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THE MEXICAN SITUATION: MANUEL GAMIO'S PROGRAM

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Commissions in plenty are studying the question, "What is the matter with Mexico?" Most of them are narrow in view and find a single cause to be the trouble, usually within the range of their own special field. Economic commissions, educational commissions, business commissions, all are studying Mexico and telling us just what she needs. A recent investigation by an educational commission has found of course that education has always been in a bad way in Mexico and that what is most needed is schools. Little red schoolhouses, with a Robert College under American direction thrown in, will solve all problems. That education in its proper time is desirable no one will question; that it is Mexico's most urgent need is not so evident. Of what advantage is it to teach boys and girls to read if no reading-matter is available? Of what use is it to know how to write unless there is some real need for writing? Mexicans may be illiterate; they are not unintelligent, nor are they, within the range of the requirements of daily life, uninformed.

Alberto Pani finds Mexico's chief need in sanitation and hygiene. His study, largely academic, was made at order of the

Mexican government. He believes that the Mexican most needs cleanliness, food, and decent housing. To some degree he is right. Schools may well wait until the cravings of hunger, chronic and lifelong to millions of Mexicans, are appeased. But Señor Pani is only partly right. The Mexican needs no direct control in the matters of cleanliness, food preparation, and building. The Indians of Mexico are usually clean; one may fare sumptuously today in an Aztec town; there are many houses in Indian villages which could not be surpassed in comfort and healthfulness. Filth, hunger, and bad housing exist in Mexico, especially in the great city (which was Pani's chief study), but the introduction of Italian "model houses" is not going to solve Mexico's problems.

Foreigners generally, especially business men, insist that Mexico's salvation must come through "development," with foreign capital, under foreign direction, "because the Mexican is incapable of working unguided." The trouble with the solution is that "development" is always primarily for the benefit of the outsider. When it has been carried through, Mexico has been but indirectly advantaged. Take the railroad development under the Diaz régime. Railroads were not built to strengthen and unite the country; they were built simply to give ingress and egress to Americans and Englishmen, to give entrance to their goods and exit to raw materials. What real advantage was it to Mexico that the city of Tampico should grow, when the only railroads from that port led to El Paso and Eagle Pass and Laredo and not to the city of Mexico? Instead of uniting the capital city with every part of the country, as real railroads should, these connected absolutely separated and disunited producing areas with the cities of the United States. In case of war with us the railroads of Mexico would be of little service for the transportation of Mexican troops, but they would enable the United States to flood the central plateau, the west coast, and the gulf seaboard with forces. In other words, the much-vaunted railroad development of Mexico was more advantageous for Americans than for Mexicans. So, too, the great petroleum fields

of Tamaulipas and Vera Cruz are of little real benefit to Mexico. They increase the business of Tampico; they furnish labor to a certain number of hands; they produce a valuable material for world-use; they make fortunes for a few American and English speculators; but they contribute little to Mexico's upbuilding; they lead to political corruption, to local unrest and disturbance, to meddling and interference, to constant threat of intervention.

No one who knows Mexico will claim that her troubles are due to any single cause. Her problems are highly complex. Their solution must come from Mexicans. Improvement must come from within, not from without. Neither as individuals, or commissions, or government can *we* settle Mexican troubles. Fortunately there are many Mexicans who are seriously seeking for the root of evils and trying to devise remedies. Among them is Manuel Gamio, who has recently published a most suggestive book and, as an official in the Carranza government, issued a remarkable *programa*. Señor Gamio is director of the newly organized *Dirección de Estudios arqueológicos y etnográficos*, a division of the *Departamento de Fomento*. We believe that he has found the gravest and most fundamental cause of Mexico's ills—the one which comes nearest to being the *single* cause. His book is named *Forjando Patria*; it deals with the forging of a nation out of the iron of the Spaniard and the bronze of the Indian—the two metals involved in the Mexican population. Gamio's fundamental proposition is that the Indian can no longer be ignored. He forms more than half the population. There will be no solution until he is given his proper place. This idea underlies every chapter of the book, which deals with a wide range of topics. The book is remarkable and on the whole sound. Few Mexicans so clearly recognize the real difficulty; fewer would state it; still fewer would dare to publish it with the force and earnestness of our author. If there is to be progress in Mexico, this principle must be admitted and made the very basis of action. As *Forjando Patria* is little likely to be known here, we make liberal quotations from it, adding brief comment only.

The fundamental question is: Can countries, in which the two great elements which compose the population differ fundamentally in all respects and are mutually ignorant of each other, be considered as nations? [p. 10].

Can eight or ten million individuals of indigenous race, speech, and culture hold the same ideals and aspirations, tend toward the same ends, render reverence to the same fatherland, cherish similar national manifestations, as the six or four millions of beings of European origin who dwell in the same territory but speak a different language, belong to another race, and live and think in accordance with a culture which differs profoundly from theirs, from whatever point of view? [p. 13].

The most liberal and radical Mexican leaders have ever pointed back with pride to the Constitution of 1857. Gamio finds it unsuited to the real needs:

The Constitution of '57, which is of foreign character in origin, form, and basis, has been and is adaptable to the material and intellectual mode of life of twenty per cent of our population, which by blood and civilization is analogous to the European populations. For the rest, the said Constitution is exotic and inappropriate.

It is an error, for example, to expect one same law shall apply to the Lacandon of Chiapas, who goes naked and lives by hunting and fishing in a wild tropical district, where no other idea of nation is held than that constituted by his mountains, his women, and his children; to the frontiersman of the north, into whom have filtered and percolated the language, the idiom, the industry, the aptitudes of the American; to the inhabitant of the high tablelands, conservator of the traditions, the customs and religion of the past and to the dweller in the seaport, liberal and innovator; to the frontiersman of the south, whose culture is more Central American than Mexican; to the Indian in general, helpless and illiterate, who speaks diversity of idioms, lives in unlike climates and differs in customs; to the man of culture, active, progressive in tendencies; to the individual of aristocratic lineage who has been educated(?) abroad and when he returns to his native hearth displays a repulsive hybridism in customs and ideas.

When the government knows these individuals and groupings thoroughly, it will be possible to undertake the task of legislating upon the social life. Then will be possible the formation of a general constitution with grand features and special laws adequate to the ethno-social and economic characteristics of our groupings and the geographical conditions of the regions which they inhabit [p. 52].

Throughout his entire argument Señor Gamio urges a real fusion, but the fusion must take what is native as the basis.

Life, thought, achievement, must be Spanish-Indian, not Indian-Spanish. The native, not the invader, must supply the foundation:

Ethnic representation.—In order to legitimately represent the different ethnic groupings of our population, the respective legislators ought to be named by them and to belong to them, or at least to be intimately permeated by their mode of being. Further, the electoral mechanism should be that which the said groupings choose, even though some of them in comparison with others appear very primitive. In effect, the native families preserve deeply rooted the patriarchal system in electoral nominations, in the settlement of domestic questions, etc., etc.; neither the federal government nor the state governors have a right to interfere with such methods of procedure, so long as they do not prejudice the collectivity.

The Chambers never knew what were the conditions and the needs of the Mayas in Yucatan, Quintana Roo, Campeche, Tabasco and Chiapas; of the Yaquis of Soñora; of the "pintos" in Guerrero; of all these families of natives which number various millions of creatures. Such ignorance was explicable if it was remembered how reduced was always the proportion of individuals of native origin in the legislative representation, being necessary to notice too that, apart from their small number, these individuals were renegade natives, who had already assimilated the culture, the language, the aspirations and the tendencies of other social classes—they did not understand nor "feel" the urgent physical and intellectual necessities of their ancient brothers, whom they considered as unredeemed and uncultured beings. And it is clear that these native families, separated from the national concert, ignored by the Constitution and the federal and state laws, and only taken into account when it concerned the imposition of arbitrary contributions upon them, of snatching from them their contingent of blood and service, and of taking advantage of them in commercial transactions, only found in their desperation one dilemma: to revolt or to die . . . and some, as may be observed in the central plateau, have been perishing, through degeneration; others—Yaquis and Mayas—vegetate ever in secular rebellion and almost all have collaborated in the present Revolution in search of liberties, in hope of the position and standing which by legitimate right belongs to them in the national home [p. 136].

The Indian continues to cultivate the pre-Hispanic culture, more or less modified, and will continue to do so as long as his incorporation into contemporary civilization is not secured through gradual, logical, and sensible means. The attempt at his incorporation has been made through inculcation of religious ideas, through clothing him, through teaching him the alphabet, in the same way as if dealing with individuals of our other classes. It is natural that this civilizing bath has not gone below the epidermis, leaving the body and soul of the Indian as they were before, pre-Hispanic. In order to incorporate the

Indian, we must not attempt to "europeanize" him at one stroke; on the contrary let us "indianize" ourselves somewhat, so as to present to him, already diluted with his own, our civilization, which he will then not find exotic, cruel, bitter, and incomprehensible. This approximation to the Indian naturally ought not to be carried to a ridiculous extreme [p. 172].

He urges that a characteristic, a truly Mexican, development in life, art, industry, and literature be encouraged. The past shows the possibility of a happy and creditable union: the present and future should produce something still more worthy of respect:

From this contest, there is born what may be called "cultural cleavage"; a great part of this middle class, which feels more the environment in which it has developed and the historical antecedents which brought it near the native class, adopted an intermediate culture, which is neither the native nor the western. We cite some manifestations of this culture: the popular music, which Ponce in most noble effort exerted himself to make known, is not native music, nor is it European; it is something intermediate, the technique, the mechanical part, of which is occidental, but which in character and sentiment strongly arouse the native soul. Our sculptors, who in Guadalajara, in Mexico, and in other places make little figures of clay and wax or typically decorated vases, are the true national sculptors, however much the public may, foolishly, consider its work as mere curious rubbish. The decorative designs which are used in the lacquer industry, pottery, textile fabrics and a thousand other things, are the legitimate Mexican decorations, they were inspired by our sky, by our soil, by our plants, by our animals, even by the ancient polytheistic religious conceptions of the pre-Hispanic Indians. As much might be said of the literature, the architecture, and even of the very special character which religious ideas show in this class. The "intermediate culture" originated immediately after the conquest, it being necessary, in order to understand perfectly what is here said to examine among other manifestations the transitional artistic work of the sixteenth century. This intermediate culture, like that of the native class, has developed without principles, method, or facilities; it is natural that it presents frequent deficiencies and even deformities, like everything that has to flourish, conquering obstacles. It is, nevertheless, the national culture, that of the future, that which will end by imposing itself when the population, being ethnically homogeneous, feels and understands it. It should not be forgotten that it is the resultant of the European and the modified native, or pre-Hispanic [p. 175].

We will accept what is said: the percentage of persons who possess scientific knowledge in Mexico is very reduced; that of individuals who do not know how to read is very large; the art of European origin is not understood

by the majority of the population; industrial production is restricted, etc., etc. In our turn we will reply: scientific knowledge in Mexico is deficient, because the character of the evolutionary stages which we have traversed during centuries has made anything else impossible; an actual scientific prosperity would be extraordinary and the extraordinary may always be left out of account. A majority of Mexicans do not know how to read and write . . . but they know other things: the people produces literary work, musical, etc., etc., that is to say, it lacks one cultural manifestation, literacy; but possesses others. Mexican industry is inferior in efficiency to the European, a fact explained by the richness of the soil and the consequent ease of subsistence. We do not understand European art, we do not "feel it," that must be confessed; the Europeans in their turn do not understand or feel our art.

In the final analysis, we live contented with the natural evolution, which our cultural manifestations follow and with the application of those manifestations of European origin which our necessities counsel us to borrow [p. 190].

To real nationality a common language is essential. Spanish is still far from universal in the country. Fifty native languages, perhaps, are still in daily use. There are probably millions who do not know Spanish; there are large towns where hardly an individual speaks it. Writers in Mexico often urge the purification of Mexican-Spanish, the restoration of it to academic perfection. Our author does not expect or desire to see a uniform spoken Spanish of Castilian purity in Mexico. There are local divergencies in Spanish speech that will continue. In writing, there will no doubt be a general diffusion of a Spanish that will be as correct and refined as our American-English compared with that of England, but no doubt local peculiarities of spoken speech will continue:

All these modes of speaking Spanish differ among themselves analogically, syntactically, phonetically, and ideologically, that is to say they differ in form, expression, and sound and they will differ as long as the Mexicans have not fused into a single race, physically and intellectually homogeneous and, in order that such a thing happen, it is necessary that this race live in a region where the physical and biological conditions shall be the same for all the individuals who compose it. In effect, the form and structure of the human body and the manifestations of its intellect—art, language, etc., etc.—result directly from the action of the foods, the climate, the flora, the fauna, and the geology of the soil or region they inhabit. Ah well, the distinct regions which make up our country differ in climate, botany, zoölogy and geology, and therefore the same Spanish will never be spoken in all the regions of Mexico, but that which naturally develops and flourishes in each one of them.

Four hundred years of experience are more conclusive than all that literary men and grammarians may say with respect to the attempted unification of the language [p. 194].

There is more of beauty, more realism, and greater force of expression attaching to this picturesque variety of "Spanishes" of Mexico than if they should be fused, through compulsion, into one impossible and grotesque imitation of the Spanish of Castile or of whatever other place [p. 196].

Of the rise of a national literature Gamio says:

It is logical to affirm that the national literature will appear automatically when the population attains to racial, cultural, and linguistic unification. Then, without doubt, the ethical, esthetic and religious ideas, the scientific acquisitions, the aspirations, the ideals of the distinct groupings of the country will not diverge as they now do, but will have converged and blended. The national literature will present various origins but one single body of exposition. The national soul will then be sensitive to the beauty of this literature, whether the episodes or passages which arouse the esthetic emotion be native or Spanish, pre-Hispanic, or colonial. Today, each Mexican grouping possesses its own literature, different from the others in form and in content, as one may easily convince himself by a detailed examination of the actual literary manifestations, written and "latent"—that is to say those which have not been written but exist and are orally transmitted, such as those of the natives [p. 205].

It is necessary to encourage all the actual literary manifestations in place of praising some and decrying others, a feat of fools to ridicule the little histories of Vanegas Arroyo, publications of the type of *La Guacamaya*, the pathetic compositions declaimed by the strolling bards of the town square and the stories that issue from the mouths of nurses and servants, since all of this is Mexican literature, however much the pretended purists preach the contrary [p. 206].

His discussion of the industries which arose by fusion during the colonial epoch is most interesting and deserves thoughtful reading. At its close he makes several concrete propositions:

We propose concretely:

1. That an attempt be made to crush out or diminish the ridiculous exotic tendencies which make us unconditionally prefer industry of foreign character and to disdain our own.
2. To encourage first of all the production of our typical industry to the end that not only its consumption in the country may be increased, but the demand which has always existed for it outside may be supplied and augmented.
3. To apply the technical methods of the foreign industries to the similar typical industries and to sensibly bring about the fusion of the two, as was done spontaneously and so brilliantly during the colonial period.

4. To send our workers to foreign industrial centres that they may incorporate with their traditional industrial aptitudes, foreign experience.
5. To establish in foreign countries expositions of Mexican typical products and in Mexico expositions of new foreign industries unknown to us [p. 262].

In reference to literacy he makes some observations which are sane and appropriate and outlines the proposed "editorial division" of the present government, which is planned to meet the actual conditions and to make it worth while for a person to know how to read:

It is frequently preached that the national welfare and the enlargement of the country depend upon the "alphabetization" of all the Mexicans. We, however, do not admit that the educational factor will produce such miracles unless it is accompanied by the complementary factors, as the political, the economic, the ethnic, and the others to which we refer in this book [p. 285].

If our population were racially homogeneous, possessed a common language and the same tendencies and aspirations, it would be easy to adopt and adapt an education plan analogous to that which has produced such a good result in those countries [France and Germany]. Unhappily, the heterogeneity of our population, the multiplicity of languages, and the divergence in modes of thought, render its implantation impracticable and impossible [p. 286].

In effect: when on account of lack of books, more advanced readings than the primer and first reader are impossible, the knowledge of reading appears idle and unproductive.

Nevertheless, for the generality of those who learn how to read there remains no other recourse, because there are few who can secure a more extensive education or even have the opportunity of obtaining printed matter of whatever sort. To what is this fact due, which directly and indirectly contributes to maintain illiteracy? It is that in Mexico the pamphlet, the book, publications generally, have always been costly and for that reason little adequate to the diversity of standards of the population. Provision has been made, though defectively, for the intellectual "élite," which can pay for what it reads, and for the city youth by supplying them schoolbooks. But is not the rest of the population, the great mass which longs to gather knowledge through reading, worth attention?

In consideration of what we have just said, the department of public instruction and fine arts has proceeded to create an editorial division, which will have for its high mission the vulgarization of human knowledge among us, by publishing books, pamphlets, and periodical publications, the prices of which shall be within reach of the generality of the population and the selectness

and adequacy of the text of which shall supply teachings of efficient and practical results. This division will also care for the needs of the intellectual "élite" and school children, since in agreement with the nationalist and democratic principles of the Revolution, all classes or social groups ought to receive the cultural benefit which in accordance with their conditions and aptitudes corresponds to them. Ultimately, the Indian, who with dire pains learned to read in the poor schools of the mountains and who apart from his primer has had nothing with which to enlarge his knowledge may secure at insignificant prices, or without any cost, elementary works of useful instruction, since they will deal objectively with the fields in which he lives, of the modes of seeding and cultivating them, of the wild and domestic animals of the region and the products which they yield, of the notable men and the salient facts of the past, etc., etc. The workman of the cities will encounter in his turn in such works, reliable counsels for perfecting himself in his industry and obtaining from it a better return, simple hygienic rules which will improve his health and that of his family, civic and social instruction which will strengthen the grouping to which he belongs [p. 293].

We have not presented the half of the passages we had translated to show Señor Gamio's views, but have already overrun our limits of space. His *Programa* is an official plan for amelioration based upon anthropological and ethnological studies and developed from scientific principles. It outlines an extraordinary, almost unique, governmental experiment. The Latin-American excels in drawing up schemes of perfection. No one better than he can formulate plans, programs, codes, constitutions. We are usually able to grant assent to almost every paragraph. These beautiful theoretical constructions are rarely carried through. We hope this case may prove an exception. Mexico would not only make a marvelous step forward, she would command the admiration and respect of the world if she could place her Indian in his proper position. Should she fail, the ideas and the words remain and they are largely true. Americans who really wish to know the causes of Mexico's present troubles will do well to read *Forjando Patria* with care, even though there may be occasional flaws and weaknesses in it.