

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CRT - 19  
Return to Lima

Hotel Bolivar  
Lima  
Peru  
June 3, 1956

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

At dawn, from the plane flying southward over Peru, there are two spectacular sights which evoke the foreignness of the country below. To the east, the jagged silhouette of the Andes, a continuous string of dark and fantastic geometrical shapes, stands backdropped by the soft copper smoothness of the dawn sky. The Andean ranges rise higher than the sun, stretching endlessly north and south as far as the eye can see, cold and lifeless, infinitely impressive:

Below, looking like gray frozen lava, the coastal fog, the garúa, covers the land and is wedged in among the Andean foothills. From the plane, it has a solidity which belies the fact that it is only condensed vapor which any wind could sweep away. As the plane lowers over it, it has a topography of its own: mounds and ridges and crater like depressions, as if in imitation of the mountains to the east. So substantial does it seem, that there is the feeling that anyone might walk upon it, until the plane at last dips down into the grayness and it dissolves into shreds and masses of wet cloud.

Once Lima is reached, it is still hard to forget the alien quality of the Andes and the garúa, especially since the city is sunk in the murk of the fog, with a slight drizzle (wishfully called "rain" by most limeños) falling, the signs of full winter in the City of the Kings. Yet, soon, one is racing familiarly along in the hurtling traffic, noting that the summer white uniforms of the police have been replaced by winter's slate blue, counting off the new buildings which have gone up since the beginning of the year, adjusting to the odor of factory and car fumes always trapped by the garúa.

Downtown the face of the city has acquired a new makeup, which gives unexpected color to the gray stoned buildings. Hundreds of posters are plastered on every available bit of wall space, touting the men who are running for the presidency of Peru. "Lavalle is the man," or "The poorest in money, the richest in virtue," or "You know Prado, vote for him." The posters appear to be haphazardly applied, but on

closer inspection one finds that over a Prado poster is a Lavalle one; on top of both may be one for Belaúnde Terry. Some wit saw to it that on a large poster bearing Lavalle's photo, tiny cutouts of Prado's head were carefully pasted on the lenses of his opponent's glasses.

And it is politics which occupy the conversations in the streets, in the cafés, everywhere that two Peruvians meet. Although obviously a foreigner, my first taxi driver forgot this so far as to ask for whom I was going to vote. The second sneered at the waste of money represented by the posters and the illuminated signs and billboards. Yet, he was for Prado, rich and getting richer. One elevator boy in the hotel bemoans to everyone the postponements of election day from June 3 to June 17 - he suspects dirty work afoot. A business man pointed out that he was marking time this summer until the political situation was straightened out: he was afraid to make any new outlays of money until he had some assurance that the new president was going to continue General Odría's economic policies.

Exploring the actual political scene is confusing, not so much because the names are strange and the issues different, but because there seems to be no clarity with regard to who is supporting whom, who will actually run, and what the issues really are. Manuel Prado, a wealthy financier and wartime president of Peru, seems to be campaigning from his home offering his previous service as a program. He is hindered by having suffered a heart attack recently, but thought to be "very much a man" for the same reason: he is running despite the fact that it may kill him. Hernando de Lavalle, another upper class candidate, promises continuing peace and prosperity, and seems to have the support of the Odría party. Fernando Belaúnde Terry, a young architect, shouts reform - in every sphere of national activity, including a full scale agrarian reform to do away with "feudalism" and to meet the needs and desires of the "forgotten man." He colors these utterances with a stress on youth, "untried but vigorous," and the need for a clean sweep.

While Belaúnde does offer a concrete program (although his speeches do not explain how it is to be implemented), the three candidates content themselves with generalizations sharpened occasionally with clichés congenial to themselves, so that the observer is still left very much in the dark as to just what each man would do if he were president.

If the candidates seem uncertain behind their grand words, the electorate is equally unsure judging by the comments I have heard. Two questions are of prime importance: how will the women vote, and how will the apristas vote? Some say all women are conservative and will vote for the tried thing, meaning Prado. Others say they are

apt to be impressed by Lavalle's financial success after growing up as the son of a known but not wealthy family. And others caustically assert that Belaúnde Terry's youth and good looks will win him the feminine vote. No woman with whom I have talked will commit herself.

The apristas, members of the outlawed leftist APRA party, seem mainly interested in any candidate who will guarantee them legal status and take apristas into the government hierarchy. At first, they came out for Lavalle, on the grounds that this action would persuade President Odría to recognize them and bring the party out of its underground state. But once this failed to materialize, they withdrew their support. Belaúnde's program is nearer the aprista's doctrinal position, but as yet he has not received their outspoken support. It is asserted that the apristas can count with 50 to 70% of the total vote to be cast. If true, how they vote is critical to the outcome of the elections.

A cloudy campaign but not an apathetic one. The central fact remains that there is a passionate interest in the role which the government will play in the national life for the next six years. President Odría's benevolent but authoritarian incumbency is both praised and decried, but no one can quite get over the feeling that peace within the nation is desirable above all other things, and this he has provided, despite sporadic moments of violence such as the pre-Christmas trouble in Arequipa last year (CRT - 11, WHM - 28). There is, however, an equally strong conviction among many groups that the military in politics prefer dictatorships, or at least incline towards arbitrary action, and want to see a civilian - preferably one who has no compact with the Armed Forces - in the presidential palace.

There is some sense of waiting violence in Lima, perhaps growing out of the frustration of not knowing the future. The night before last, the partisans of Belaúnde Terry gathered in the Plaza de San Martín to protest what they called the delay in his inscription as an official candidate. (Each candidate has to be certified by an Electoral Jury upon the presentation of certain credentials - without this official certification no man can enter the elections.) For reasons still not clear, the police attacked this meeting with tear gas bombs and a "manifestation-breaker," a special truck which among other things throws out fierce streams of water. In spite of his "long march," in which Belaúnde stalked alone with the Peruvian flag in his hand down Avenida de la Merced to protest personally to the city's chief of police (the chief's comment was that his forces

were merely "obeying orders," and couldn't desist), and the tearing up of paving stones from the Plaza as weapons, the assaults went on. Finally, thoroughly soaked by the water from the truck, Belaúnde retired to his headquarters, and there heard the news that the Electoral Jury had certified him, after which the demonstrators went home to bed at the not unusual Lima hour of 12:30 in the morning. Later, Belaúnde claimed that the Jury which had "refused through fear, inscribed him through popular action." Perhaps he was thinking of the cracked heads and asphyxiation suffered by some of his partisans.

Yesterday morning, near noon, the Plaza de San Martín saw another, much smaller, manifestation for Belaúnde. Down La Colmena, one of the major streets giving upon the Plaza, marched an orderly procession of students, shouting "Belaúnde" and the basic word in any Peruvian politician's vocabulary, "liberty." They bore a sign which said, "Continuance is Dictatorship, Belaúnde is Liberty; Continuance is Exploitation, Belaúnde is Justice." Even Belaúnde might have felt that being so categorically equated with abstractions was taking the case too far, but no one seemed to be bothered by this, and in the short speeches given he was carried even nearer to apotheosis. Around the edge of the crowd, arguments flared up between the demonstrators and hecklers, but stopped just short of fist fights. The willingness to violence was there.

When I returned to my hotel room, after the marchers vacated the Plaza, I found the maid leaning out the window and shouting to the crowd below, "We don't want this type."

With all the sound and the fury, all the confusion and tension, Lima manages to go along as if it were not an election year. Perhaps the street clashes are just entertainments accompanying an election. One man told me: "This is to be expected - it's not a sign that any real trouble will come." Perhaps they may be taken as indications of something more convulsing in the future. The general attitude seems to be that this remains to be seen, first on June 17, and then July 28, when the new president will officially take over the office. Until then, one can only wait.

Even LA PRENSA, which is anti-government, and whose editor, Pedro Beltrán, is still smarting over his imprisonment in La Frontón recently, found time to dedicate six columns of the editorial page to explaining the "manifestation-meter," a system to obtain a more or less exact count of the number of people in attendance at an outdoor meeting.

Based on how many persons can fill a square meter of space,

the density of occupation is broken down into four categories:

"Lord of the Miracles" - 10 persons a square meter;

"Compact" - 7 per square meter;

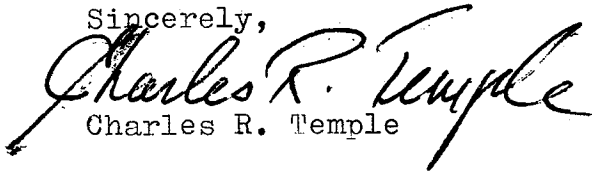
"Full" - 5 per square meter;

"Dispersed" - 2 to 3 per square meter.

(The religious processions on the day of the Lord of the Miracles in November are attended by thousands of persons, and at this time more people probably crowd the streets than at any other.) The paper's contention is that this will forever resolve the problem of how many people a reporter sees in such a meeting.

Life must go on.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Charles R. Temple". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Charles R. Temple

Received New York 6/8/56.