

ADDITIONS, INTEGRATIONS, CORRECTIONS AND SUPPLEMENTS
TO THE BIBLIOGRAPHY OF ARNOLD JOSEPH TOYNBEE*

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Works by Arnold J. Toynbee

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568) Arnold Toynbee, *Venezuelan Seeds of Danger. Human Nature Is Crux*, in «The Daily Colonist», Saturday, March 16, 1963, p. 4. Observer Foreign News Service syndicated article (see S.F. Morton's *Bibliography*, p. 212, no. 18985, March 1st, 1963, *Seeds of danger in Venezuela*). With text.

* *A Bibliography of Arnold J. Toynbee*, compiled by S. Fiona Morton, with a Foreword by Veronica M. Toynbee, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980.

VENEZUELAN SEEDS OF DANGER

by Arnold Toynbee

Some mirrors accentuate the features of the faces they reflect, and, in accentuating them, make them unmistakably clear. Venezuela today serves as a mirror of this kind. There you will see reflected the visage of the present-day world, with its characteristic features thrown into sharp relief.

Until early this century, Venezuela was not particularly prominent among the Latin American republics. It had, however, played a leading part in the liberation of the Spanish-American Empire from Spanish rule and shared with the Argentine the initiative in liberating the rest of the vast Empire of the Indies.

Venezuela and the Argentine played this leading role in the early nineteenth-century war of liberation, thanks to their geographical position. The Spanish colonial administration had tried to insulate the Spanish overseas empire from contact with the non-Spanish countries of the Western World.

Venezuela had, at her door, the Dutch, French, and British West Indies; and, via the islands, eighteenth-century liberal thought had seeped into this adjoining part of the Spanish mainland. This item of history has a bearing on current events. The biggest of the West Indies is Cuba. You fly over Cuba *en route* from Caracas to Miami, the nearest big city in the United States. It is thus conceivable that history might repeat itself by making Venezuela serve again as the door for the penetration of revolutionary ideas into continental Latin America.

Until the present century, Venezuela was obscure because she was poor. Neither the Spanish imperial government, the Spanish colonists, nor the native Indians had been aware of the wealth below their feet. They had thought in terms of gold and silver, and, for these minerals, Venezuela was of no account compared with Mexico and Peru

The story of Latin America's wealth has been like the story of the Arab world's wealth. The statesmen blithely drew international frontiers across vast unexplored territories. It was not until after they had finished their haphazard work that Nature's equally haphazard distribution of her subterranean and subaqueous wealth came to light; and these natural accidents, in combination with the man-made vagaries, made some countries fabulously rich, while leaving neighbor countries miserably poor.

Venezuela has been one of the lucky countries – lucky, if one takes the conventional view that it is a blessing to become rich suddenly by chance. Shortly before the First World War, prospectors discovered the oil-field round the edges, and under the surface, of Lake Maracaibo; and, some years after the end of the Second World War, other prospectors discovered mountains made of iron-ore, with a 65 per cent metallic content, on the south side of the River Orinoco.

As you fly, today, over the iron-mountains of Venezuelan Guayana, you see below two huge lumps of rusty-red ore rising out of the plain. The bigger of the two, and it is by far the bigger, is still untouched. It is being held in reserve. The smaller iron-mountain would be a big one by any other standard than the size of its neighbor. This smaller mountain is now being gradually scraped away (underground mining is unnecessary), and the ore is taken by train to the newly-built steel-mills above the junction of the Orinoco with its great southern tributary, the Caroni.

Just before joining the Orinoco, the Caroni tumbles over a ledge in a long line of falls. The harnessing of one section of these has provided the infant steel-mills with all the hydro-electric power they need so far. The potential supply is virtually unlimited. The Caroni's tributary, the Corrao, has falls as fine as the Caroni's (they are unharnessed up to date).

Next door to the iron, there is manganese. The only thing locally lacking, for the present, is suitable coking coal. The Guayana steel-mills import their coke from Britain.

As for the Lake Maracaibo oil-fields, you might imagine, as your plane descends, that you were hovering over a vast armada of sixteenth century caravels and galleasses. The caravels

are oil-well derricks; the galeases are weird looking contraptions for capturing natural gas from below the lake-bottom. It is an astonishing spectacle.

Being now a treasure-house, Venezuela has become a land of contrast and inequalities and consequently a land of unrest. One is conscious of a tension in the air.

The housing of the Venezuelan workers of the lowest category in the Shell Company's camp at Lagunillas presents a harrowing contrast to the squalor of the fishing-village of Pueblo Viejo, which stands embedded in the oil-field like a festering fly in amber. Even here, life has improved. The villagers no longer drink the lake water beneath their pale dwellings. The Shell Company has piped pure water to them from its own supply. All the same, the contrast is sharp; and it is even sharper in Caracas, where shacks jostle with tall buildings of glass and concrete in an ultra modern style of architecture, while super-speed through-ways cut across primitive mule tracks.

The shacks are pathetic monuments of unfulfilled expectations. Smor a golden rain from the oil fields and the gron. mountains began to descend on the capital. the poverty-stric ken subsistence-farmly peasantry has been streaming out of the countryside info the city. Perhaps one in a thousand finds his dream of a better life come true.

Here is a polarization of extremes of wealth and poverty. Polarization creates high tension, and high tension generates destructive sparks. Today Venezuela is afflicted with sabotage and terrorism. But there is a paradox here again. This violence is what one would expect, yet it does not proceed from the expected quarter. It does not come from the urban shanty-towns, or from the rural slums out of which these have been populated. It comes from the university campuses.

Yet the university students are not members of the "have- not" majority of the Venezuelan people. Quite a generous shower of the golden rain has come the students' way. In the university at Caracas there are no tuition fees. Venezuela can afford this, but she can hardly afford the students' reaction. No doubt, it is only a fraction of the student body that reacts

to prosperity in this violent way; but this fraction is enough to keep Venezuela in a fever. Here we have the present day state of the world accentuated with a vengeance.

The iron-mountains of the Orinoco basin are being converted into ingots of steel by the Venezuelan government's own enterprise. The oil industry is largely in the hands of foreign companies. Shell is a joint Dutch and British enterprise; Creole is North American. For capitalistic enterprise Venezuela is a bed of thorns, and it is naturally even thornier for foreign capital than it is for Venezuelan.

The foreign companies operating in Venezuela are following an enlightened policy. They are wisely trying to make their presence agreeable to the Venezuelan people by performing a number of services that are of unquestionable value for Venezuela' "national development". On the companies' staffs, more and more Venezuelans are being employed in responsible positions.

The companies are, in fact, making themselves serve as schools in which Venezuelans can learn modern technology. The companies are also doing disinterested work for Venezuela in fields quite unconnected with their own commercial operations.

Venezuela has the makings of an earthly paradise. It would, in fact, be one if a paradise could be stocked solely with minerals and plants, without needing any complement of human inhabitants. Human nature is the crux. Venezuelan human nature is probably no better and no worse than elsewhere. Venezuelan wealth, however, is something quite out of the ordinary, and extraordinary wealth puts human nature to one of its hardest tests.

Can human nature stand this? That is the critical question today for Venezuela, as it is for the world as a whole. And the outcome in Venezuela, whatever it may be, is bound to be of world-shaking importance. If, in Venezuela, the spirit of President Kennedy's Alliance for Progress were to suffer defeat, that would be the opportunity for Doctor Castro of Cuba. Present-day Venezuela is as great a prize as a sixteenth-century Spanish treasure galleon. Into whose hands is this prize going to fall?