

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Election Aftermath

Hotel Bolivar
Lima
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Dear Mr. Rogers:

The election smoke has cleared in Lima but the shouting goes on.

The pradistas loudly proclaim that their candidate has won hands down. The belaudistas deny this and hold up their own computations of the ballots which give Belaúnde a slight edge. The official returns have just begun to appear and give Prado the lead, although they still represent only a quarter of the votes cast. In short, no one as yet knows who won last Sunday's elections but this has done nothing to prevent anticipatory claims to the presidential chair.

In what proved to be a surprise to many people, the Peruvian electorate went to the polls last Sunday in an orderly fashion, patiently waiting out the long queues which formed outside the polling places. Under the voting circumstances - each voter has to mark a ballot, put it into an envelope and drop this into an urn - the process could not have been speeded up much. There were some cases of disorder, provoked mainly by insufficient voting tables where it became apparent that many citizens would be unable to cast their votes by the time the polls closed. In general, though, the elections came off smoothly, and much of this is to the credit of the Army which supervised the polls in an efficient and unemotional fashion. The Army has won many kudos from all sides for its part in the day's activities.

If the elections themselves were quiet, the days following have not been. On Sunday evening last, several radio stations broadcast their extraofficial totals, and a pattern soon emerged which has held to date. Lavalle, the Odría sponsored candidate, gained few votes, while Prado and Belaúnde alternated in the lead, piling up large totals. It was indeed nervewracking as the lead shifted from one man to the other.

During the week, the totals have grown but the issue is still

in doubt. Extraofficial sources which have tabulated most of the votes cast give Prado the victory, although Belaúnde's headquarters say no. On the basis of these results, Prado gave an interview to United Press in which he claimed victory and somewhat pompously asserted that the only course open to Belaúnde was that he concede, which brought a quick reply from Belaúnde pointing out that official results were still to be reckoned with.

On Tuesday last, a curious disturbance took place which marred the sense of order which Sunday seemed to promise. The downtown section of Lima was busy as usual that night, with late shoppers and office workers clogging the main streets. In front of the office of LA PRENSA a crowd gathered to follow the election results chalked on a blackboard outside the building. Then, at seven, several trucks loaded with young men pulled up on the Plaza de San Martín and disgorged the riders all shouting for Prado. Although on Monday there had been many little demonstrations for the several candidates, there was something menacing about this aggregation which had the look of hoodlum stamped on it and carried sticks.

The LA PRENSA office is on the Jirón de la Unión which connects the Plaza de San Martín with the Plaza de Armas, and is Lima's Fifth Avenue. The gang from the trucks moved down Unión, accosting passersby and demanding that they shout "Prado." When they didn't, they were clubbed, and a cousin of Belaúnde was not only attacked by a half dozen of these hoodlums but had his cheek laid open by a knife wielded by one of them.

In front of the LA PRENSA office, the Belaúnde partisans set up cries for their candidate, and finally marched down Unión to battle with the invaders. For the next hour or so, the two groups surged against each other like waves not quite breaking and never did come to grips. The casualties were pedestrians and three photographers, one of whom was beaten into unconsciousness while the other two had their cameras smashed by those who were acclaiming Prado. One belaundista was injured and was hurried off with a handkerchief pressed to his bleeding scalp.

At about eight, a man shouted that Belaúnde was going to speak at his headquarters and the belaundistas moved off to the Avenida Tarapacá, leaving Unión to the toughs, who were finally frightened off by the arrival of the police. This gang then headed towards the offices of the pro-Prado newspaper, LA CRONICA, (which is just around the corner from Belaúnde's headquarters) to demonstrate, molesting pedestrians on their way.

I joined the crowd outside Belaúnde's headquarters which was large and tightly packed into the narrow Avenida Tarapacá. Aside from

the noise which was deafening, I think the strongest impression I carried away was the mingled smells of body sweat and urine - which last emanated from several of the surrounding buildings which evidently had somewhat indifferent plumbing facilities. Belaúnde did not appear but several of his aides spoke, hanging from a window. There was nothing conciliatory in their words, and they made quite a point of fulminating against the "vicious tactics" of the opposition. One of them climaxed his speech by producing a blood soaked handkerchief (the one which had bound up the head of the injured belaundista) and saying that they would take it as their banner.

I returned to Avenida Tacna and the LA CRONICA offices, where the demonstrators were cheering loudly for Prado, and threatening those who passed with their sticks. Several minutes later, the belaundistas erupted from Tarapacá and turned down Tacna ready to do battle. Seeing that they were faced with armed men, they retreated briefly to tear branches off trees and then ran back in full force. The hoodlums in front of LA CRONICA, despite their bravado with individual pedestrians, held back from confronting this crowd, and both groups paused to shout cheers. Then, with one forward rush as if shot out of a cannon, the belaundistas charged down Tacna.

An onlooker next to me said, "Ah, at last," but he was cheated of his spectacle, for just at that moment a truckload of police arrived and set themselves between the two groups. After much talking between the police officials and the Belaúnde leaders the latter dispersed their forces while the others, with their sticks and knives, seemed quite content to withdraw to the front of the LA CRONICA building and continue shouting there.

It was a pretty seedy performance after all was said and done, and next day indignation exploded on all sides. The hoodlums were identified as being from Callao, Lima's port, and said to be imported solely for the purpose of stirring up trouble. Prado's headquarters published a statement denying any connection with the happenings, and implying that some one or some group was intent on creating an atmosphere of violence to interfere with the vote counting.

LA PRENSA, which is apt to be single-minded when outraged, published Saturday two photographs of the same man - one in which he is receiving a stick from inside a car on Tuesday night, the other showing him as a helper to the Prado officials assisting in the vote counting in the Senate building.

Whoever has the final responsibility for these events, however, seems less important than the furious public protest which they engen-

dered: it would seem that the electorate wants peace in its electoral process, and this above all.

The extraofficial results, which will probably come fairly close to the official ones, have provoked endless discussions as to their interpretation. Several things do seem to be clearly established, however.

First, the poor showing of Lavalley seems best interpreted as a repudiation of the present government. One limeño told me, "It's a shame for the man for there's nothing wrong with Lavalley - he himself is a good person. He just had the misfortune to be the Odría sponsored candidate." To support this conclusion is the fact that the government Congressional lists were defeated in nearly every section of the country - which hit the men in power hard.

Second, APRA appears to have played a key role in Prado's showing. On Saturday before the elections, the APRA leaders, who earlier had supported Lavalley, decided to get behind Prado, perhaps sensing that Lavalley was already a losing candidate. With a rousing and furious denunciation of Belaúnde, they turned to Prado, and instructed regional leaders to vote for him. It is still not clear whether this mandate went to all the aprista voters or not. Several of the rank and file I have talked with say this is not so and stated that they had voted for Belaúnde. Nonetheless, there must have been a considerable segment which voted for Prado on party orders. If so, it underlines the current split in the APRA.

(APRA's actions have evoked considerable comment. On the one hand is sympathy with its position as an outlawed party. "APRA simply had to go for that candidate who offered them legalization: Prado seemed the better choice." On the other hand, there is a feeling that the party sold itself cheaply out of an hysterical desire for legal status. "The party acted like a courtesan angling for the highest bid, but settling for the lowest.")

Third, Belaúnde's showing after entering the campaign late and as a novice speaks for the electorate's preference for a man without binding alliances to any one faction, and a desire for a new broom. Statements I have heard stress this over and over again, and many people who would be hurt by his reform program if land expropriation occurred voted for him because he was an independent.

However these events are interpreted in detail eventually, the one significant generalization which I think is possible is this: the electorate has demonstrated clearly that it was making a choice between an old style authoritarian regime and a more democratic government and that it favored the latter. So, the political issue which was at stake in these elections has at least been resolved.

Sincerely,

Charles R. Temple