

Democracy Undergoing Acid Test in Venezuela Riots

By JAMES R. WHELAN
United Press International

Caracas, Venezuela - (UPI) - Late on the night of Dec. 7, 1958, screaming and rioting mobs teemed into Caracas. They smashed windows, burned houses, looted stores and, for three days, clashed with police.

The reason? Romulo Betancourt had just been elected president of Venezuela.

From that time to this, Communist "riot specialists" and disgruntled troublemakers from losing parties - far right or far left - have given Romulo Betancourt little rest.

Today, all eyes are on Venezuela, the buffer nation between South America and the explosive Caribbean.

If democracy succeeds here - and continues to achieve peaceful reform - it will serve as an example for the rest of the hemisphere.

Venezuela is now undergoing its sternest test - the battle against phantom bombers and clandestine rebels.

Former President Alberto Lleras Camargo of neighboring Colombia summed up the situation this way: "The pity of Venezuela is that President Betancourt must spend 18 hours a day just fending off those who would overthrow him, and that leaves him only six hours a day to govern the country."

That was two years ago and President Betancourt has, in fact, done a lot of governing in between. But the extremists - now almost exclusively of the far left - have sharpened their claws.

Enemies Strike

At 9:20 a.m. on June 24, 1960, Betancourt's enemies struck their most daring blow: A bomb activated by microwave shattered a parked car just as the presidential car passed. The chief of the military household in the presidential place died in the blast, as did a bystander. Betancourt lived, but his hands and face will remain scarred.

PP&L Economists Attend Seminar

Pacific Power and Light company's staff of Polly Pacific home economists have completed a three-day seminar at Portland, reviewing the company's home service advisory activities and hearing details of the company's new "Total Electric" promotional program.

Home after concluding the training session is Mrs. Geane Kinsner, Medford, the Polly Pacific representative for PP&L's Copeco division.

Conducting the sessions were Frank Reis, PP&L's general sales manager, and J. W. Mowrey, residential sales manager.

The Portland seminar emphasized the company's new program for Medallion Home, indoor and outdoor lighting, the increased terms of the wiring finance plan and the company's greater emphasis for electric space heating promotions.

for the rest of his life and his hearing was permanently impaired.

Investigation traced the plot to Betancourt's then arch-enemy, Dominican Dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo.

Foreign ministers of the American republics met in emergency session two months later, and the economic and diplomatic boycott they voted was the beginning of the end for Trujillo, victim of an assassination one year later.

By the end of 1961, it was clear that the far left as a political force capable of controlling the "masses" was finished. Nowhere was that more evident than during the December, 1961, visit to Venezuela of President Kennedy.

Welcome Kennedy

Instead of the rocks and riots that met Vice President Richard Nixon 30 months before, Kennedy was greeted by huge welcoming throngs.

Early in 1962, the far left resorted to terrorism and subversion, though continuing to operate freely on the political front. Their decline coincided almost exactly with the decline of Cuba's Fidel Castro.

Shortly before 3:30 p.m. on the afternoon of Jan. 23, 1962 - the fourth anniversary of the overthrow of Dictator Marcos Perez Jimenez - a plastic bomb exploded in the seventh-floor bathroom of the \$2 million U.S. Embassy building, only 50 feet from the ambassador's office.

No one was hurt, but this was the violent debut of an organization known as "The Armed Forces of National Liberation" (FALN), a Castro-patterned combination guerrilla and terrorist force which has since come to be known as the "armed wing of the Communists and MIRA (Marxist-line extreme left party)."

In the next three days, ambushes and hit-and-run attacks claimed 40 lives. They went on to specialize in arson raids, chiefly on U.S. factories.

Youths Terrorize

The pattern: Youths armed with machine guns and usually including one or two women surprise a nightwatchman or small security force, tie them up while they paint slogans on the walls, then spread gelatinous gasoline and flee.

In October of last year, coincidental with the Cuban crisis, the far left stepped up its terrorist campaign. The government retaliated by rounding up an estimated 800 prisoners and airlifting them to a prison colony in the jungles of eastern Venezuela.

In 1963, the FALN - who claim to number 1,500 in all of Venezuela, though the government claims their number is closer to 400 - concentrated

their fire on American property and spectacular stunts. These included the hijacking of a 6,000-ton tanker on the eve of President Betancourt's trip to the U.S. in February and the theft a month before of five French paintings worth \$660,000. Both the paintings and the ship were recovered.

Damage Grows

Attacks on U.S. property alone have caused damage since the first of this year estimated at almost \$4 million. None of the members of the 50,000 strong U.S. community in Venezuela - one of the largest in the world - has

been physically hurt. But lately the attacks have had a personal taint.

June 5, 10 youths armed with machine guns and some of them dressed in stolen Venezuelan army officers' uniforms tricked the guards at the Spanish Colonial house used by the U.S. Army military mission here.

Inside, they forced the four Venezuelan guards, four U.S. enlisted men and two U.S. officers to strip to their underwear and submit to a 40-minute lecture on "Yankee Imperialism."

Before leaving, the assailants bayoneted a portrait of

George Washington, trampled a U.S. flag and hoisted a FALN flag in its place. They set fire to the building, leaving with the warning "The next time we won't be kidding."

Ten days later, four well-dressed youths armed with machine guns invaded the home of U.S. Embassy political counselor Edward T. Long. Long was out, but the invaders tied up Mrs. Long and a maid before they ransacked the house.

As the Fourth of July approached, authorities in Valencia - a booming industrial area 70 miles southwest of Ca-

racas - disclosed a bomb attempt against a U.S. industrialist. They also revealed that families of American executives of "blue chip" U.S. firms had received threatening telephone calls.

The objectives of the Communists are apparent: Shake investor confidence in the country, thereby creating

economic hardships, and sabotage the presidential elections of this fall.

The December elections will mark the first time in Venezuelan history that one freely elected government turned over power to a freely-elected successor.

Venezuela is vital to the West for political, strategic and economic reasons. Presi-

dent Kennedy recognized this in the warm welcome he gave Betancourt last February in Washington.

"You are," Kennedy told Betancourt, "a symbol of what we want for our own country and our sister Republics of Latin America. It is no accident that you and your country have been marked as the principal target in

their (Communist) efforts to eliminate you, and all that you stand for, and the progress you represent . . ."

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