

Latin America

Mass Movement Develops in Depth

THE mass movement in Latin America has continued to develop in depth during the past year.

The broad masses of the people have gone on demonstrations and strikes, boycotted classes, and taken back their farmland. These struggles were waged to safeguard state sovereignty and oppose oppression and exploitation by imperialism and hegemonism, to win democracy and improvement in living conditions.

In the struggle against imperialism and hegemonism and for national independence and state sovereignty, the Panamanian people's struggle to recover sovereignty over the canal zone and the Puerto Rican people's struggle for national independence have all along assumed an important place. More than 100,000 people from various parts of Panama rallied in Panama City in October last year to reiterate their determination to regain full sovereignty and jurisdiction over the canal zone. At meetings and demonstrations held in the past year in Colon and Chorrera, the masses raised the slogans "The canal belongs to Panama," "Unity of the anti-imperialist forces of Panama and Latin America in their struggle against colonial rule in the enclave," and "Sovereignty or death," expressing their determination to fight in defence of state sovereignty. In Puerto Rico, mass meetings and demonstrations took place on several occasions in March and June, showing the people's firm resolve to put an end to U.S. imperialism's colonial rule.

In other Latin American countries and regions, the struggle against imperialism and hegemonism and for safeguarding national independence and sovereignty is developing further in depth and breadth. The mammoth rallies and demonstrations on May Day this year by the labouring people vividly reflect the anti-imperialist and anti-hegemony torrent in Latin America. In Mexico City, nearly one million took part in the May Day demonstration, and the demonstration in Caracas, capital of Venezuela, involved 250,000 workers. In Quito in Ecuador, and Georgetown in Guyana, thousands upon thousands of workers took to the streets, carrying placards inscribed with anti-imperialist and anti-hegemony slogans and shouting: "Yankees, get out of Latin America!" They demanded oil nationalization

and expressed support for the Panamanian people's struggle to recover sovereignty over the canal zone. These large-scale demonstrations show that the labouring people of Latin America are forcefully pushing the anti-imperialist and anti-hegemony struggle forward so that it will rage more fiercely.

The deep-going development of the mass movement indicates that the labouring people are directing the spearhead of their struggle more consciously against the transnational corporations which have long been plundering and exploiting them. Since the beginning of this year, workers in Mexico, Argentina, Ecuador and other countries have successively staged large-scale strikes, waging intense struggle against the transnational corporations. These included more than 3,000 Mexican workers in three Ford Motor company plants, over 7,000 Mexicans in a plant of the West German-owned "Volkswagen," more than 9,000 Argentine workers in the Ford Motor Argentina S.A., the Chrysler Fevre Argentina S.A., General Motors, the Fiat-Concord S.A., as well as Ecuadorian freight transport workers. They demanded higher wages and a shorter workday. Some of them called for depriving the transnationals of the right to operate in these countries. Their struggles have been a blow to the greedy foreign monopoly capitalists.

Latin American peasants, the most bitterly oppressed and exploited, are an active force in the struggle against transnational corporations. Last year, many poverty-stricken peasants in Honduras, the Dominican Republic, Brazil and Bolivia waged a face-to-face struggle against foreign plantation owners, especially against transnationals when they seized land occupied by the latter. Following their struggle in May last year, landless peasants or those with small plots in four departments of Honduras launched another large-scale campaign last May. Arms in hand, they stormed into big plantations, demanding the recovery of their land from the transnationals and the plantation owners in their country. Dominican peasants of Pueblo Viejo in Sanchez Ramirez Province held meetings last June indignantly protesting against the plunder of the country's gold resources and occupation of local peasants' land

by the U.S. company Rosario Dominicana and strongly demanding their recovery from this monopoly company. Since it began mining gold in Pueblo Viejo in 1972, the company has forced large numbers of local peasants out of their land and thus made them homeless and destitute. The United Fruit Company and the Cerro de Pasco Corporation own over one-third of the land in some Latin American countries, while 180 million peasants in Latin America own only 4 per cent of the total arable land and 140 million of them are landless. The vigorous development of the land-seizure movement by the peasants stems from this most unreasonable land distribution.

The sustained and in-depth development of the mass movement also finds expression in the fiercer struggle by the labouring people against the oligarchic forces which depend on the imperialists. Since the beginning of 1976 in Bolivia, Argentina, Colombia, Brazil, Ecuador, Honduras, Costa Rica, El Salvador and other countries, a series of strike actions and land seizures have taken place when workers, peasants and students pressed for better political and living conditions. The mass movements in Bolivia, Argentina and Colombia in particular were highlighted by their magnitude and duration. Incomplete statistics show that in the first six months of the year there were more than 20 big strikes in Bolivia. These included four miners' general strikes involving over 40,000 workers in the state mines. Beginning in July, Argentine workers started a series of work stoppages and slowdowns. This was

followed by strikes in early September by tens of thousands of workers in the nation's major industrial districts, including those in auto, electric power, metallurgical, petrochemical industries and transportation. In some countries, workers, students and employees supported one another and worked in close collaboration in the course of their struggles, creating the striking situation in which any move by one section enjoys support from many other quarters.

The sustained and deep-going development of the mass movement in Latin America reflects the enhanced consciousness in struggle of the labouring people under the strong impact of the two superpowers' rivalry for Latin America and the imperialists shifting their economic crisis which has resulted in a worsening economic situation in Latin America. The growth rate of the Latin American economy dropped from an average of 7 per cent in 1974 to 3.2 per cent in 1975, while foreign debts shot up from 30,000 million U.S. dollars in 1974 to over 50,000 million. Inflation is rapidly growing, prices are skyrocketing, currency value keeps plummeting and the labouring people are suffering the greatest oppression and hardship.

Where there is oppression there is resistance. The broad labouring masses in Latin America are closing their ranks to persist in their struggle to safeguard state sovereignty, combat oppression and exploitation by imperialism and hegemonism and win better political and living conditions.