

II. BROAD TRENDS IN LATIN AMERICAN POLITICS, 1943-59

The overwhelming political development in Latin America since World War II has been the attainment of political power by the people. In most of the countries in the area, the old rural oligarchy and their allies in the church and army hierarchy were replaced, at least for a time, by rising labor, industrial, and middle-class urban groups generally backed by young army officers.

The war itself produced pressures that made the maintenance of the status quo progressively more difficult. The outbreak of hostilities in Europe seriously disturbed Latin America's economy. The immediate shock, due to the transportation squeeze, was shortage, particularly of manufactured goods, but also of foodstuffs. The sudden interruption of imports from the United States and from Europe gave a great new impetus to industrialization. This trend was stimulated by financial assistance from the United States. Despite wartime shortages of labor and equipment, Latin America's industrial establishment grew by leaps and bounds. New installations included steel mills, textile mills, paper mills, chemical factories, food-processing plants, highways, shipyards, and airfields.

Wartime prosperity, however, was not broadly based. Despite inflation, governments froze wages, prohibited strikes, and even outlawed labor movements in some countries. The hardships suffered by the middle and lower income groups increased social stresses and strains. As economic development and social change intensified under the World War II stimulus, the pressures upon the anachronistic political system became unbearable. It was merely a matter of time before the populace would break through the oligarchy's political dikes and bring in a flood of social and economic change.

Civilian foes of the status quo were joined by military ones, mostly young officers restless under a static armed forces organization that offered little opportunity for change and advancement. From 1943 on, an assortment of disgruntled, patriotic, and ambitious colonels and majors began joining aspiring popular groups. The upshot of these alliances was evidenced by revolutions which were far more fundamental than the palace-type revolts which had occurred in the past.

The first such successful challenges to the old order were the Argentine and Bolivian revolutions of 1943. The following year similar popular young officer political upheavals toppled traditionalist regimes in Ecuador and Guatemala, and Batista was obliged to surrender his grip upon Cuba when his handpicked candidate lost the 1944 elections. During 1945, the contagion of revolution spread to Venezuela, as popular forces and young army officers ousted the traditionalist forces. That same year, the Vargas dictatorship was brought to an end in Brazil, and in Peru, the popular Aprista Party helped elect a middle-of-the-road President, and, for the first time, won