

REPORT ON COLOMBIA

Com. Book to C.B. B. I.

Comrades, I cannot make a very well organized report because I was given notice of this meeting only yesterday in the afternoon, and today I had to attend to various urgent matters in the Party so I will give you just the report the way it comes to my mind from the time I started to work in Columbia until I was imprisoned in Venezuela.

Columbia is one of those countries that have a pretty big population,—about 8 million. For a country in Latin America that is not so small. It is predominantly an agrarian country. Only about one third of the country is really occupied in one form or another, and even this one third the cultivation is extensive, not intensive. There are all kinds of climate, from Canadian climate down to the most torrid heat and for that reason we can have there all kinds of agriculture from good Oregon apples, which require certain climate, down to cotton and coffee or rice, and there are all these different types of agrarian production there. But the type of agriculture that predominates is coffee, bananas, and for the inner market, the things that are necessary to life, tropical products, potatoes, etc. For the foreign market, the principal products are coffee and bananas. Coffee is the principal occupation in the center of the country in agriculture, and bananas on that part which borders on the Caribbean Ocean.

The regime that prevails in agriculture is a mixture of modern bourgeois agriculture with feudal methods of exploitation. There is only one really modern plantation system. That is the United Fruit Company, which works with the latest up to date methods but even they have not a system which is strictly wage labor. The United Fruit Company does not employ any workers. It employs a species of sub-contractors. These sub-contractors hire workers, and each worker works a certain piece of land and gets paid by the piece. In coffee there is the plantation system. There are plantations that employ as many as five to eight thousand and even more, what they call "aridentarios", which is a sort of share cropper and agricultural worker, but in coffee there are also other small plantations and farms, and even a sprinkling of independent farms with a small amount of land.

The division of property in agriculture is something like this: big planters, then various types of planters, big ones, middle ones and small ones that employ only 50 to 100 workers. Then there are those that they call "colonos". These are farmers that open up a new piece of land. This land does not belong to anybody. It is worked by nobody. They just go there and open it up. There is a considerable number of this category in Columbia. They are pretty dissatisfied because the regime there is not such that it grants them a title to this land. Very often they start to work on this land, work it two to three years and then some bastard comes around and says "you are working on my land". He knew that all the time, but he lets him work a couple of years until the land has a certain value and then he comes and claims he has a title to it. All lands are under title except one third of it, which is wilderness. These colonos do not want to go to the wilderness. They try to take a piece of land which is near to some road and so on. These colonos are very dissatisfied because they are never sure of the land in which they have put their labor.

Then there are these "aridentarios". Well, this is a farmer who works part time for wages and part time on land that he rented. On this land he makes all kinds of improvements, but if the owner discharges him, then he can claim nothing for these improvements, and the owner takes that land and appropriates it for himself. The aridentario is the principle type in Columbia. There are millions of them in Columbia. The aridentario works part time for wages on the plantation,—regular wages and certain hours. They work from ten to fourteen hours a day and get paid for the time that they work on the plantation. What he produces he is obliged to turn over to the owner, which is the only means for him to sell his product. Then there is the independent farmer. There are in Columbia a considerable quantity, considering Latin America as a whole. These are in a certain part of the country, like Antiochia, Santandé Del Norte and even around Bogota. In the provinces there are quite a number of independent farms. These are the regions that are most conservative. The mass movements are where the aridentarios and colonos predominate, although lately the independent farmers have been quite dissatisfied and have been "left" among the liberals. You will see later on what a heavy tax-