MEXICO, THE END OF AN INDEPENDENCE

By PAUL MAX WEBER

Mexico, once the proudest country of the New World, whose borders reached to Oregon and included the whole Southwest of the United States, whose name once stood for wealth, power, adventure, and honor—Mexico has, in the last few years, practically become a province of the United States. Dr. Weber, formerly the representative of the “Eidgenössische” news agency in Mexico City and now in Saigon, tells us in the following pages how this has come about. And, taking Mexico as an example, he gives us an interesting and detailed insight into the workings of American imperialism in general.—K.M.

THE southward urge of the United States of America is almost as old as the history of the United States themselves. The purchase of Louisiana from the French in 1803 and the annexation of the Spanish colonial possessions north of the Rio Grande were the first indications of this tendency. With the acquisition of the Panama Canal Zone, the United States had additional strategic reasons for gaining influence in Central America. It has long been a dream of the United States to ensure an overland connection with the Panama Canal.

Originally, the idea was probably only to create this connection by railways and highways through the territory of friendly or dependent states. During the last few years, however, and as a result of the tension in the Pacific, the protection of the west coast of Central America has also been envisaged. Bases were desired just as much between the fortifications of the Panama Canal and the southernmost US naval and air base of San Diego in California as they were on the Antilles, which lie to the east of the Canal, and to the south on the Gallapagos Islands. Such naval and air bases on Mexican territory have been planned above all in the Magdalena Bay in Lower California and in Acapulco. In addition to these two, a number of islands off the west coast of Mexico have also been considered with a view to establishing naval outposts on them.

ECONOMIC INTERESTS

The interest taken by the United States in Mexico is not only of a strategic but also of an economic nature. Mexico’s wealth in minerals, especially in oil, has always attracted foreign interests and foreign capital. The extent of these interests is revealed by the fact that, before the expropriation of foreign oil properties, foreigners held roughly two thirds of the Mexican national wealth. Among Mexico’s mines, about sixty per cent belong to citizens of the United States, twenty per cent to British and some eight to ten per cent to French interests, while only about four per cent belong to the former and present masters of the country, i.e., Spaniards and Mexicans.

Before March 18, 1938, almost all Mexican oil wells and refineries were in foreign hands. About seventy-five per cent were in British/Dutch hands, represented by the Royal Dutch Shell, and the rest in the hands of USA firms, mainly controlled by Standard Oil and Sinclair. The oil expropriations of 1938 resulted in England losing her greatest financial interests; and everything seems to indicate that, in the new participation of foreigners in the exploitation of Mexican oil reserves, the influence is being
revised in favor of the Americans and at the expense of the British. And even in 1941 there were already rumors that the other large interests of Britain in Mexico in the form of railways, mines, and power companies were to be liquidated in order to enable Great Britain to pay for the war aid granted her by the USA. These rumors have recently been confirmed by press reports from Buenos Aires. So even in Mexico the United States is heir to the British Empire.

TROPICAL SUPPLY BASE

In addition to all this, Mexico, like all the regions around the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea, is a natural subtropical and tropical supplementary area for the economics of North America. In Central America, the American Grossraum economy is provided with all the possibilities of those climatic zones for cultivating agricultural and forestry products which are lacking in the USA proper. Moreover, these possibilities are available in a geographical position which is the most favorable from the point of view of transport and which can most easily be protected from attack.

In this connection, we should like to mention the cultivation of quinine trees in southern Mexico which was begun by American initiative; the buying up of raw rubber supplied by the guayule plant in the Central American states; and the importance of henequén, which is being produced in Yucatán, in southeastern Mexico, as a substitute for Manila hemp. This development was not set in motion only by the Greater East Asia War, as is shown by the fact that even at the beginning of 1941 American government experts were occupied in those regions with extending the cultivation of rubber trees and with laying out quinine plantations.

The shortage of shipping which began to be felt in the Allied camp in 1941 has also increased Mexico's importance, since she is connected with her northern neighbor by good roads and railway lines and can also be reached by coastal shipping, in contrast to other, more distant supply areas of the USA. As an example, we need only mention the fact that the USA has had no trouble in taking delivery of her entire Mexican coffee quota, whereas in Brazil she has met with difficulties on account of the lack of transportation facilities.

Even in normal times, the share of the United States in Mexico's foreign trade was more than sixty per cent. The fact that Mexico has been one of the few countries able to increase their foreign trade since the outbreak of the war in Europe, and that the share of the United States in this trade has risen to over ninety per cent, emphasizes the close economic interdependence between Mexico and the United States.
There are several reasons for the fact that the USA's efforts at expansion in Mexico have only been crowned by success now after a century of being pursued. First of all, with almost twenty million inhabitants Mexico has, after Brazil, the largest population of all Latin American states. Secondly, she represents a territory that is entirely different from the United States in racial and cultural respects. And finally, Mexico's size made her military occupation and domination a difficult problem until the most recent developments in modern war technique. Moreover, after the proclamation of the "Good Neighbor Policy," a military invasion of Mexico by US forces might have led to undesirable reactions on the part of other Latin American countries.

The "peaceful penetration" which the USA has pursued during the last few years in Mexico was effected through private as well as official enterprise. The acquisition of influence in the private sphere was carried out mainly by economic interests. This development was furthered by the close relations existing between Mexico and the USA in the field of foreign trade. But the large interests of the USA in Mexican mining, oil companies, automobile and electrical industry (broadcasting stations!), breweries, cotton export, banana plantations, and film production also opened up opportunities for political influence. The ground gained by the Associated Press and the United Press in the press of Mexico influenced the forming of public opinion in favor of Washington. In the field of radio and movies, the USA predominated (since 1941 almost every other American picture shown in Mexico contained anti-German propaganda). Instead of the beautiful old Mexican songs, more and more American jazz hits were sung even in the smallest Mexican towns, and Mexican composers took over the rhythms and arrangements of Tin Pan Alley. Women's fashions were determined by American taste.

More decisive than this unofficial gaining of influence was the subjection of the Mexican Government being brought about by diplomatic means. The active Pan-American policy of the United States, which is personified by Sumner Welles, has indeed systematically and persistently made use of every promising opportunity and method in its penetration of Mexico. Not only the old, popular inducement of large loans, but even severe, disagreeable pressure was employed here. The military superiority of the USA in numbers and equipment over Mexico is so obvious that we need not bother to give detailed figures on Mexico's army, navy, and air force. We only mention here that in 1941 Mexico had a normal effective figure of about fifty military planes, of which there were never more than seven or eight ten-year-old machines ready for action. The decisive point is that the advantage of difficult terrain which Mexico still possessed in 1914 for a possible guerrilla war has meanwhile disappeared as a result of the development of modern weapons, especially planes, thus making the fast and safe occupation of all important ports, railways, highways, and airfields a comparatively simple matter for the United States. The increasing attention paid to the development of strategically important roads in the USA along the Mexican border was enough to serve as an unmistakable warning to Mexican statesmen.

Another means of pressure in the hands of the USA against Mexico, the importance of which is not generally known, is the USA's silver-purchase policy. The continuance of these silver purchases is the only guarantee for the existence of the major part of the Mexican mining industry. The cessation of the USA silver purchases would affect not only the large silver mines, which are mostly in American hands, but almost the entire remaining Mexican mining industry; for most of the silver sent to the United States is produced in mines where it
Down Mexico Way

Mexico and cacti are almost synonymous. Here are the *papalotes*, a kind of prickly pear, whose "leaves" are eaten

The little town of Amecameca at the foot of the two volcanoes Popocatepetl and Ixtacihuatl
Mount Ixtaciuhtle (17,343 feet)—the "Sleeping Virgin"—southeast of Mexico City. Such veils of mist can often be observed over its ridge.

A vista of Lake Chapala, near Guadalajara.
appears as a by-product with other metals and where it is usually the most important factor for ensuring the profitability of the mine. The value of the production of the Mexican mining and smelting industry is equivalent to the value of the entire Mexican agricultural production. The collapse of this industry would, therefore, mean a catastrophe of unimaginable extent to Mexico. Thus it is not surprising that even a tiny reduction of the price paid to Mexico for her silver automatically entailed changes of political attitude south of the Rio Grande and that increases of a few cents had to be bought by important concessions in other fields on the part of Mexico.

... AND SILVER BULLETS

The Mexican President Obregon once said that there was no Mexican general who could withstand a bombardment of 100,000 pesos. In the case of businesslike politicians, a much weaker bombardment is usually sufficient. When a Mexican politician of humble origin is suddenly seen driving around in an expensive American limousine, no one is surprised in Mexico. On the contrary, the more he spends on himself, his numerous relatives and, last but not least, his girl friends, the more respect do people have for him. A motorcar dealer trying to make a sale once emphasized that a member of the newly formed government had already ordered twelve 120-horsepower limousines and was negotiating for the purchase of another six cars. To the amazed question as to what a man would want with so many cars, he replied, almost with pity for so much naiveté: "Pues, Señor, tiene muchas señoritas!"

It can be imagined that the USA did not fail to make use of such wonderful opportunities for "dollar diplomacy." She has made extravagant efforts at securing grateful and firm friends. Indeed, it is characteristic of the recent policy toward Mexico that the USA has not been satisfied with solitary concessions but has been endeavoring to safeguard these achievements for many years to come by establishing good personal relations with Mexican politicians and by seeing to it that the key positions in Mexican politics and administration were occupied by men with pro-USA feelings. Thus, for instance, a man whom the Americans had made mayor of Vera Cruz when they had occupied this town in 1914/15 now obtained the key position of Director General in the Ministry of the Interior, which is in charge of all immigration, nationalization, and police affairs.

The Mexicans themselves usually ironically call their present Foreign Minister the "Ambassador of the United States in Mexico." In every department, servants of the USA were pushed into the administration; and, with all her problems of safeguarding the strategically important raw materials, industries, and air and naval bases in Mexico, the United States did not forget to secure the necessary influence on the human element in that country.

MEXICAN ELECTION

However, it was only by skillfully exploiting the domestic political situation in Mexico that the American Government was able to bring about the decisive change, a change that made a vassal of the rank of Cuba and Panama of a country which, at the very least, was not especially friendly towards the USA and as late as in the 1940 oil conflict had acted with considerable independence.

In July 1940 the Mexican President had to be elected for a period of six years. General Manuel Avila Camacho, the candidate supported by the Cardenas Government then in power, was faced by an opposition which penetrated all parts of the country and all classes of the population and which set up as its candidate General Andrés Almazán. Now a majority of votes for Almazán would hardly have caused the Government party much anxiety, in view of the possibility of correcting election results, a customary procedure in Mexico.

However, Almazán had paid several visits to the USA before the elections.
He had always stressed his friendship for the neighbor in the north and had apparently actually succeeded in coming into contact with influential quarters in the United States. Since in a civil war in Mexico it had always been the side recognized, i.e., financed and supplied, by the USA which had won, Almazán's activities gave rise to serious misgivings on the part of the Government group. Although General Atila Camacho would have had the support of military circles in the case of a revolution, a presidential candidate who had the entire people behind him would certainly have had chances of success if supported by Washington.

This predicament of the Mexican Government was exploited to the utmost by Washington. Both parties were skillfully played off against each other. The USA was, after all, only concerned with obtaining the greatest possible influence in Mexico by the smoothest possible means. If this could be achieved without revolution through the yielding of the Cardenas-Camacho group, this was all the better, in view of the possible disruptions of communications and stoppages in production which civil war would entail. Any other interest in either of the two parties or in the result of the election was absolutely nonexistent in the USA.

THE COUPL

In the last few months prior to the election, the uncertainty and anxiety in the camp of General Camacho grew perceptibly. Only worried faces were to be seen and pessimistic utterances to be heard, while at the same time the confidence of the opposition camp grew from day to day. Then, almost at the eleventh hour, that is to say, exactly two weeks before the elections, came the sudden change. Atila Camacho's group gave in and switched over to the USA side. It was not until during 1941 that the extent of the agreements made at that time became properly known. For the agreements made were put in force in some cases with a delay of one year, and the lapsus occurred that one of the publica-

tions of the Mexican official gazette spoke of the agreements of June 23, 1940. As far as could be ascertained, the negotiations for these agreements were held in Cuernavaca, a week-end resort some fifty miles from the capital. In order to keep away all undesirable visitors, a notice was launched in the press to the effect that an epidemic of infantile paralysis had broken out there, with the result that all the guests had fled the place.

In those days of June 1940, the result of the presidential election, which did not take place till July 7, was already decided. The fact that, according to estimated calculations, approximately eighty per cent of the voters in the capital supported the opposing candidate Almazán, was of no consequence. According to the Mexican voting regulations, that party which first appears at the voting place is given the chairmanship and the right to check the votes handed in. After most of the voting places had been occupied by Almazánists, shooting and rioting broke out toward noon. Armed Camachists stormed the voting stations pistol in hand and then—the police intervened to restore peace and order. It safeguarded all voting places with armed detachments and saw to it that the Camachists were able to carry off the voting urns without interference.

For weeks afterwards, a revolution was expected to be started by General Almazán, who had meanwhile left Mexico on a train used by American diplomats and for that reason hard to dynamite. It was months before the last of his followers acknowledged that their money invested in the Almazán election funds was finally gone, and before their enthusiasm for this politician gradually turned into the very opposite, to give way in the end to the usual political hopelessness and passivity.

THE PRICE

In December 1940 the new President of Mexico, General Manuel Atila Camacho, took office. About four months later it began to become apparent at what cost he had bought it. The first thing that
happened was that Mexico handed over her air sovereignty to the United States. American war planes were given the right to fly over or into Mexican territory at any time and without previous notification or permission. In return for this, the Mexican air force, with its seven planes ready for action, was given the same right for the territory of the United States. Of course, the Mexican airfields had to be improved in order to permit the "Flying Fortresses" to land. In Tampico, for instance, an airfield was built that was larger than was needed by any Mexican plane. For improving airfields, money is necessary. The money was provided by the USA. Out of international considerations, this money was given by Pan-American Airways, which company, incidentally, had bought up all private Mexican air lines and in this way ensured itself control over all airfields used by them.

Then Mexico placed her ports and naval bases at the disposal of the US Navy and, as a matter of course, received the same rights in the ports of the USA for her own navy. It has not yet been ascertained whether the somewhat obsolete Mexican gunboats and coastguard vessels are even capable of undertaking such extended voyages. The harbors used by the US Navy were to remain under Mexican sovereignty. Since Mexico lacked the money for improving these bases, a solution was found by which the USA expenditure for construction work and investments was designated as rent to be paid to Mexico for the terrain required.

For the defense of the Western Hemisphere, Mexico needs a strong army and an even better air force. The USA was prepared to give Mexico some artillery that was no longer quite suitable for the equipment of the US Army but which was nevertheless newer than the French 75's delivered to Mexico before the Great War, as well as a few planes, etc. In order to pay for this material, Mexico needed in turn a credit from the Export and Import Bank in Washington.

Of course, the United States was also interested in developing the Mexican network of roads, in order to safeguard land communications with Panama. The increase in road-building activities in the border districts south of the Rio Grande had long been noticeable, and American experts had long ago examined the condition of the Mexican roads and furthered their improvement. So Mexico was given a road-building loan from the Export and Import Bank. The Mexican peso was to be linked to the dollar. So Mexico was given a currency-stabilization loan and in return handed over her financial sovereignty to Washington.

THE OIL COMPROMISE

Finally, even the adjustment of the oil conflict, the most serious obstacle in the way of Mexican-American understanding, was taken in hand. A commission of experts was to fix the compensation to be paid to the American oil companies for the expropriation of their possessions in Mexico. This country had always emphasized her readiness to compensate the former owners; but she had also always been prepared to pay only for the actual investments and the plants erected by the foreigners. On the other hand, the oil companies had demanded compensation for the values still latent in the ground, which practically amounted to payment for the entire Mexican oil reserves.

In the end, the Mexican Supreme Court reversed its former decision on the value to be compensated, which had corresponded to the official Mexican point of view, and made a new decision in favor of the oil companies. It was obvious that such immense compensations could never be realized, in view of the vast extent of the Mexican oil reserves and the chronic financial distress of the Mexican Government. So a compromise had to be reached. This was done by Mexico being given the majority in the capital of a new American-Mexican oil monopoly, while the oil companies obtained the stronger influence in management and administration. Thus, by this ingenious separation and distribution of the majorities, the foreigners have gained
effective control over the entire Mexican oil industry. Since the new members of the board of administration, the technical and business managers, and with them probably the whole managing personnel, of the Mexican oil monopoly are almost certainly supplied by the USA, this country has also gained a decisive influence at the cost of the British, who formerly controlled about seventy-five per cent of the Mexican oil wells.

GROWING MILITARY AND POLITICAL COLLABORATION

Co-operation in the military field grew closer and closer. Military missions traveled through both countries. American officers—at first in civilian clothes—studied conditions in Mexico and “advised” the Mexicans in every respect. Mexican officers were invited to the USA and always returned filled with enthusiasm. Mexico, for instance, introduced US standards in the field-telephone system of the Mexican Army. This, in turn, naturally meant that new equipment could henceforth be bought only in the USA.

At the outbreak of the war in Europe, Mexico had had no diplomatic relations with neither Great Britain nor the Soviet Union. Relations with Great Britain had been severed by Mexico in 1938, as a reply to the sharply worded British note—regarded in Mexico as an insult—following upon the expropriation of the British oil companies in Mexico. There had never been diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union. Now, relations with Great Britain were resumed; and, after a Soviet Russian military commission had been allowed to study the defense system of Mexico, the latter country soon established diplomatic relations even with the USSR.

MEXICO DECLARES WAR

The crowning achievement of the years of persevering labor on the part of the United States to force the country, state, and people of Mexico into her bondage was Mexico’s declaration of war on the Axis powers in June 1942. An Italian tanker, which Mexico had confiscated while she was still maintaining diplomatic relations with Italy and which, now under the Mexican flag, was en route for a country at war with the Axis with a cargo of oil, i.e., contraband, was sunk. Although it had not yet been established whether the ship had been sunk by an Axis submarine and contrary to international law, this incident was used to encourage and justify Mexico’s entry into the war.

After some tumultuous demonstrations, led by the Labor leader Lombardo Toledano, had shouted for Mexico’s war declaration, the Mexican Government “was forced by public opinion” to declare war on the Axis powers. The parliamentary committee in session during the holidays unanimously accepted the proposed act. Another act passed at the same time gave the Government the far-reaching powers usual in war time, suspended the constitutional rights of the individual citizen, and created the basis for the expropriation of all Axis nationals in Mexico, a procedure which was doubtless very important to many of the war enthusiasts in Mexico.

Now the general staffs could co-operate officially. A “common” convoy service was introduced, and American instructors began to train the Mexican Army. Mexico supplied not only soldiers but also laborers to increase the war-economic potential of the USA. Soon the first effects of the war declaration began to show. The Mexican ports were deserted. Hence the railways had to bear an increased load in order to replace shipping in the movement of freight. For reasons of communication and strategy, the USA urged the renovation of the Mexican railways and the removal of the mismanagement from which they had been suffering for decades. Consequently, by the end of 1942 the administration and restoration of the Mexican railway system were placed entirely in the hands of the USA.

SOME FRICITION

While all Washington’s other desires had been fulfilled with comparatively
little friction, there was one question which led once more to serious difficulties between Mexico and the United States. After war had broken out, the USA conscripted all able-bodied Mexican subjects residing within her borders. The number of these is estimated at about two million. Public opinion in Mexico raised its voice in vehement protest against this step. For the last time, Mexico's national pride was roused.

However, Mexico's sole remaining autonomous solution of the problem, in view of the unyielding attitude of the USA, namely, to repatriate her citizens, foundered on the cost of about a hundred million pesos, which was more than Mexico could bear, since this amount represents almost a sixth of her annual fiscal income. The result was that the Mexican Foreign Minister Padilla, Washington's mouthpiece in the Mexican Government, announced that there was nothing to be done but legally sanction the service of Mexican citizens in the US Army, i.e., under a foreign flag. In the end it was even said that Mexico was too poor to equip her own army. Hence even Mexicans residing in Mexico were invited to join the US Army. If any further proof had been required to show that Mexico had lost her independence, this should have been sufficient.

THE END OF AN INDEPENDENCE

Even clear-sighted Mexican politicians, who were fully aware of the weak position of their own country in relation to its great neighbor in the north, had hoped as late as the summer of 1941 that a certain amount of effective sovereignty could be saved for Mexico. They said: "To be sure, we must give way to Washington's pressure in many details, but we want to do this 'with dignity' and remain the masters in our own country." What, we wonder, do Mexicans think today of their role? We can only hope that Mexico's fate will give food for thought to other nations which are falling under the shadow of the United States.

As a factor in world politics, Mexico today is dead. The longer the war lasts, the more effectively will American propaganda destroy her national will to resist, and the more thoroughly will Americanism be able to take possession of the Mexican spirit. If the present preponderance of the USA remains after the war, even the resumption of relations between Mexico and the Axis powers will not be able to alter Mexico's powerlessness in the least.

Only if the USA should one day break under the blows of foreign enemies, or become politically impotent as the result of long-drawn-out domestic conflicts, might Mexico's hour perhaps come once more. Even in Mexico, which is now at war with the Axis powers, there are many people who desire nothing more ardently than an early and complete victory for the Axis. Is not its cause that of Mexico? Is not its struggle Mexico's struggle too? And will not the Axis victory also be the decision over Mexico's future?