

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

Ideas Behind Mexican Reforms: Las Ideas Sociales Contemporaneas En Mexico

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Philippine Studies vol. 12, no. 2 (1964): 362–363

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Fri June 30 13:30:20 2008

Book Reviews

IDEAS BEHIND MEXICAN REFORMS

LAS IDEAS SOCIALES CONTEMPORANTEAS EN MEXICO.

Por Victor Alba. Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1960.
473 pp.

This book is part of the great collection published by the Fondo de Cultura Económica of Mexico, dealing with the history of ideas in América. Victor Alba has made a deep and well documented study of contemporary social ideas in Mexico and, in doing so, he has gone back in time to the social ideas before the wars of independence, after the independence and during the wars and social movements that have been called "La Reforma" when liberal social ideas and the Liberal Party came to power. From there he goes on to the triumph of Porfirio Díaz, his long dictatorship and what has been known all the world over as the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

In the second part of the book he deals with the evaluation of social problems in modern Mexico: the agrarian reform, the Indian, industrialization and labour. The third part deals with a conclusion that has been reached: the nationalization of ideas.

This last part is of the greatest importance for the understanding of Mexican social problems and ideas. The author says that the important part of his study is seeing how imported ideas in the social order have become mexicanized and transformed into Mexican social ideas. In all Mexican history we find two trends. One is the importation of ideas, especially political ideas such as the organization of government imported from the United States. The other is the theory, born from the problem itself and the remedies for that problem. We could say in a broad sense, that in Mexico political ideas have been imported, but social ideas have been created. Social ideas have consequently not been theories, but programs; not doctrine but practice.

In the nineteenth century the great social problems such as land reform, indigenism and industrialization began to be felt. Even before

the independence in 1810, Bishop Abad y Queipo had spoken about the urgent need for a land reform. The Conservative Party and one of its foremost spokesmen, don Lucas Alamán, had dealt with the problem. Conservatives and liberals agreed on the need of a land reform. Both made programs to that end. The expropriation of the lands owned by the corporations of the Catholic Church, was one of those programs, and so was the expropriation of communal lands in the villages. But it was not until the great Revolution of 1910 that land reform was implemented fully, a process still going on in Mexico. Naturally quite a few of those ideas which gave direction to reforms had come from outside Mexico, but as determined by the urgency of the problems, the social theories were converted into programs of reform and mexicanized to the extent that today it is difficult to tell the foreign ideas from the Mexican.

And so with the labor problems. Sometimes solutions might have been proposed in the far left, but the programs implementing those solutions, have always been different from the theories, have been in essence Mexican.

Victor Alba shows a very important fact. Against the widespread legend of utter confusion on the history of independent Mexico, we find the country always following a direct path toward the solution of its problems. As those problems were urgent and, to a certain extent, invariable, the solutions offered might have differed in certain ways, but they could never get away from the total setting of the problem.

Some of Alba's conclusions may be interesting to the Filipino reader. He observes for example, that "by some strange alchemy in the Hispanic nations, all the problems become political problems, all ideas are metamorphosed into political ideas".

As a side note, we call attention to a remark by Alba that "Marxism never had an influence in the Mexican labour movement". The social ideas and movements of Mexico, from the wars of independence to the revolution of 1910 were, as has been noted, of definitely Mexican characteristics. The same can not be said about the other countries in Latin America.

Victor Alba's book ends with a very complete bibliography.

RAFAEL BERNAL

TEXTS IN CHINESE STUDIES

SOURCES OF CHINESE TRADITION. Compiled by W. M. Theodore De Bary, Wing-Tsit Chan and Burton Watson. New York: Columbia University Press, 1960. 976 pp.