

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CRT - 11  
Arequipa Objects

(Arequipa)  
c/o American Embassy  
Lima, Peru  
December 26, 1955

Mr. Walter S. Rogers  
Institute of Current World Affairs  
522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

During the past months in which I have been traveling among the indian peoples of the Peruvian sierra, I have often felt that the most striking void in the range of activities which the indian considers proper to himself, and which are by common consent assigned to him, is in the area of political activity. It is one of the distinguishing marks of the white and the mestizo to be concerned with politics, on at least the local level, and few conversations, with the mestizo especially, fail to turn to political problems. With the indian the opposite is true - unless one forces this topic into discussion it is rarely touched upon.

This contrast between the politically neutral indian and the white-mestizo was sharply brought home last week in Arequipa, Peru's second largest city, where I had the opportunity to witness Peruvians in political action, or, perhaps better said, the will of the body politic translated into concrete results without the intervention of political forms and legal process.

On Wednesday, December 21, "El Comercio," one of Lima's leading newspapers, received this telegram: "After gaining theater aided by valiant people of Arequipa and program begun we were dislodged by police and tear gas bombs Stop We transferred to main Plaza, police proceeded as before proving farce with respect to civil liberties Stop We protest vile outrage energetically." (Signed) Pedro Roselló.

The events referred to in the telegram marked the beginning of four days of unrest and tension in Arequipa which went ill with preparations for the celebration of Christmas. The uproar provoked by an attempt to prevent a political meeting culminated in an uneasy peace on Christmas Eve, which eased but did not erase the upset and strain of the preceding four days.

Pedro Roselló, millionaire industrialist, who styles himself "a common man," is the head of the newest political party to appear in

Peru in anticipation of the promised presidential elections to be held in June of 1956. His organization is called the Coalición Nacional ("National Coalition," CN). Up to now the announced program of the CN has been a medley of vague references to national welfare, the common good, liberty and the like, with but two definite themes: the repeal of the Law of Internal Security (which gives the government unlimited police powers), and that the CN is the "party of the people, the worker, the man in the street." Whatever its purposes, however, the CN has already drawn a great deal of attention to itself through a campaign of expensive advertising and through the recent refusal of the Prefect of Lima to allow a meeting under its auspices.

The CN scheduled a rally in Arequipa's Municipal Theater for Wednesday, December 21, after having obtained permission of the local officials. Its advent was heralded by advertisements in newspapers, loudspeaker trucks, and red and white posters and labels which were pasted indiscriminately on houses, public and private buildings, trucks, busses, trolleys and cars. To someone newly arrived such as myself it seemed as if Arequipa had gone all out in support of this party.

The city was quiet on Wednesday afternoon and the shopping center was busy with toy stores doing the most business. But as six o'clock approached the shoppers became aware of groups of men standing on street corners, some arguing, some only watching. It was not a usual occurrence but not so abnormal as to cause too much perturbation.

However, when Roselló and the other leaders of the CN arrived at the Municipal Theater, they found their entrance blocked by a determined group of men and women, among whom were several leaders of the local branch of the Partido Restaurador ("Restoration Party," PR, the official government party). Although no one will ever be sure, some persons claim that "goons" especially imported from Lima were among the blockaders.

After a confused struggle, the CN faction managed to force its way into the theater, but was allowed only a few moments of formal meeting. No sooner had the party's second in command, Mujica Gallo, said a few words than uniformed men (identified later as "assault guards sent from Lima") protected by gas masks released several tear gas bombs into the auditorium which was filled to overflowing.

In the mêlée which followed the theater was emptied and the crowd tried to move to the Plaza de Armas. They found mounted as well as foot police ready to prevent this. A loud battle ensued between the police and the crowd, in which the police defended themselves with

sabers and nightsticks, and their opponents with sticks and cobblestones ripped from the streets. The latter were also used to throw up makeshift barricades.

At this point in the development of the night's events, opinions diverge, depending upon the observer's sympathies, as to whether the police coldly turned their guns on the crowd and shot away, or whether a few of them became panicky and shot into the mass of demonstrators. In any case, the casualties reported the next day were six shot, two wounded by sabres (one student with his right eye plucked out) and five injured by stones (probably thrown by the besieged but treated as if hurled by the police).

The mob was finally dispersed after the shootings but the protestors did not abandon the streets completely. They stood on corners and shouted their outraged feelings; saw to it that the merchants closed up shop; impeded traffic; and in general were noisy in promises of retribution.

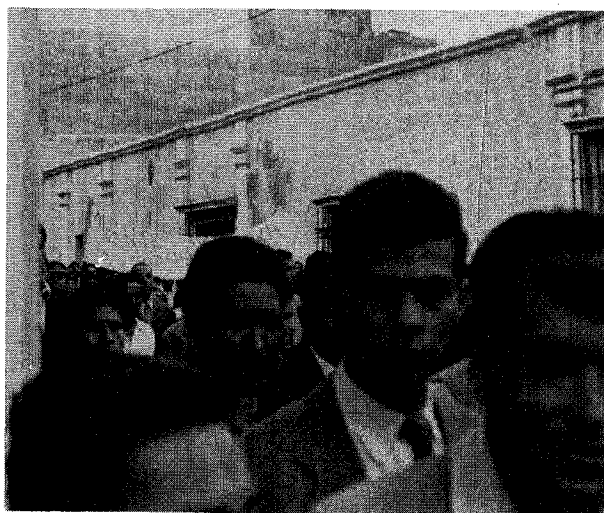
By midnight, however, the city was a dead thing, and most of Arequipa slept uneasily, except for the leaders of various students' and workers' organizations who formed a "Front" to protest the events of the day.

On Thursday morning these groups declared a general work stoppage in protest and the city's commercial functions were paralyzed. The wounded in the hospital were visited by a succession of politicians, students, workers and by General Pérez Godoy, Commandant of the Third Division, resident in Arequipa. (Pérez Godoy later assumed the post of Prefect when his predecessor found it incumbent to resign and fly to Lima.)

But most of the populace stayed at home and waited for the next happening, and read three different versions of Wednesday's affair in the newspapers: "El Pueblo," anti-shootings and pro-strikers; "La Nación," pro-government and anti-strike; or "Las Noticias," generally objective but in sympathy with the strikers.

Four in the afternoon brought a dark clouded sky and a meeting in the Plaza de Armas of students, workers and partisans who marched through the main streets shouting "liberty, liberty, liberty" and carrying banners of cheap muslin on which appeared such slogans as 'Death to the Dictatorship,' "Down with Tyranny," and "Down with Esparza."

This last caused some surprise in the city by its daring, for Esparza, Minister of Police, is something of a legend in Peru, along the lines of the more notorious leaders of secret police in history.



### Thursday's Marchers.

His ruthlessness and air of invincibility had caused many Peruvians to think him stronger than even President Odría himself.

But the ariquipeños who were protesting Wednesday's violence were beyond fearing a legend, and Esparza served as a convenient focus upon which to vent their feelings. It was finally announced that the general strike would continue until Esparza resigned from his cabinet post.

Surprisingly this demonstration was conducted in an orderly fashion and broke up without any out of the way incidents, despite the gloomy forebodings of many people. In fact, one of the most impressive aspects of the four days was this general orderliness of the meetings and activities of the protesting groups, and one of the main selling points in favor of supporting the spontaneous uproar against what had by now become an attempt to inhibit the exercise of civil liberties. (It was only in the actions of small groups, outside the official events, that the violence of Wednesday was continued.)

By ten in the evening the streets were again empty, and a chilly wind played games with the scraps of paper which littered them, most of which were torn up CN posters.

On Friday, another protest gathering was held at ten in the morning, and the lines of protest were fixed in favor of civil liberty. The crowd in the Plaza was larger than Thursday's, having been augmented

by many persons who seemed to be more in a holiday mood than a fighting one, but who were nonetheless vigorous in their cheers for the speechmakers. The steel shutters of the stores were drawn, and in one store, equipped only with a grill work screen for protection, the owner was nervously watching the movements outside for his plate glass windows were tempting targets for stones.

A few minutes after eleven, Pedro Roselló arrived in the Plaza de Armas, and was hoisted on the shoulders of several people who carried him to a stone pillar which was being used as a temporary rostrum. His big, paunched frame in its handsome vicuña jacket teetered uneasily on this perch throughout his speech. (Someone near me remarked: "This 'man of the people' couldn't look more like a bloated capitalist if he tried.")

Roselló, unfortunately as it turned out, chose to talk of the CN and the outrage committed against it, which drew quick whistles (the Latin sign of disapproval) from the listeners. He got down hastily and his place was taken by Ildefonso Alemán of the Bank Employee's syndicate who made it clear that the general strike was apolitical, had nothing to do with any political party, and was intended as an expression of Arequipa's concern for the maintenance of civil liberties. Roselló looked rather disgruntled at having misjudged the temper of the crowd, but applauded dutifully.

The spectators became restless as speaker followed speaker, each one repeating more or less the same themes, and it seemed that any provocative word or action could easily explode the crowd into violence. The leaders of the demonstration seemed to sense this too, and in the middle of one speech, two men climbed lampposts and shouted "On to the University" - to hear more speeches as everyone knew, but at least it gave the participants a chance to exercise by running to the University grounds.

In the evening, however, some of the potential violence found an outlet in an unscheduled attack on the local radio station, Radio Continental. The attackers found it guarded by police and a furious struggle followed, in which the ubiquitous cobblestones and sticks were matched against the billy clubs and gas bombs of the police. (Most of the casualties of this fracas were caused by the bombs which damaged a few skulls as they fell from the upper stories of the building.)

When the door was finally forced, the invaders found the transmitters turned off and the station closed down. They let off steam by smashing up the fixtures of the auditorium, however, before



Before Friday's  
Meeting. Plaza de  
Armas.

Listening to  
the Speeches.



Rosell6 Speaks.

withdrawing. (This sally evoked less support in the newspapers of the next day since it was an unwarranted assault on private property, although, by a perhaps not unexpected logic, it was blamed ultimately on the "tyranny and violence" of those responsible for Wednesday's measures.)

Friday also provided confirmation of the effects the strike and protest were having in other parts of Peru. Sympathy strikes were promised in Cuzco, Juliaca and Lima on the part of students and workers to show their support of Arequipa's stand and demands. The newspapers of Lima (minus "La Nación") gave wide coverage to the events and were strongly in sympathy with Arequipa. The arrival in Lima of Oscar Balbuena Marroquín, the student who had lost his eye to a sabre, for medical treatment was given a front page spread by "La Prensa" and "El Comercio."

Christmas Eve brought gloom and fear to Arequipa: the stores were still tightly shuttered, no transportation was running, presents were unbought, salaries unpaid, food running out and restless men roamed the streets acting as guardians of the strike. There was by no means unanimous support of the comment made by one of the student leaders the day before, "If some must suffer through this strike then we must all suffer."

It was the unpredictable actions of the small bands of vigilantes who stationed themselves throughout the city that kept most people indoors and caused the most concern. Bill and Peg MacLeish had a run-in with about twelve of these men which was typical of such incidents recorded that day.

The MacLeishes tried to get out of the city to pick up the turkey for Christmas dinner early in the morning but were met by a small mob which shouted "Get this truck off the street." Then the men jumped on the truck, tried to let the air out of the tires and finally began to shower it with stones. Luckily, Bill managed to drive through the attackers and got home by a circuitous route.

Later, Bill called me and I decided to join them to compare and to rue the events. My hotel is separated from the Quinta in which they are staying by the Chili River, and the only bridge across it passes through the center of town. The vigilantes had barricaded this bridge to all traffic and were hardly more congenial to pedestrians. So I crossed the river in a slippery wet journey over smooth stones well down stream from the bridge, not feeling very agile with the camera, briefcase and shoes I was carrying. Bill remarked when I reached his side, "What - no typewriter?"

Radio Continental came back on the air with Christmas Music - "Silent Night," "God Rest ye Merry Gentlemen," and even "White Christmas" in an odd Spanish version. Radio Nacional (the government station) did the same and continued to keep an absolute silence on matters in Arequipa: as far as it was concerned things were normal in Peru.

At noon this announcement came over Radio Continental: "The new cabinet will be sworn in at seven o'clock this evening in the Government Palace." Later, we read that the cabinet had resigned en masse so as "not to embarrass the government."

Esparza was out and the "Front" could recognize Christmas now that its demands had been met. A "suspension of the general strike" was declared by the leaders, and we were told by phone that the banks and stores would open in the evening. The last official act of the "Front" was to hold a victory demonstration at four, with more speeches extolling liberty, Arequipa's role in its maintenance and the downfall of Esparza.

By seven, as if by magic, the city took on its normal appearance: the stores were ablaze with light and music blared from loudspeakers; the crowds were thick, jubilant and buying furiously to make up for the lost time; the coffee machines in the cafés around the Plaza de Armas were doing double duty. The only signs of the events of the four days were piles of cobblestones at street corners and a few bullet holes in some walls.

A special edition of "El Pueblo" appeared with a lead editorial entitled "Arequipa in the Breach...." One typical paragraph ran: "...the outcry against the arbitrariness, the anti-democratic attitude and the lack of scruples of one man who had become a symbol of oppression was a national outcry. But it remained for Arequipa, now as a hundred times before in the Republic's turbulent history, to take up the banner of rebellion and hold it up with an angry gesture, naked breast and heroic attitude."

With relief and satisfaction, then, the Christ child was welcomed into Arequipa homes.

Sunday was a day of the easing of tension, although many people still jumped at the sound of firecrackers going off, and wondered if Monday would bring a revival of the strike in view of the "suspension" clause published by the "Front."

It was also a day of reflection on what had happened. Most

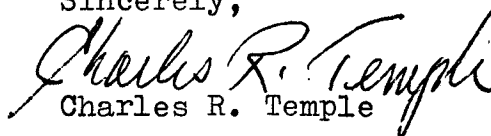


persons were content that all was over, but some looked warily at the entirely military cabinet which had taken the place of the old civilian-military one. Others wondered if the "Front" ought to have committed itself to such ticklish proposals as the repeal of the Law of Internal Security and a general amnesty for political opponents of the government. And one man whispered to me: "Yes, there's peace now, but in a few weeks the vengeance of Esparza may come, and then...?"

The one thing which went unmentioned was for me the most interesting aspect of the uproar: the total absence of the indian in any of the activities, although Arequipa has a substantial indian population. This was revealing in two ways: for what it says about the white-mestizo attitude toward the indian as a political animal, and for what it says about the indian's concept of his place in political affairs. The indians I saw in the streets of Arequipa during the four days' activities **were** spectators, and not very interested ones at that.

This is a curious situation in a country in which the indian accounts for nearly 60% of the population, but represents a time honored state of affairs. Bill MacLeish and I were watching Thursday's demonstrators marching through the streets with their cry of "liberty," when an indian cargador (carrier) in homespun, his cheek distended with a coca wad, passed us. Bill was moved to remark: "And I suppose this 'liberty' is for him, too?"

Sincerely,

  
Charles R. Temple

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