



Letter From Peru

By Norman Gall

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The peasantry itself . . . cannot function independently in the political arena. It is deeply cleft into layers with sharply conflicting economic interests. It is the most numerous, but also the most scattered and backward section of the population. It is localized and Limited, economically and psychologically. For these reasons the village has, in China as elsewhere, always been subject to the town. The peasantry has always been at the command of the urban class able to centralize, weld, control, whether in the economic process or in politics. Without the centripetal force of the city, around which the rural economy must inevitably revolve, the peasant is helpless, especially the poorest peasant, the most exploited and nearest to the soil. His own attempts to better his own lot, without the aid of or in defiance of the dominant city class, have almost invariably taken the form of isolated acts of violence without permanent Issue.

—Harold R. Isaacs, *The Tragedy of the Chinese Revolution*

TOWARD the end of *Calle Recoleta* in the old Inca capital of CUZCO in southern Peru, there is a whitewashed adobe building with cavernous doorway and sagging balcony, where Indians wait in the shadows outside the office of the Peasants' Federation of Cuzco. Late at night the balcony is packed with emaciated beings wrapped in worn and dusty ponchos, shod in sandals cut from old rubber tires. Some chew slowly on coca leaves and dehydrated potatoes; now and then a derby-hatted woman stirs from her sleep, unwraps an infant from her shawl to give it the breast. Little other noise or movement issues from the mass of stinking bodies parked on the balcony. Some dazed, frightened eyes stare into the dimly lit office of the peasant federation. It is hard to believe that these Indians are capable of revolution, that this building in this tired city of ancient stone, from which the Incas ruled half a continent, is the seat of a major Communist-led offensive which is pushing Peru toward a terrible confrontation with the cruelties of her past.

On the other side of the balcony is the office of the Cuzco Workers' Federation. Inside, Ernesto Quispeledesma, one of the young lawyers serving as "juridical advisers" to the *sindicato* is listening to three Indian peons who just walked twelve hours from a hacienda near the town of Urcos. Beneath a poster announcing a world youth meeting in Prague, a university student is writing a receipt for monthly payments (between twenty cents and two dollars per family) from a *personero* (headman) of another community. The news from Urcos is that eight peasants have been killed and twenty wounded at the Hacienda Ninabamba; there was a fight with the *hacendado* (planter), who had a machine gun and rifles in his house. "That is a new *sindicato* of ours," Quispeledesma told me. "We don't know what happened yet. I am going there tomorrow to find out."

The Hacienda Ninabamba is a small plantation of rich pampa lowland in the valley of the Vilcanota River. The owner, Miguel Luna, is in the class of large landholders forming a little over 1 per cent of Peru's farmers and owning over 62 per cent of its land. The hacienda system of agriculture has never been very productive in the Peruvian sierra and is now in a visible state of decline. Some of the *hacendados* have already abandoned their holdings to

the Indians, and the average planter's dwelling resembles a run-down American Southern farmhouse of the turn of the century, with its home-made furniture, discolored wallpaper, and ancient photographs of stiffly posed ancestors. Many of the manorial families are represented now by only an aged couple and a few servants who look after their needs, their children having left to become merchants or government officials in Lima or Cuzco.

In the weeks before the clash at Ninabamba the peasants refused to do any work for the plantation and insisted on their right to the land they were farming; Miguel Luna, along with other *hacendadas*, began arming to defend his property. Then an agitator named Cesar Galdos, cousin of the famous Trotskyite peasant leader Hugo Blanco, appeared on the farm, and leaflets of the Castro-sponsored *Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR) were later found there. With the arrival of Galdos, the Indians demonstrated in front of the main house, declaring they would soon take over the land. On Christmas afternoon Luna's twenty-five-year-old son, educated at a Paris boarding school, got into a fight with two Indian youths and shot one of them in the foot with a pistol. The youths returned that night with several hundred indians who assaulted the hacienda with clubs, crude farm implements, slingshots, sharpened wood poles, and a few knives. Luna, his son, and a friend opened fire with a light machine gun and rifles, and the Indians fled with terrified screams from the garden of the *hacendado's* house, leaving behind some thirty casualties.

Lucio Quispe, twenty-nine, is a survivor of the massacre. A limp felt hat falls to his ears, framing the tension of his broad mouth and his small, moist eyes, shining with terror and injury. A brown poncho with faded red stripes covers his shoulders. His legs are bare beneath his knees, save for the rubber-tire sandals. "*Buenas Tardes*," he says, bowing timorously: this is virtually the only Spanish he knows. On his shoulder he carries a *chaquitacla*, a digging stick with a footrest and an iron blade, with which he plows and cultivates his half-acre plot, while his young wife follows behind breaking the clods into small pieces with her hands. "We joined the *sindicato* to better our conditions," Lucio Quispe tells me in so many words. "Before we organized last March we had to work 150 days a year for the right to farm our land. We were paid a sol and a half [six cents] a day for our work. After we joined the *sindicato* our pay was raised to five and a half sols [twenty-two cents]." He lives in a crumbling, windowless adobe house, with a ladder leading to an upper room where he stores his corn. His family of four exists on a diet of potatoes and corn. To keep him warm on winter days in the field, where the temperature often drops to twenty degrees below zero, he drinks *aguardiente*, a sugar-based brew strong enough to light a kerosene stove. To forget his hunger and his troubles he chews coca leaf and a lime ball to produce cocaine as well as a gastric secretion to ease his hunger. "We don't know what to do with the Indians," said Julio Luna, brother of the Ninabamba *hacendado* and president of the *Sociedad Agropecuaria de Cuzco*. "They are animals. These Indians are good for nothing, not even for eating."

THE DEGRADATION of the six million Quechua Indians, half of Peru's population, has passed through several stages. The Inca nobility governed them despotically but nevertheless allotted them enough fertile land, kept enough grain in reserve, and were humane enough as masters to maintain the Quechua population. During the two hundred years of Spanish rule that followed, Quechua numbers were to diminish by half. With the Spaniards came the *encomenderos*, the noblemen who were granted the labor of an Indian community in return for administering its land, and later the *corregidores*, minor judicial officials assigned to defend Indian legal rights. Many of the *encomenderos* and *corregidores* merely seized the Indian communal lands they were supposed to protect and sold the inhabitants into slave labor in the mines. The republican period (1824 to the present) freed the growing *mestizo* (half-breed) class from royal restrictions and they in turn seized whatever fertile Indian land they could get their hands on. Many Quechua communities were eventually driven from the river valleys to the mountain sides where the first Communist organizers found them about a decade ago.

Because of the continual stealing of Indian land through a variety of legal malpractices, the corruption of the traditional Spanish legal system, based on a civil code rather than precedent and trial by jury, reached an extreme in Peru. During the colonial period, according to anthropologist George Kubler, "The Indians were constantly wandering back and forth between the *repartimiento* [reservation] and the seat of their *Audiencia* [regional court] to secure legal papers usually worthless, for which they were heavily charged by the swarms of parasite solicitors and scribes who made their living in the Spanish cities from this occupation." Barratry among the Indians continues to thrive in Peru. As in colonial times, many of these lawsuits never reach trial because the judge or the lawyer or both wind up in the planter's pocket.

So far as local government is concerned, it is a matter of a few prominent families dividing up the jobs among their retainers. Last December Peru held its first municipal elections in forty years. Of 1,500 district (county) capitals, 1,200 lack aqueduct and sewage facilities and 725 lack roads to the outside world. The local judge, like the *corregidor* before him, is so badly paid that the judicial process has come to resemble an auction. And even with the new municipal elections, the Indians, who make up 95 per cent of the Sierra countryside, cannot elect officials of their own because the literacy requirement prevents them from voting.

"When we go into town to see the mayor or the judge, we must wait for hours," said Horacio Quispe, the sixty-year-old head of the community of Acna. "We are told to clean the floors and toilets of the city hall and the priest's house and the stables behind them. Then we are told to go back to our village and come back the next day with lambs and pigs to offer as gifts. Then they will hear our case." The community of Acna, 12,000 feet high, is a confusion of stony patches of about a half-acre each, farmed at a sixty-degree incline for corn and onions and potatoes. In more fertile parts of the sierra, a peasant's holding often consists of one or two furrows.

The land hunger in the sierra, as well as the poverty, are comparable to the worst in Asia. Because of the extensive mountains, deserts, and jungles, only 1.2 per cent of Peru is under cultivation, with 62 per cent of the population farming it. Only 0.44 acres per capita are under cultivation in Peru, compared with 0.79 in India and 0.42 in China.

THE formation of peasant *sindicatos* in the Andes dates back to 1952, when the Argentine buyers of the Hacienda Lauramarca decided to oust the 6,000 Indians living there and hire laborers in their place. Communist leaders organized a peasant union for defense of the land and stopped the eviction. Despite this, however, the Communist party in Cuzco remained a preserve of intellectuals allied with the small Workers' Federation and lacking any substantial following among the Quechua-speaking Indian masses. In fact, many of the Communists owned haciendas themselves, sent their children to Roman Catholic schools, and, as lawyers, built lucrative practices defending other planters in the courts. It has been the younger generation of revolutionary leaders, who, since the mid-1950's, have developed the peasant federation movement—a feat that seems the more remarkable when one considers the immense cultural as well as physical boundaries which have kept these communities apart from the rest of the nation. If the older Communists still give strategic advice to the peasant movement, it is the young, Quechua-speaking lawyers and field organizers who, night after night, make their way on foot and horseback over treacherous mountain paths and the great expanses of the *altiplano* to isolated haciendas and Indian villages. Several such difficult journeys are necessary to break down the intense distrust of an Indian village toward outsiders, and several more to convince it that free land can be obtained merely by forceful demands. Many of the organizers themselves were born in Indian communities and are recent converts to *mestizo* culture. Some have been trained in Russia and Cuba and function as professional, subsidized agitators. They remain in close touch with the two hundred peasant unions belonging to the Cuzco federation through a system of couriers, who will walk one or two whole days from their community to bring an item of news to the *Calle Recoleta* headquarters. These Peruvian *sindicatos* now have an estimated membership of 250,000 made up of hacienda peons and members of isolated mountain communities. They were responsible for some one hundred and fifty hacienda

invasions in 1965 and twenty-five more in the first months of 1964. At least seventy-one people have died in the fighting.

The Peruvian sierra has its romantic *Fidelista* hero in Hugo Blanco, a twenty-nine-year-old agronomist who became a Trotskyite after studying at Argentina's Universidad de la Plata. In La Convencion Valley, Blanco and a few friends have developed Peru's most troublesome peasant federation. The valley is little more than a thickly forested ravine until it spreads out beyond the hamlet of Quillabamba—eighty miles from Cuzco—to merge hundreds of miles away with the great jungle forming Peru's indistinct frontier with Brazil. These fertile lands were grazed by cattle until the 1930's when an epidemic wiped out most of the cows and peasants, forcing the *hacendados* to switch to cash crops and to rent their land to tenants or *arrendires*. To get the land into production, the landlords obligated the *arrendires* to more labor than they could possibly provide, with the result that the *arrendires* sublet part of their lands to indentured peons, or *allegados*, who in turn might subdivide the land two or three times after that. All of which produced a grotesque confusion of land tenure, with the kulak-like *arrendires* exploiting the sub-tenants and strengthening their holdings through equity in capita] improvements such as irrigation and coffee planting. Since 1958, with the assistance of Cuzco University students subsidized by the Communist-led Cuzco University Federation, Blanco's federation mobilized the *allegados* against the *hacendados* and *arrendires* and persuaded them to refuse to do their contracted work..

More violent tactics were not long in coming. On Christmas Day, 1962. a band of about two hundred peasants disarmed two policemen at Chaullay, near Quillabamba. and that night clashed with police reinforcements at Chaullay Bridge. Using machine guns the police killed thirty of the peasants. Meanwhile, three policemen were killed in two other attacks and Blanco was formally charged with their deaths.

AFTER THESE incidents, Blanco and his companions withdrew deeper into the valley, his so-called guerrilla operations really a desperate flight from the police and army troops who were pouring into the area. He was finally captured last May in La Convencion Valley, and since then he has been in jail in the south coast city of Arequipa where, police say, he sees visitors, issues manifestoes, and directs key activities of his Revolutionary Workers' Party. In December he went on a hunger strike, and 5,000 of his followers marched on Cuzco, enforcing a general strike and destroying a bridge, telegraph lines, and train rails. Nevertheless, the government refuses either to try or to free him.

After Blanco's capture, the military junta, which had nullified the 1962 elections by a coup d'état, initiated a program of agrarian reform on two plantations in La Convencion Valley. On one hacienda, some 3,800 acres (for which the owner received \$10,000) were distributed among 260 peas. ants. The plots consisted of eroded hillsides that might produce one crop every three or four years; the good pampa land, reserved for sugar cane, remained in the owner's possession and was farmed by hired labor from outside the valley. The *sindicato* leaders urged the peasants to refuse to pay for the land under the low-price, long-term plan of the government. Those who insisted on buying were taken from their homes, dressed up as women, and dragged through the streets of Quillabamba.

Revolutionary activity in the sierra is still limited by such primitive means of coercion and will remain a political rather than a military problem until the Indians get modern weapons. But this may happen sooner than expected. Last May, seven Peruvian youths, all sons of middle- or upper-class families, were killed or captured crossing the border from Bolivia. The police announced that they had been trained at Che Guevara's guerrilla warfare school in Minas del Frio, Cuba, and were carrying arms and money to assist Hugo Blanco. Some eighteen months earlier a yang airliner, carrying a group of Cuban officials, had crashed en route to La Paz, Bolivia. A packet of documents found at the crash reportedly contained plans for revolutionary activities in the sierra to be carried out from the Cuban embassy in La Paz. Peru had already broken diplomatic relations with Havana in December 1960. following the discovery of records in the Lima embassy of payments to Peruvians to finance Communist activity and to provide favorable publicity for the Cuban Revolution. Luis de la

Puente Uceda, head of the Castro-supported Movement of the Revolutionary Left, is reliably reported to have received at least \$70,000 for trips to Cuba.

If Cuba is indeed supplying military assistance, the weapons have not appeared in the sierra — though police claim to have discovered several stores of them in the coastal cities. Some observers are convinced that Cuban weapons will not be used as long as the new government of Fernando Belaunde Terry remains in power. For Belaunde, a devout Catholic who is also allied with the small Christian Democratic party of Lima intellectuals, won the Presidency with Communist support in 1963, and he still depends on that support today.

THE IMMEDIATE political danger posed by the Quechua uprising in Peru is that of a military coup which would again frustrate the movement to establish constitutional democracy in Peru. This movement is already split, largely because of bitter enmity between Belaunde and Victor Raul Haya de la Torre, though it should be said that Belaunde's hatred of Haya's American Popular Revolutionary Alliance (APRA) is shared by almost everyone else in Peruvian politics. It is this animosity which has led Belaunde—whose own Accion Popular Party is too small, amorphous, and *personalista* to run a strong national campaign—to accept the support of the disciplined Communist machine, just as, on the other side, it has led Haya to form an alliance with the oligarchical party of ex-dictator Manuel Odria, whose regime was responsible for the death and imprisonment of many *Apristas*. In last December's municipal elections, in which APRA was badly beaten, Peruvian voters were treated to the extraordinary spectacle of Odria's wife running as APRA candidate for mayor of Lima.

Thus the two main democratic factions are dependent on extremists of the left and right respectively and can agree on very little. (Rival proposals for agrarian reform legislation, for example, have been stalled for months in the Congress, which is controlled by the APRA-Odria coalition.) Following the Ninabamba slaughter, the APRA-Odria coalition voted a Congressional censure of the Belaunde cabinet for failing to take action against the Communists. In February Belaunde finally declared martial law in Cuzco Department after eight thousand indians invaded haciendas near the railroad town of Sicuani, and nineteen peasants were killed. If the disorders continue, as they probably will, the "soft on Communism" refrain is likely to produce another military coup in Peru. Short of a counter-coup uniting the peasants, their cousins in the slums of the coastal cities, the Communists, the progressive or "Nasserist" elements in the armed forces, and the Lima middle classes—all of whom support Belaunde—another military dictatorship would leave Peru that much more exposed to the tide of revolution that is slowly rising in the countryside.

Meanwhile, the Peruvian oligarchy bides its time behind the scenes. It continues to maintain its stranglehold upon the economy, as evidenced by the fact that one-tenth of 1 per cent of the population still earns 20 per cent of the national income. (Fifty-six per cent of the population earns less than \$4.50 a month.) The main instrument of the oligarchy's economic power is the banking system: five banks owned by a few families control three-fourths of Peru's commercial credit, roughly the same proportion of which goes to borrowers in the Lima area. Other domains of the Peruvian oligarchy, sometimes shared with U.S. corporations, are large-scale commercial agriculture, mining, cement and other construction materials, as well as the booming Lima real-estate market. The political power of these families has been demonstrated many times in the past. Their favored method is to create an artificial credit and food scarcity and then bribe a few generals to carry out a military coup. With the growth of a "Nasserist" spirit in the armed forces and of a substantial middle class in Lima, one of the big questions in Peruvian politics today is whether the oligarchy still has enough power to overthrow Belaunde's regime.

U.S. policy is caught between the peasants' claims to elementary justice and the Peruvian oligarchy's strong connections in American business and political circles. Since the 1952 revolution, the United States has paid more than \$250 million to contain the threat of

increasing Communist power in Bolivia and each year provides roughly one-third of Bolivia's annual budget. No such contribution has been made to Peru, which has had no revolution. So far the Alliance for Progress in the sierra, apart from the work of one hundred fifty Peace Corps volunteers, has been limited to the Food for Peace plan and to programs of road-building and technical aid to large cattle breeders, none of which can be said to have strengthened the government's position against the oligarchy.

In a recent interview Belaunde said that "we have made many requests for funds from the United States for loans to support our programs, but there are many studies and reports and discussions and, so far, very little real help." Belaunde's main proposal is for a three hundred million dollar "marginal highway" on the eastern slopes of the Andes, running through Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Bolivia. The highway is designed to give these countries a ground route to the east coast cities of Brazil and Argentina and to open up the *selva* or jungle area for colonization. According to Belaunde, "the only real agrarian reform possible in Peru must be carried out in the *selva*, east of the Andes, where there is much rich land. Elsewhere, there is practically none."

Meanwhile, the U.S. apparently has shelved Belaunde's very modest request for a \$10 million loan to buy "*picos y palas*" (picks and shovels) to equip one-hundred-forty-four tool-lending centers in the sierra. Indian agricultural tools are so primitive that the introduction of iron implements in sufficient quantity could by itself initiate a technological revolution in the sierra. According to Belaunde, the Export-Import Bank agreed to finance the purchase of road-building machinery, but not of agricultural tools which could be lost or stolen and did not constitute a good risk. On the other hand, the Peruvian government with its overstaffed, low-paid, underskilled, and often corrupt bureaucracy, has still to inspire confidence in its capacities, especially in view of the fact that it proposes to carry out fundamental social reforms while working a twenty-eight-hour week with two months' annual leave.

"*Picos y palas*" is an integral part of Belaunde's attempt to develop Peru through community work programs. "More than half of the populated parts of our national territory remain inaccessible," Belaunde wrote shortly before his 1963 election. "For this reason we think it necessary to turn our eyes to the towns and villages themselves. We must revive the unextinguished flame of the communal spirit, which continues bearing unexpected fruits in the heights of the Andes and the plains of the *selva*. We must promote this voluntary work, which is the way of humble and patriotic people, lacking money, of paying their tributary portion to the nation."

Invoking the communal traditions of the Inca empire, Belaunde's program may be all too romantic, but it is not much more so than the Alliance for Progress itself. At present the large U.S. aid mission in Peru, like many others in Latin America, is bizarrely overstaffed in its comfortable Lima office and understaffed in the field. In Lima AID occupies several floors of a large office building, while it only has two representatives in the desperately backward Department of Cuzco. Thus, the Alliance for Progress both imitates and encourages the traditional overcentralization of Latin American governments. This is one of the reasons why the Alliance has had a very limited effect in Peru, and would have had practically none at all but for the four-hundred-and-fifty Peace Corps volunteers who work in the slums and countryside.

TO BE sure, the situation in the Peruvian sierra is so explosive that the mere presence of a *grin go* at the scene of a strike or demonstration can be an incitement to violence; consequently, American field personnel have frequently been withdrawn when an eruption has occurred in the sierra. However, Peru has entered a period in which the politics of extreme poverty—of insurrection with nothing to lose but miserable lives—are in the ascendancy. Electoral democracy, having fared so badly at the hands of the army and oligarchy, is in the Belaunde regime undergoing its final test as a viable political system for Peru.

The Andean highlands of southern Peru and Bolivia form a single geopolitical unit where ten million people live in extreme poverty with few economic and social relations with the outside world. However, these relations are increasing with the penetrations of modern technology as well as of political currents such as the Alliance for Progress and the militant inspiration of the Communist-led peasant federations. Twelve years ago Bolivia had her peasant revolution, which brought little improvement. Peru, less purely Indian, appears to be in for a longer and less decisive class struggle carried on amid the tensions of a 3.4 per cent annual rise in population and a historic national incapacity for political cooperation. Confronted by such realities as these, the Alliance policy of sowing social reform and political democracy has begun to founder, and the Johnson administration is backing away from President Kennedy's missionary commitment to the development of Latin America. But the problems of revolution and repression in Latin America, and of creating new markets for our mushrooming productive capacity, do not diminish because our initial solutions have not borne fruit. Nor can they be resolved by cutting back foreign aid and reverting to our hemispheric policies of the Republican 1920's and the Truman-Eisenhower postwar period. The United States has been irrevocably cast in the role of an international institution responsible in a great measure for the stability and progress of this hemisphere. We cannot pretend to remain merely a nation among the nations of America while our power and interests lie deeply embedded in the life of every republic and Latin America continues its deterioration into a continental slum. Not only in Peru, but increasingly throughout Hispanic America, the seed-bearers of revolution from the towns continue to sow the whirlwind in the countryside. The rapid organization of the Quechua Indians is merely one striking example of another "alliance for progress" in the Americas against which our own schemes for the guidance of history must either contend or risk being violently swept aside.

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