

Report on Peru

Leftists in Uniform

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The peddler assembled a pyramid of small, red envelopes on the grass at his feet. He was hawking a nostrum, which he declared would cure everything from impotence to corns to alcoholism. His curly black hair glistened in the milky Peruvian sun. His assistant, a young boy, was transfixed by an iguana, as the crowd was transfixed by the voluble huckster. Figuratively he held them in the palm of his hand while the boy literally held the iguana in his. He stared at it, as if waiting for it to change into something other than a lizard.

It was Saturday afternoon. In the center of town foreigners picked over Indian blankets and dickered inexpertly for ceramics, copper masks of Inca deities, and the handbags woven in bright colors that are all the rage these days in Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires.

Away from all that, in the plaza where the garrulous huckster owned the moment, there is a clock tower. It was erected by the German community in Lima in 1821. It is a vertical monolith, fluted on its sides, and not at all impressive. The clock, however, runs with German precision. Not that the people who frequent the square have much need of a clock that keeps perfect time.

Tourists rarely come to the plaza for two discernible reasons: it is dirty, and there is nothing to buy that most of them cannot buy at home. But the Peruvians come to purchase the small items—Platinum Plus razor blades, padlocks, screwdrivers, metal and plastic watch bands—which are not so easy to get elsewhere in Lima as they are in the plaza with the German clock.

Most of the items on display in the plaza—alarm clocks, plastic overnight bags, sunglasses—were manufactured in the United States. They flow south over the circuitous routes of the smugglers, the same trails used to transport cocaine from the Bolivian highlands

and marijuana from the Colombian llanos to New York and Miami.

The Peruvian market is a contraband market. Such places exist in every city in Latin America. They are crowded conventions of ambulatory vendors. They are also folk festivals of a sort. Food is sold from stands covered with blue plastic: cobs of corn with the fattest kernels ever seen by man, chunks of cow's heart skewered on wooden sticks and cooked over hibachis.

For the unhungry and unacquisitive there is entertainment. A young blind man plays a fiddle. He is an Indian, as are most of the others assembled in the plaza. The music of the Andean Indian is mournful, the program music of a dead empire. The blind man sings a Quechua refrain about a village in the mountains he remembers, "a pearl hung on the throat of the Andes."

The cure-all man's voice worked hard against the traffic plunging down Jiron Cuzco. He gestured toward the iguana. From the anatomy of that reptile, he declared, had been extracted this miraculous substance he was now offering for a mere ten *soles* (about twenty cents). He was not, of course, free to divulge the secret of the process. He said only that it had been perfected by the Inca ancestors of the modern Peruvians.

Suddenly the irony was evident. The seller was white. Surely his ancestors were interred in Europe, probably in Spain. The faces of the buyers ran from the color of mahogany to that of tea. The Indian was being taken again.

A friend who has lived many years in the Andean countries once said: "There are five Perus: the pre-Incaic civilizations, the Incaic, the Spanish colonial period, the Republican, and, for want of a better term, Modern Peru. There are a handful of scholars familiar with the first. Millions romanticize the Incas. Hundreds of high-school teachers can impart reasonably accurate information on Colonial Peru and

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the early Republic. But Modern Peru? Nobody understands it!"

Modern Peru has a military government. The President, elected by his fellow officers, is General Juan Velasco Alvarado. He is a one-legged man; like Ahab he is in single-minded pursuit of a quest. In the general's case it is revolution. In the seven years he and his fellow generals have run Peru things have happened.

Vast expanses of land have been taken from the rich drones whose families sat on it for generations. It has been turned over to the peasants and today yields food crops where it never did before.

Socialist experiments have been launched in the cities. Workers now share the profits earned by the factories they work in, though the ownership of these factories remains nominally in private hands. Not all these enterprises earn profits; some do.

An institution called "Social Property" has been created. These are new industries, completely worker-(not State-)owned and operated. By such measures, an American diplomat in Lima said, "the regime is trying to change the very nature of property in Peru."

Many of us, who as journalists experienced Salvador Allende's last year of life and power in Chile, perceive

striking similarities between Lima today and Santiago then. One of these is the obsession with socialist rhetoric, the drumbeat of slogans. I remember a young woman on the radio one Sunday morning exhorting workers in the textile industry on to greater production goals. She spoke with the relentless fervor of Greta Garbo playing *Ninotchka*.

Lima looks run-down. The City of Kings, under cloudy but rainless skies, is beggarly. It is dirty, a hive of dilapidated vehicles, dust, smog, abandoned buildings, broken windows, and street urchins. Santiago was like that, and the parallel begs the question of whether jolting social change is necessarily linked to urban decay.

But one should not compare the countries of Latin America to one another. The differences always demolish the parallels. The fact is, Lima looks better today, despite the malaise, than it did in 1965 when I first visited it. A few years previously James Morris of *The Guardian* had visited Lima. He wrote:

In Peru you can smell the misery and you need not sniff too hard....Lima's slums are festering, so filthy, so toad-like, so bestially congested, so utterly devoid of water, light, health, or comfort, so deep in garbage and excrement, so swarming with

scabbed ragged barefoot children, so reeking with squalor that just to wander through its alleys makes you retch into your handkerchief.

Between then and now much has changed. The slums today are not quite "so festering, so filthy, so toad-like." More important, ten years ago those who governed Peru were not determined to change all that. The present government is. Even its critics will admit that if they are honest.

Where change is most profoundly needed is evident. The incident in the plaza focused on it. In that brief tableau the two races of Peru were still in conflict. The Indian, bereft of his birthright, is induced to buy it back in snake oil.

Let it be clear, the government of Peru is a military dictatorship, nothing less. It is emphatically authoritarian. It proved that in February when the army ruthlessly crushed a police mutiny and shot down scores of rioters and looters in the streets of Lima. It has suffocated the free press and regularly deports its critics.

Yet this military dictatorship is different from others on this continent. The Peruvian generals have been called Nasserists, because of their exaggerated nationalism, anti-imperialism, their ostensible desire to develop new social and economic institutions in Peru. The new military rulers of Portugal seem to be forming in their image.

The Peruvians are leftists in uniform (wits among the dispossessed oligarchy call them "watermelons": green on the outside and red on the inside) and for that reason they are anomalous in this part of the world. They are not better governors because they are leftists. But they are better because they are not so murderous as the Chilean military, so totalitarian as the Cubans, so exploitative of their people as the empresarios of the "Brazilian Miracle" have been.

The Peruvian Government is characterized by an arbitrariness of action it tries to disguise behind exaggerated concerns with legalistic form. It respects not at all the rights of individuals.

Unlike every other military government in Latin America, Peru's has refrained from using torture as a method of political control. That such could be said in its favor only shows how low the level of governance is today in Latin America.

To understand Modern Peru it helps to think in Hegelian terms. Francisco Pizarro, from Estremadura, Spain, landed on the coast of Peru in 1530 and met the complex, declining Inca civilization. There was no fusion, but a rending historical collision. The only really instructive observation one can make about that clash is that the entity produced from it, Peru, has never been as significant in the world as the two forces, both now spent, which produced it: the Inca civilization and imperial Spain.

Not long after the military seized power in Peru by

deposing the mildly reformist government of President Fernando Belaúnde Terry, on October 3, 1968, a report appeared in the *New York Times* to the effect that the new rulers had begun to deemphasize the Spanish heritage, suggesting that Peru would follow Mexico's lead and present itself to the world unashamedly as an Indian nation.

One cannot find a statue of Hernando Cortéz, the conqueror of the Aztecs, in Mexico City. But in Lima's Plaza de Armas Francisco Pizarro, rendered in bronze by an American sculptor, is still astride his horse, his sword brandished. His mummy, shrunk by the centuries to midget proportions, reposes in the cathedral on the plaza. You can peer through the glass side of his coffin. It requires a strong imagination to see in that pile of rags, bone, and the human leather of his skin the living image of the conqueror. The black statue is more conducive to mental recreations of events during those critical years of the sixteenth century.

Granted, some of the portraits of Pizarro have been taken off the walls of the palace now occupied by General Velasco. The place itself has been renamed, the Palace of Government. It is no longer "Pizarro's Palace."

An effort has been made to encourage the teaching of Quechua, once the universal language of the Andes. Children in a few places in the highlands are actually learning the history of Modern Peru in the tongue of ancient Peru.

But these are scattered and perfunctory efforts. According to a knowledgeable Peruvian with whom I discussed the matter, it is difficult to find teachers who speak Quechua, or at least qualified ones. "Most want to teach in Lima," he said. "The government has tried to force teachers into the rural areas, but they have had little success. They simply bide their time until they can come back to Lima. Probably all Peruvians will be bilingual in Spanish and Quechua when all Irishmen speak Gaelic and all Canadians French."

Those sympathetic to the government tend to excuse its lack of enthusiasm for the task of integrating the nation racially and culturally. People speak of the "Indian Problem" as being, if not unsolvable, at least too formidable for the limited material and intellectual resources at the government's disposal. They allude to the less-than-complete success the United States Government has had integrating a much more culturally proximate racial minority.

Peru, they say, is locked in a struggle for survival, as are most of the Third World nations, and today's energies must go to infrastructure building, basic economic development, such as increasing nontraditional exports or developing the new oil fields on the eastern slopes of the Andes. The Revolution's master planners want to make Peru into a modern nation, not so wastefully consumerist as, say, Brazil or the United States, but a nation "developed" in the sense that bankers and economists understand that term. To this

aim "cultural development" must be subordinated. Augusto Zimmerman, one of President Velasco's closest counselors, assured me: "The revolution proceeds on all fronts." Clearly, though, on some fronts it is pushed with more vigor than on others.

Peru is one of the foremost exponents of the Third World mentality. It advocates class consciousness among the developing countries. It is that kind of thinking which encouraged Mr. Zimmerman to identify his country with the feudal sheikdoms of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. "The oil embargo," he told me, "is something we supported because it is a form of defense against the economic aggression of the United States and other imperialist countries."

Mr. Zimmerman is possessed of that impatience and arrogance peculiar to aging ideologies. He has little time for those who fail to understand. His task is to guard the gate, to admit no one access to the President's ear who is not a true believer in the Peruvian revolution as he understands it.

Economic dependence has been the constant experience of Modern Peru. In the hope of terminating that experience it has developed an activist foreign policy, one that has brought it into conflict with the United States and Latin America.

For instance, Peru has urged (so far unsuccessfully) the Latin American nations to amend the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (the Rio Treaty of 1948). The purpose is to include a provision calling for coordinated defense against the more subtle form of attack by one state upon another in "economic aggression." Peru is the most militant proponent of a two-hundred-mile territorial sea. Peru is the most vehement advocate of the reintegration of Cuba into the political and commercial flow of the Western Hemisphere.

All these positions are repellent to certain power groups within the United States. The multinationals, which do an aggressive and profitable business in Latin America, do not like them. The Pentagon, which wants no restrictions on the U.S. Navy's freedom to roam close to whichever coast it chooses, does not like them. The revanchist Cubans of Miami and their Republican sponsors do not like them.

The International Petroleum Company was the first of these interests with which General Velasco's government collided. That was back in 1968. The new nationalist rulers of Peru, shortly after they seized power, seized the holdings of the giant subsidiary of Standard Oil of New Jersey. They refused compensation, asserting that IPC owed \$600 million in back taxes. It was the most seismic expropriation in Latin America since Mexico nationalized American and British oil holdings in 1938.

Came the hot blasts from Washington, then the cold, vindictive counterattack by the Nixon Administration. American aid was stopped. Credit in international lending agencies dried up. The CIA, Peruvians believe, was set to machinating.

But the years have drained the rancor that first run-in produced (though General Velasco says quite openly he believes the CIA is still at work). An agreement was signed in February, 1974, between the two countries, and compensation was agreed upon for expropriated American properties other than IPC. Loans from the Inter American Development Bank and the World Bank are flowing back to Lima. The Peruvian Government insists that it won in the confrontation over IPC. Perhaps it did, for it survived. So many other governments in Latin America that openly challenged Washington have not. Remember Salvador Allende.

The Peruvians feel that they have come through the fire. The experience has given them confidence. Small Peru moves in the world of diplomacy aggressively, but the essence of its national mission is defensive. It aims to raise the consciousness of its neighbors—by "neighbors" it includes the poorer nations of Africa and Asia, as well as the more proximate Latin American states—to the exploitative nature of the relationship that exists between the developed and underdeveloped worlds.

To this end Peru calls attention to the encroachments of the multinationals. By claiming the offshore oceans as her own Peru invites the other coastal states to husband resources they do not yet have the technology to exploit.

But Peru is inconsistent. Although denouncing neocolonialism in the great world, it tolerates it at home. It is not the first nation to do so. Probably it will not be the first nation to suffer for permitting the contradiction to exist.

At least half of Peru's fifteen million people are full-blooded Indians. Four-and-a-half centuries have passed since the empire that cradled them disintegrated, and still they have not found a home. They are the displaced race of the Andes, surviving in the blasting winds of the puna and in the slums of the coastal cities.

Millions of them are perpetually hungry, illiterate, ignorant of the official language (Spanish), unaware even that they are citizens of a nation called Peru. They communicate their messages verbally, in the mother tongues of Quechua or Aymara. They are "cholitos" (the Peruvian term, usually pejorative, for Indians)—the unprivileged, unwashed, unfed masses, oppressed through centuries by a minority "white" élite. If history teaches us anything, it is that the oppressed eventually come to see themselves for what they are, and that is when the revolution really begins.