the international united front of workers, peasants and students against Yankee Imperialism. The Latin American Union was founded as the Anti Imperialist Frente Unico of the Intellectuals. As a matter of fact, the Anti Imperialist Leagues have no fixed political program, but only that of resistance to Imperialism, and the Latin American Union has simply intellectual activity. The A.P.R.A. was founded in 1924, with a program of revolutionary and political action, and it invites all the scattered forces to form themselves in a single united front.

The Class Struggle Against Imperialism

The history of the political and economic relations between Latin America and the United States, especially the experience of the Mexican Revolution, lead to the following conclusions:

(1) The governing classes of the Latin American countries—landowners, middle class or merchants—are allies of North American Imperialism.

(2) These classes have the political power in our countries, in exchange for a policy of concessions, of loans, of great operations which they—the capitalists, landowners or merchants and politicians of the Latin American dominant classes—share with Imperialism.

(3) As a result of this alliance the natural resources which form the riches of our countries are mortgaged or sold, and the working and agricultural classes are subjected to the most brutal servitude. Again, this alliance produces political events which result in the loss of national sovereignty; Panama, Nicaragua, Cuba, Santo Domingo, are really protectorates of the United States.

The International Struggle Against Imperialism

As the problem is common to all the Latin American countries, in which the dominant classes are allies of Imperialism in joint exploitation of the working classes, it is not an isolated or national question, but is international among the twenty Latin American republics. But the governing classes encourage divisions among these

republics, assisting the Imperialist plan which fears Latin American unity (covering eight millions of square miles and about ninety millions of inhabitants). The governing classes stir up national feeling and national conflicts, as in the case of Peru against Chile, Brazil against Argentina, Ecuador and Colombia against Peru, etc. Every time that the United States intervenes as an "amicable mediator," they arrange matters purposely so that no definite settlement can be arrived at which might produce a principle of unification. The recent question of Tacna and Arica between Peru and Chile is the clearest demonstration of this policy of Imperialism.

Imperialism Cannot be Overthrown Without the Political Unity of Latin America

The experience of history, especially that of Mexico, shows that the immense power of American Imperialism cannot be overthrown without the unity of the Latin American countries. Against this unity the national dominant classes, middle class, landowners, etc., whose political power is almost always buttressed by the agitation of nationalism or patriotism of countries hostile to their neighbors, are ranged. Consequently the overthrow of the governing classes is indispensable, political power must be captured by the workers, and Latin America must be united in a Federation of States. This is one of the great political objects of the A.P.R.A.

The Nationalization of Land and Industry as the Sole Means of Combating Imperialism

Within the capitalist system, and in accord with the dialectics of its historical process, Latin America would infallibly become a North American colony. The United States holdings of values in the world (*The New York Times*, June 27, 1926) are shown in the following table, exclusive of war debts:

United States holding in Asia.....	\$1,000,000,000
United States holding in Europe.....	2,000,000,000
United States holding in Australia.....	2,500,000,000
United States holding in Latin America...	4,100,000,000

This introduction of capital into Latin America increases almost daily. From June to October, Imperialism has invested over \$50,000,000. The conflict between the United States and Mexico shows us that Mexico has not been able to nationalize the petroleum industry, which today is still dominated by the menace of a North American invasion in defence of the interests of the Standard Oil Co. (North American capital in Mexican petroleum \$614, 487,263). The "Enmienda Platt" of the Cuban Constitution and the cases of Santo Domingo, Panama, Nicaragua, Honduras and Hayti prove to us that national authority is lost in proportion as investments by Imperialism are accepted. The nationalization of land and

industry under the direction of the producing classes is the sole means of maintaining the country's power, and is the correct policy for the countries of Latin America.

Latin American Political Unity Pre Supposes the Internationalization of the Panama Canal

The Panama Canal in the power of the United States Government is one danger more to the sovereignty of Latin America. The program of the A.P.R.A. frankly proclaims the "internationalization of Panama." Dr. Albert Ulloa, Professor of International Law in the University of San Marcos, Lima, Peru, writes in support of his thesis: "The Panama Canal must be internationalized...It is not possible to allow the United States the exercise of supreme rule in Panama." (Open letter to the President of the Federation of Students of Panama, June 1926).

Conclusion

The A.P.R.A. represents, therefore, a political organization struggling against Imperialism and against the national governing classes which are its auxiliaries and its allies in Latin America. The A.P.R.A. is a united front of the toiling masses (workers, peasants, natives of the soil) united with students, intellectuals, revolutionaries, etc. The A.P.R.A. is an autonomous movement, completely Latin American, without foreign intervention or influences. It is the result of a spontaneous movement in defence of our countries in view of the experiences of Mexico, Central America, Panama, and the Antilles, and the present position of Peru, Bolivia, and Venezuela, where the policy of "penetration" by Imperialism is already keenly felt. For this our watchword is to be the following: "Against Yankee Imperialism, for the unity of the peoples of Latin America, for the realization of social justice."

IS LATIN AMERICA READY FOR DEMOCRACY?

What we frequently hear and read in discussions of the political problems of our America in the United States is: "You Latino or Indoamericans are not yet ready for Democracy." They prove or attempt to prove their claim by saying: "in the countries of Latin America the people frequently support long dictatorships, scandalous electoral frauds, vile oppression. If such things would occur for a single week in the United States, the people would rise in a new civil war."

This is said and written even today. When one comments, with a discussion group or in a public assembly, on the case of our dictatorships, the drama of our usurpations, the dolorous paradox of criollo rulers who adhere orally to democratic ideals while denying and mocking them in practice, one then hears or feels the objection present in the eyes or murmurs of the audience: "Still backward people, not prepared for democracy, a

function of cultured people, if it is possible to impose on them a dictatorship, they deserve it!"

Then there is the problem of explaining and knowing how to explain. I remember that in England this theme was discussed extensively in the Bryce Club in Oxford. Each time that the theme of Latin or Indoamerican history became the subject of debate, one had to be ready to hear from the student who was astonished by the willingness of our peoples to bend their heads to such despots: "Here," he says, "our Democracy has been won through struggle. When a king pushed his nose into Parliament, he lost his head. The Revolution in England would start today or tomorrow if an absolute monarch or autocratic dictator were to appear."

If one suggested that in Russia, Germany, or Italy it had also been possible to have dictatorships, the reply came immediately "Three nations of monarchical and aristocratic tradition. Their dictatorships are rooted in a collective ambition for control of the world Communists or Nazi-fascists have risked their citizens' liberty to gain the dreamed-for universal power. There, dictatorship has a historical explanation. But in the underpopulated and new Latin American republics that gained their sovereignty under the democratic banner how can one explain despotism except as cultural and political inferiority?"

These arguments are revived now that the problems of a democratic peace are being discussed with progressive vehemence in the United States and even in England. When democracy is discussed in our America, smiles and these well-known objections flourish. Here and there one reads in newspapers and magazines notes and opinions about our incapacity for the authentic and complete exercise of democracy. Duncan Aikman, the celebrated author of *The All American Front*, alludes to our taste for dictators and frauds in a penetrating article in *The Atlantic Monthly* of October. Mr. Laurence Martin, professor of the University of Chicago, writes in *Harpers*, of September that nothing justifies the hope of a democracy in the grand style—the North American type—in the four little Central American republics of Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala, whose peoples, culturally backward, undernourished, and individualistic, are spiritually and materially semi-colonial. And he forgets that Costa Rica, their Central American neighbor, while very small, poor, and a fifth sister of the other four, is a model of democracy and a miracle of culture!

Because of this case, and those of Mexico and Colombia, another argument is frequently made in the United States concerning the curious relationship said to exist between the exploitable riches of our countries and the prevalence of dictatorships. It is claimed that where there is much to extract from the soil and subsoil, the large entrepreneur needs a strong government. Economic colonialism works against democracy.

Thus, the Mexican insurrection is a double movement: for the democratic organization of the state and for

the economic emancipation of the country. Colombia, after Panama, put aside its rebelliousness and its impotence and affirmed a solid freedom, as vigorous or more so, than that of the United States. Costa Rica, less rich than its sisters of Central America, and without Nicaragua's problem of the canal,* lives more for its people and for its culture by selling it bananas and its coffee without mortgaging itself. These cases, like the recent ones of Chile and Uruguay, disprove the popularized conclusion that the peoples of our America are spiritually and politically incapable of exercising democracy.

If we were to go a bit deeper into this difficult subject—particularly into this matter of the democratic paradoxes of our oligarchic regimes—we might come to some stimulating conclusions. The first of these would perhaps place primary importance on the system of economic relations between the great industrial democracies and our countries. And we might come to attempt a brief and relative statement of the relationship between the great foreign financial enterprises and the criollo anti-democratic oligarchies. Theodore Roosevelt in his presidential message of 1905, said in reference to the Monroe Doctrine: "It is always possible that mistaken actions towards this country or towards its citizens in some state unable to maintain order among its own inhabitants, incapable of assuring justice on the part of other peoples and with lack of will to do justice to its respectable neighbors, obliges us to go into action to protect our rights..." From this we might deduce that a solid Latin or Indoamerican Democracy depends in large part on a new system of economic relations between the large capitalist countries and our own. This is because the business of supporting oligarchies, dictatorships, and frauds to earn money ends in being a bad deal.

For an improvement in the North American public image of the political reality of Indoamerica, the journey of Vice President Wallace,[†] has been an efficacious step. No declaration has been more interesting for us, because of its repercussion on the popular masses of the United States, than that of the Vice President mentioning that democracy in Chile is an effective, vital, and working reality.

When Mr. Wallace says that he "has seen democracy functioning in Chile," he helps to destroy a very generalized idea in the northern country about our psychological incapacity to live and act within a regime of liberty. This is important in getting our neighbors to respect us, since there is nothing more degrading in their eyes than a people or a man incapable of carrying out

*Haya refers here to frequent suggestions that a second canal between the Caribbean Sea and Pacific Ocean be built through Nicaragua. For many decades this possibility was a disturbing factor in internal Nicaraguan politics and an excuse for U.S. intervention in the little nation's affairs.

†Vice President Henry Wallace visited several South American countries on a goodwill tour in 1941.

against despotism what Locke calls "the right of resistance," one of the essential principles of the United States' concept of republicanism. This is because every North American who has read the Declaration of Independence knows that the democratic purpose of his country is to assure their inalienable rights to "Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness"; that for this are organized governments emanating from the consent of the governed, and that "whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of those ends, it is the right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness."

For that reason, most North American citizens don't understand the existence of a despotism which doesn't have the tolerance of the oppressed. Alien to our feudal background and the ferocity of our autocracies, they consider that when these exist they are the result of the public will, or are a malediction merited by the moral inferiority of the people. Such opinions about our incapacity for democracy are common in the United States. Since there are not many cases demonstrating the contrary, since it is our despots and their claque who defend the fallacious necessity for a "strong man," and as the great merchants and investors of the imperialisms earn more under the protection of tyrannies than with alert democracies in Indoamerica, it is very difficult to convince the man in the street in the United States that we are not a race of slaves.

But the opinion of Vice President Wallace is of great importance in favor of our thesis. He has seen in Chile a magnificent democratic coordination and has justly eulogized it. He has not forgotten the "leaders" of the old country, of the conservative Chile of a century of good government, since they cannot be forgotten particularly by a man of the left....Perhaps it is time to say in merited homage to Chilean democracy that it owes its exemplary process to the historical gift of a responsible conservatism—the most responsible of the continent—capable of making of Chile what Wallace has said: an asylum against oppression for the great exiles of the past and a tribune for all ideas. Also, for what the Vice President didn't come to say: an exemplary school for rightists who know how to lose, even in recent times, as in 1920, 1938, 1942.

This is democracy, even though those who live it

and enjoy it at close hand see its defects, which is always the way to see it. Government and legislative opposition—and in Indoamerica, the feudal-colonial heir of so many miserable oligarchies—tolerance and respect for new ideas, without being fearful of them, this is Democracy! Chile has achieved it, in spite of having been so often called militarist and Prussian, and until recently, a refuge of Nazis. Its case is an example for us, and for the North Americans, incredulous of our capacity for democracy, a fact.

It is important, very important, for us that the great electoral masses of North America come to understand that the peoples of Indoamerica really are ready for democracy. And that the despotisms which still humiliate us are as ominous for us as the Nazi-Fascist-Falangisms are for the European peoples. And it is important, very important, that the North American voter know that we hate despotism, even though we are sometimes impotent against it. Thus, votes in favor of the imperialist political groups of that country seeking fruitful alliances with our tyrants, crowding around and eulogizing them, will cease. This is important because we must not forget that in the elections of last November there entered the House of Representatives of Washington a goodly number of supporters of the isolationist and imperialist thesis.

For that reason, we are extraordinarily interested in the North American voter, that is to say, the people of the United States. If they know nothing of us and having no other sources of information than that provided by criollo despots and their Goebbels-like "intellectuals," or the capitalist investment firms allied to the tyrannies, or that of the reactionaries and imperialists of their own country, then they will think that we still need tutelage and controls....But if the authoritative voice of Vice President Wallace is joined to that of the good neighbors, those North American supporters of our capacity for democracy, the desired day may come when the people of the United States comprehend that it is necessary to struggle against the despotisms south of the Rio Bravo as against those on the other side of the Atlantic.

To this we must be inclined, not only for the strengthening and support from outside of the position of the anti-imperialists within the United States—such as the Vice President—but also to make vigorous our democratic and anti-imperialist conscience, such as that possessed by Mr. Wallace.

Questions

- (1) What motives does Haya ascribe to the United States vis-a-vis Latin America? What does he see as examples of U.S. manipulation?
- (2) What are APRA's basic principles of policy?
- (3) How does he argue against critics who assert that Latin America and democracy were not yet compatible?