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Integration - I

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New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The future of the Andean farmer is a prime topic of conversation in Ecuador. This country is essentially agricultural, and what might happen to its large farming population, primarily indian, is of even greater importance than in Bolivia, which can rely to some extent on mineral production for economic security, or in Peru, which can count with sugar, cotton and rice (produced outside the subsistence agricultural pattern of the indian) as well as minerals and oil to support itself. Ecuador wants to feed itself, but has had a long history of recurrent scarcities in basic food items, and a population cursed with dietary deficiencies.

Through feeding itself, the nation can cut down on expenditures for imported foodstuffs, and turn its income to the purchase of ~~needed~~ technical assistance and machinery to deal with needs in communications, public health, education and projected industrialization.

In order to achieve this end, many people feel that the indians of the sierra have to be made into something resembling the U.S. farmer. One Ecuadorian asked me rather wryly, "Why shouldn't there be a Buick in front of every hut in this country - and maybe a deep freeze inside too?" Others, who consider the agricultural need less pressing, are interested in raising the indian's income through a program of revival of handicraft industries. Both intentions, however, follow a common line of argument. If the indian's buying power is increased, not only will he be a potential customer for the output of home industry, but he will also gradually be absorbed into the national life, as now interpreted by the white and mestizo population of the country. Simply stated, the basic premise is: alter his consumption habits and you alter his life. In this relatively painless way, "integration" is achieved.

According to several persons with whom I have talked, the simplicity of this argument is deceptive. One said: "What seems

to be overlooked by all these people who propose integration through greater consumption is that today there are hundreds of indian families in Ecuador who are relatively well off, with plenty of spare cash to purchase what they like. But they don't - I think because they are not cognizant of the same needs as we are, and there's no reason why they should be. Is it going to do any good to put more money in more hands unless first we are assured that the indian will use it to benefit the general economy?" Another comment put the counter case more succinctly: "I certainly don't think that by increasing the material inventory of the indian, we're going to convert him to our beliefs as to what constitutes a proper way of life. An inanimate object is hardly a good teacher."

The problems, however, are broader than the dispute over the efficacy of material goods in inducing change in the indian's life. One day, soon after arriving in Ecuador, a school teacher said to me: "Look around you - everywhere the indian. He's the basis of our economy whether we like it or not. Any improvement in the future has to begin with him. We have to revise our agricultural system, which may mean land reform - although don't quote me on that - and this has to take off from the indian base. You know what that means: changing the lives and viewpoints of a group of indifferent peasants. All of this has to be accomplished by mass education, a feat in itself. And, the difficulty of difficulties, is that we are faced with a human rather than a technical problem: we have to work with a living breathing indian - stubborn, backward, and often stupid."

It is easy to agree that change in the life of the indian in Ecuador, or anywhere else in the Andes, involves staggering human problems. But, where the teacher would restrict the sources of these problems to the indian's psychology, they might be extended as well to the attitudes of the non-indian world, which, whether correct or false, whether enlightened or prejudiced, govern the relations between indian and white-mestizo. In turn, these relationships affect programs for change and integration. For example, one mestizo told me: "I hope you're not one of those anthropologists who runs around advocating uplift for the poor indian. None of them seems to realize that there are more than just indians in this country: there are people like myself who need help just as badly as any indian. I've got a wife and four children, and make \$50. a month. We just get by, but prices are going up all the time. Besides, have you thought what kind of world would come out of integrating the indian? I have, and it scares me. I certainly don't want that indian to be my equal just because the law says he must be. Give him power and we'll all be chewing coca before long." [Unlike his

counterpart in Bolivia and Peru, the Ecuadorian indian does not take coca.7

This is not an isolated opinion in the non-indian world, nor is its mingling of reason and prejudice confined to the mestizos or whites. The indian is equally capable of criticizing integration in such terms, although his criticism often expresses itself in nothing more than hostility to the white and stranger, or playing dumb before him. Whatever other problems are pertinent to integration, it seems that in this area of mutual misunderstandings and misapprehensions lies the essential difficulty governing the future of the indian.

Other problems, however, which lie outside human attitudes and emotions, are involved in agricultural reform in Ecuador. They are what one informant labeled "technical problems in an untechnical country." This same man went on to say that "these problems are, for us, particularly great, since we seem to be fond of treating material obstacles to rhetoric and passion, as if to atomize them with the sheer force of words and the strength of emotion."

What these technical problems are were summarized for me by an Ecuadorian, educated here and abroad, whose hobby is to collect statistics relating to a weird variety of subjects, such as the taxes imposed on foreign peoples during the reign of Hadrian to how many hair nets are purchased in the United States each year. He wasn't particularly interested in whether or not the indian farmer is converted into a reformed agriculturalist, but he did enjoy the chance to comment upon some of the statistics he had gathered.

"Agricultural reform. For some people this is a dirty word in Ecuador. Probably 75% of my friends would react to it as violently as if you had insulted their honor. Anyway, it's a possibility - given time and money. Money with which to buy teachers to train the farmer in scientific methods. Time to allow the effects of such training to accumulate into pressures which will change the indian's not surprising fondness for techniques which were good enough for his father and grandfather.

"Patience, too, I imagine. There are so many people involved in the agricultural field in Ecuador. Seventy-eight percent of the sierra population lives outside the cities. These people are farmers first, no matter what else they might do. You know that the Otavalos weave, and that some of them do this exclusively - we haven't any good figures on how many - but even such men are part of families which till the soil. They are artisans in farming families, and the

weaving is the incidental factor.

"This incidental factor is widespread, however. You'll rarely find an indian farmer who doesn't at one time or another supplement his income with other work, the road gangs hired by the Ministry of Public Works, for instance. Excepting the huasipungueros, of course, since their life is the hacienda's conception of what that should be. [The huasipunguero is a worker on an hacienda who exchanges his services for rights of usufruct to a plot of land called huasipungo]

"Two important points come out of this situation. First, the indian is not apt to believe overnight that by improving his agricultural technique, he is going to be better off. The land is notorious in his mind for giving subsistence and not much more. Second, and paradoxically, being a farmer before anything else, he will resist changing his methods since they have always served him, even, in some areas, asserting that it would offend the gods to alter the usual ways. With the huasipunguero, the situation is even more difficult: if, as part of modernizing agriculture here, there was to be a distribution of land to him as private property, the initial shock of being on his own completely for the first time won't make him particularly susceptible to change. I should think he'd be even more eager to cling to the old ways, for they are the familiar ones.

"There are something like 450,000 indians in the huasipungo arrangement, and perhaps 500,000 who own their own land - not always very good land, nor, in many cases, ample enough to support a man's family. The total million or so, however, probably do not have enough land to suffice for their needs, and the only way to change this is to redistribute land from the large haciendas, especially in the more fertile areas. This is not as radical as it seems, for most of the large estates let considerable quantities of land lie fallow every year, sometimes as high as 50%. There's no reason why these unused lands shouldn't be cultivated by freeholders.

"On the surface, that is, but here one runs into the problem of having the population on the spot at the right time, and, unfortunately, in many areas of large landholdings, there just isn't the necessary local population to exploit the lands. Every year there are complaints of labor shortages made by the hacendados. The report of the Ecuatorian Commission [of Inter-American Development, 1944] states flatly that the population of the country is inadequate to till the available land; and a study by Carrera [César Andrade Carrera, "La reforma agraria en el Ecuador," Cuadernos Americanos, 1946] complains that even if there should be an agrar-

ian reform here, there aren't enough indians to till the five hectares each could receive. Some advocate resettling indian groups in favored areas, but the indian isn't too keen on this idea. His home is his home - after the fashion of Stein.

"Time, money and patience, you see. Even simple enlightenment in agricultural techniques - not to say land reform - has to reckon with the indian labor force committed to primitive cultivation methods, without much faith in the concept of an income earning farmer which a U.S. technician would bring with him, and badly distributed over the country, as well as being inadequate to the available land potential. Another example of the trouble here: in the better lands, there is a high population density which is too strong for the capacity even of good land. With scientific farming, poorer lands could be made to give a decent yield for a family, but, can you imagine the troubles one would encounter if he tried to persuade indians on good land to migrate to poorer land - even though their immediate surroundings didn't support them adequately?

"And just to complicate matters, in a country of miserable communications, poor general health, with nearly fifty percent of the population illiterate, you have to deal with the isolation of the sierra groups from each other. There is a surprisingly small amount of homogeneity from one region to the next - even from town to town. This lack of consistency is pretty much a function of the geography, and the lack of communications to overcome it. A goodly percentage of communities develop over the years in nearly total isolation. So, one can't expect a uniform reaction to a given program of change throughout the country. A presentation which might work in Cayambe won't in Guayllabamba: each time someone initiated change he'd be literally starting over again. So back to time, money and patience.

"It's not an optimistic outlook, is it? Add to what I've said that education in every aspect of life has to be the basis of any reform, and consider the amount of money and personnel which that requires, and you begin to sweat. And to wonder why so many people are free with their opinions on this or that method of integrating our indian.

"What I might have said at first, and saved all this diatribe, is that in order to change the life of the sierra indian, you are faced with multiple operations on a dozen different levels, and to ignore one in favor of the other is detrimental to your goals.

"Presumably the point of integration is to induce the indian to live as so-called civilized people do, and to minister to his spiritual as well as physical needs. You can't do this simply by

giving him more money to spend, or to hoard, more likely. Suppose there is a radio and a sewing machine in a filthy one room airless hut, shared by seven people and a number of domestic animals. Is this integration? Or, suppose you teach the indian child to read and write, and principles of hygiene and conduct. Then he returns each night to his dirty home, his dirty parents, who are unaware of the most elementary rules of being clean or avoiding disease, who cannot read, nor write, who are symbols of what the child is told is wrong. What happens to your enlightenment then?"

Perhaps the most important point made by this Ecuadorian concerns the multiple aspects of any program to revise the indian's agricultural behavior and to integrate him into the national life.

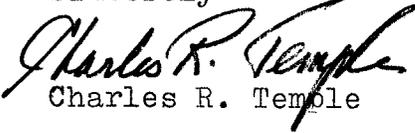
Since 1953, Bolivia has had to cope with this problem, and has had a mixed success. Certainly, as Dick Patch saw during his time there, a real social revolution is in progress, in which the indian is playing a leading role. Agrarian reform has not kept pace, however, and in many instances production on the land has decreased while generally it has not increased. Most of the reasons for this derive from factors over which the individual farmer has little control: too small a land holding, ignorance of improved farming methods, and a scarcity of machines, tools, fertilizers and technicians. Many medium sized haciendas, operating on advanced lines, and legally exempt from expropriation, have been taken over by indians unprepared to manage them well, and so their production has been reduced also. In addition, the government has been hard put to provide the educational centers needed to teach the indian scientific agriculture, standards of hygiene and the like. To make matters worse, through the scene move big and little demagogues, out for what they can get in the fluid confused situation.

Ecuadorians sincerely interested in agricultural reform are aware of the Bolivian experience, and tend to be cautious in their proposals, and sometimes despairing in their outlook.

I was told: "There is one important difference between Ecuador and Bolivia: a revolution. With a revolution, almost any action can be taken in the name of progress, and critics, who do not hold the guns, are forced into silence. So it's easy to publish a decree implementing land reform, or to summarily order funds for this municipality or schools for that one. Here, however, the situation is quite different. All the steps taken are subject to approval by the existing electorate - which means lobbies and pressure groups have to be satisfied. Few arbitrary actions can be accomplished, and

critics have their day. Under these circumstances, the problems to be dealt with double. If anyone should tell you it's simple to integrate our indian in this relatively democratic environment, he's hopelessly naive."

Sincerely

  
Charles R. Temple

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