

# *The Facts Behind the* **FIGUERES-SOMOZA FEUD**

BY ROBERT E. JOHNSON



"FIGUERES doesn't exist," said the editor of General Somoza's newspaper as he tossed back my copy. Crestfallen, I walked out of his office and re-read my story. "Plans to nationalize American and British utilities in Costa Rica were outlined yesterday by that country's President-Elect, Colonel José Figueres. Speaking at a Buenos Aires press conference, Colonel Figueres declared . . ."

It should be news when the self-styled Liberator echoes the Communist line throughout South America, I thought. But what the hell, I knew the policy of *Novedades* and the Nicaraguan government. Ignore Figueres! I wadded up the sheet of paper and threw it in the wastebasket.

No, as yet Figueres didn't exist as far as General Somoza and his newspaper were concerned. But already the perambulating Pépe was making disturbing noises across the border. It was the summer of 1953 and he was touring South American capitals, blustering and hurling abuse

at the stock targets of Leftwingers the world over.

He was being taken at his word, regarded as a man to watch. Some saw him as a new Nehru, others claimed that he would be a Central American Peron. I thought José Figueres struck a more familiar note: Pinkos sound the same in any language.

But I was in no position to question *Novedades'* editorial policy. Selected as the first American exchange student to Nicaragua, it was largely to be in a better position to observe that I became a reporter for the country's largest newspaper. I was not in Nicaragua for academic study but to get the facts about the Latin American nation most friendly to the United States. As Somoza pointed out: "There is no better way to get to know a country than to live in it and see it as a newspaperman." He was right.

It didn't require endless research to get the true story of the Somoza-Figueres feud. The facts are well known in both countries but, like

*Novedades*, the American press has generally ignored them. Despite the present quiet along the Nicaraguan-Costa Rican borders, the issue will arise again and again until one or the other of the two men is destroyed. And it will be a disaster to the United States if the final victor is Figueres. His record speaks for itself:

THE POLITICAL career of José Figueres has been short but spectacular. An obscure Costa Rican planter until 1948, he was suddenly transformed into a revolutionary leader with the declared mission of sweeping Fascism from the Americas. Figueres has since fostered the legend that he was a chieftain of the mysterious Caribbean Legion; the facts indicate that he was made a rebel commander mainly to cover the Communist spearhead which was driven from Mexico through Guatemala to Costa Rica.

The exact circumstances of the 1948 revolution in Costa Rica have never been clear. Many non-Leftist Costa Ricans backed the rebels against the government of President Teodoro Picado while one wing of the local Communist Party ostensibly supported the loyalists. Despite the fact that he was apparently opposed by some Reds, Figueres has never denied the powerful aid given him by other Communist-influenced Leftwing groups.

These subversive elements moved in immediately after the onset of

political strife caused by the 1948 elections and allied themselves with sincere Costa Rican patriots. Planes from Communist-controlled Guatemala landed troops and equipment; the so-called Caribbean Legion went into action in much the same way as did the notorious International Brigades of the Spanish Civil War. Faced by such tremendous odds, the Costa Rican government collapsed in a month. Figueres became virtual dictator. The Reds and their allies set up housekeeping.

Always careful to maintain a democratic front, Figueres installed the respected Otilio Ulate in the presidency. Ulate, popular but weak, remained in office until Figueres took over officially in 1953.

He has since become increasingly belligerent, has obviously never forgotten his dream of a crusade against Rightwing regimes throughout the Hemisphere. No deep thinker, Figueres has long had philosophic guidance from shadowy Romulo Betancourt, ousted Leftwing President of Venezuela and self-styled apostle of Hemispheric "anti-imperialism." It is Betancourt who was recently accused by the Honduran newspaper *La Hora* of "organizing Marxist labor unions in Central America by remote control with the intention of overthrowing the governments of Honduras and neighboring countries."

The newspaper goes on to say that Red agents in Betancourt's organization are infiltrating towns along the

Atlantic coast of Central America. Their aim is said to be the "recovery of an operating base such as the one lost in Guatemala." Betancourt, now teaching his brand of subversion at the University of Puerto Rico, travels regularly to San José to confer with his lieutenants in the Caribbean Comintern — and with José Figueres.

FIGUERES has never lacked other ready allies in his efforts to topple neighboring governments. Today, Costa Rica is the stronghold of the Partido Popular Revolucionario (PPR), one of the most active and disciplined Communist Parties in Latin America. Working hand-in-glove with Leftwing exile groups, the PPR has turned San José into regional headquarters for a web of subversion extending all over the Caribbean and even into the United States.

Apristas from Peru, disgruntled Leftists from Venezuela, professional revolutionaries exiled from the Dominican Republic and various malcontents from a dozen other countries enjoy the benign hospitality of Pépe Figueres. Each group believes that it is they who are "using" the Communists; all are potentially dangerous if for that reason alone.

Most violent is probably the Partido Revolucionario Nicaraguense (PRN) which works closely with Costa Rica's Red PPR. The PRN denies being Communist and all direct reference to Communism is

carefully avoided in the flood of propaganda which pours from its San José offices.

The Red propaganda pipeline becomes obvious, however, in a study of the anti-U.S. press in Mexico and Central America. The Party line first appears in Lombardo Toldano's *El Popular* in Mexico, is picked up and shrilled by a chorus of Leftist elements in San José and subsequently printed in the PRN newspaper *Revolucion* which is smuggled into Nicaragua. The propaganda then takes the form of whispering campaigns and handbills, and is even used in open speeches by labor leaders.

In a country such as Nicaragua, this type of campaign is a most effective propaganda medium. Even the wildest tale is given credence. Thousands of Nicaraguans are now convinced, for example, that the head of Sandino — a guerrilla leader who fought government troops and U.S. Marines during the early 'thirties — was cut off after he was captured, and sent to Washington as proof of his death. Sandino's head is supposed to be a prized possession of the President of the United States!

Other propaganda disseminated from San José follows the familiar Red pattern but with a Central American slant: The "economic imperialism" of American enterprise, the "brutality" of the Marine Corps during the intervention period, the "martyrdom" of Sandino and other bandit leaders, the "enslavement"

of Puerto Rico and the "persecution" of the Nationalists, etc. Typical is the accusation that the United States is encouraging the production or artificial sugar in a calculated move to deprive millions of Latin American workers of their livelihood.

But the San José Comintern has not been merely content with propaganda. Armed bands have occasionally ranged across the Nicaraguan border; one group penetrated as far as Managua in a frustrated attempt to assassinate Somoza. As yet, however, neither Figueres and Betancourt nor their allies have shown any inclination to tangle directly with Nicaragua's tough — and loyal — Guardia Nacional. That time will come, they boast, when the country is beset by an economic or political crisis. The Soviet parallel is unmistakable.

THE OPERATIONAL tactics of the San José subversives also have a striking similarity to those of Puerto Rico's extremist Nationalist Party. In much the same manner that Puerto Ricans have flocked to the northeastern cities of the United States, tens of thousands of Nicaraguans and other Central Americans have settled in New Orleans and San Francisco.

I noticed that almost every issue of *Revolucion* reports the organization of cells in those two cities, openly prints names and addresses. Suspicious of the Red claims, I

checked with government officials who admitted that the exile groups have been highly successful in penetrating Central American colonies in the United States. They also reported that much of the subversive activity directed from San José is financed by funds raised or coerced from Central American immigrant colonies in this country.

In this connection it is interesting to note that Figueres has openly expressed sympathy for the Puerto Rican Nationalists. Prodded by Romulo Betancourt, it was José Figueres who persuaded the governor of Puerto Rico, Muñoz Marín, to release from prison the half-mad Nationalist leader. Not long afterwards, Nationalist terrorists turned their guns on Congress.

The State Department's recent intervention on the side of Figueres against Costa Ricans friendly to Somoza must have caused a roar of laughter from anti-U. S. groups all over the Hemisphere. In view of the constant peril at his doorstep, common sense dictated Somoza's tacit backing of a revolution that might have succeeded but for active foreign intervention.

But what of Somoza himself? Is he the savage dictator the Leftists call him?

Somoza's government *is* authoritarian — as he is the first to admit. Nicaragua will need a firm hand at the helm, he argues, until a national economic and educational level has been reached that will permit de-

mocracy, not anarchy.

But he denies being a dictator and he has facts to back him up. Somoza can cite, for example, that the Nicaraguan press is genuinely free — free to the point of license. I have read countless articles in such opposition newspapers as *La Prensa* and *Flecha* that attack Somoza with a violence and disregard for the truth that would bring instant libel suits in the United States. They are printed without reprisals.

More important, elections are fair in Nicaragua. There is no need to have them rigged. Somoza's strength lies in the lower economic groups who constitute the bulk of the population and who have received most benefit from the tremendous economic strides Nicaragua has made under his leadership. Remembering decades of political free-loading and

Sandino-type warlords, they support him overwhelmingly. This is the group that the Communists are trying desperately to reach.

Somoza's opponent has long and publicly boasted he would destroy him. To that end, Figueres has indirectly sponsored Communist subversion. No puppet, the thin-lipped Costa Rican strongman is described by former associates as ruthless and calculating. His policies have alienated hundreds of former supporters and even ex-President Ulate now denounces him as a dictator.

Nevertheless, there is no reason to believe Figueres is a Communist. A Leftwing political opportunist and supreme egotist, he is of the stripe that believes Communism can be used as a tool for personal power.

Communism thrives on the Figueres!



### *With the Pickle Packers*

☞ Iowa State Representative Don Petruceilli has been advocating legislation which would make it illegal for pickle packers to put more juice than pickles in pickle jars.

☞ Meeting in Chicago, the National Pickle Packers Association voted to award a hand-carved wooden pickle to former Russian Premier Georgi Malenkov. He was designated as "man in the biggest pickle."



# *Doings of a Democracy*



BY HAROLD HELFER

- ✓ The Arizona State House of Representatives voted to have all future bills read by Mrs. G. William Shupe, a charm-school speech counselor.
- ✓ The United States Navy found itself puzzled over which of the 60 possible classifications seaman recruit Alfred Padilla belonged in. Mr. Padilla is a bullfighter.
- ✓ Selectman Raymond H. Bagg, West Springfield, Massachusetts, has been seeking to have cities and towns in Massachusetts get together and establish uniform closing hours for their bars — as a highway safety measure. He explains: “Customers keep rushing from one place to another to get in another hour of drinking.”
- ✓ The view is a little too good for civilian defense observers in San Francisco, complained Mrs. Pauline Gale, head of that town’s Ground Observer Corps. Mrs. Gale says she has a major personnel problem because the beautiful view of the Golden Gate is constantly inspiring romances among her observers.
- ✓ A Memphis man filed suit in court seeking to break a \$2,100 contract with the Arthur Murray Dance Studio. He explained that he had married one of the studio’s instructors and now could learn to dance at home.
- ✓ Bald-headed Senator Eugene D. Millikin, filling out a form for renewal of his identification card for the Senate-House Atomic Energy Committee, hesitated only briefly and then filled in the line that said “color of hair” as follows: “Skin color.”
- ✓ Seventeen successful candidates for offices in the town of Linda Mar, California, must have served the shortest terms on record. On the same ballot, the citizens voted two-to-one against becoming an incorporated village and having offices.
- ✓ Inmates of California’s Folsom Prison get an hour and a half “good time” credit toward parole for every hour they spend in the Civil Defense plane spotting program.