GENERAL

American Extremes. By DANIEL COSÍO VILLEGAS. Translated by Américo Paredes. Austin, 1964. The University of Texas Press. The Texas Pan-American Series. Table. Index. Pp. 227. $5.00.

Three of the main themes discussed by Mexico's great historian and essayist in this work concern the present estate of the Mexican Revolution, the relationship of Mexico and Latin America to the United States, and the significance of communism in the lands south of the Rio Grande. The Mexican Revolution, thinks Cosío Villegas, has largely failed, while United States-Mexican relations are perhaps at an all-time low. If these appraisals make pessimistic reading, the average American may at least be heartened that Cosío, as so many "leftist" Mexican intellectuals, totally rejects international communism, seeing in it a fundamental threat to what above all else is precious: Mexican nationalism and uniqueness. Less assuring to some United States readers will be Cosío's logically reasoned conclusion that communism is primarily a social and economic rather than a political system. Therefore, Latin Americans can accept much of its social and economic content without becoming politically involved with the communist world. "Russia today bears the banner of social and economic progress for the Latin American people, as England, the United States, and France did in the nineteenth century" (pp. 61-62).

The Revolution of 1910 has failed, the author asserts, largely because of the inadequacy of leadership. This thesis deserves broad attention in the United States, particularly in view of the fatuous hero-worship accorded Lázaro Cárdenas and other revolutionary figures by many of this country's authors. Referring to the Revolution's leaders, Cosío asserts: "nothing that they created to replace what they destroyed has turned out to be indisputably better" (p. 8). In particular, Cosío complains that revolutionary leadership has permitted wealth to fall increasingly into the hands of a few persons who possess no special merit of any kind. Out of this process has emerged a new high and low middle class which has dragged the Revolution and the country itself once more to the brink of devastating social and economic inequality.

If revolutions in Latin America are apt merely to destroy a talented, cultivated, esthetically-initiated upper class capable of

guarding spiritual and intellectual values, replacing its members with callous, materialistic elements perhaps less socially conscious than those whom they succeeded in power, then a man like Cosío finds himself torn by conflicting desires. A thorough-going revolutionary, he also wants to preserve Latin America's unique way of life as reflected in various aspects of pre-revolutionary institutions and value judgments. Cosío and many Latin American leftists understandably regard the newly-assumed United States interests in revolution with suspicion. United States-fostered revolution in Latin America might well mean only that the entire area will ultimately become a bit more like the northern neighbor, in so far as the habits of a directing middle class are concerned; at the same time it will become a more profitable area of investment for the northern neighbor, but not necessarily a better home for the native. Rejecting both the lures of the United States and the communist world, and at the same time dismissing out of hand the reform movements connected with the Catholic Church, Cosío leaves himself almost no place to turn. He is typical of many of Latin America's most brilliant thinkers who in frustration embrace "American extremes" that may be as hopeless of realization as they are hazily defined.

In shaping the Latin American policy of the United States, business and military leaders may well have come to wield nearly unchallenged power. Cosío foresaw something of this in 1947 when he wrote the essay "Mexico and the United States" that comprises a part of the present book. Latin America at that time faced the possibility that the United States might continue the attempt to export liberal economic institutions of questionable value in twentieth-century underdeveloped republics. Worse still, as Cosío saw it, the United States, not in order to survive but merely to aggrandize herself, might find it necessary to create on the political level "a retrograde, reactionary world made of antiliberal and antidemocratic forces" (p. 52). Events transpiring since 1947, despite the pious platitudes of the Alliance for Progress designed in part to mask what the United States business community and militarists really have in mind for Latin America, have simply made Cosío's apprehensions all the more timely.

Undoubtedly the vastly significant and perceptive opinions of Cosío Villegas will be ignored in the United States. The author himself points out: "Since the second World War the North American people have become victims of an almost hysterical impatience against all complaints, petitions, or differences of opinion, not to mention criticism or censure" (p. 46). Cosío, though, rightly stresses that

difficulties in Latin America do not arise exclusively or even primarily from attitudes in and actions of the United States, but rather from the attitudes and actions of Latin Americans themselves. Thus it is all the more tragic that Cosío's views will probably make little impact among decision-makers in Latin America, many of whom are more concerned with the immediate self gain to be derived from accommodating the United States than in the protection of national values and interests.

The University of Texas Press is to be commended for making available in attractive form the work of another Latin American intellectual whose ideas at least deserve to be heeded. An excellent introduction by John P. Harrison describes something of the vast activities of Cosío Villegas in the Latin American intellectual world, and penetratingly suggests the timeliness of the essays included in the volume. Américo Paredes has skillfully prepared the English translation, as a result of which the essays read almost as well as in the original Spanish.

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