INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CRT - 8
"One Becomes Accustomed"

c/o The American Embassy
Lima
Peru
November 15, 1955

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

North of Lima is the Callejón de Huaylas, a box canyon, rather like a crooked bowling alley, running roughly north to south between two ranges of the Andes, the Black and White Cordilleras. The latter contains the highest peaks in Peru, among them Huascarán which reaches 22,000 ft. of snow drenched beauty. With good reason the White Cordillera is referred to as the Alps of Peru.

In the north the Callejón squeezes to a narrow slot which opens into the torturous, twisting length of the Cañon de Pato, a deep gorge gouged out of the mountains by the Santa River. At the juncture, if one could get down to the river, a man can stretch out his arms and touch both cordilleras. Through the Cañon exit to the coast is possible along the course of the Santa. In the south, exit is through the valley of the Fortaleza River which carries one to the Pan American Highway running along Peru's coast.

The settlements in the Callejón are strung along the Santa River under its various local names. The inhabitants, largely indian, grow potatoes and barley at the higher levels, maize, alfalfa and sugar at the lower altitudes. Most of this activity centers around Huaraz, the capital of the Department of Ancash, a town of white buildings and narrow cobbled streets just wide enough to permit the passage of an automobile but not ample enough to allow turns at the corners without backing up a few times.

About 35 kilometers beyond Huaraz, past the locally celebrated mineral baths of Chancos, the cordouroy road ends at Hacienda Vicos. From there it goes on to join trails through and over the mountains but it becomes a steep and rocky path from that point on.

Vicos is under the supervision of Cornell University as part of a long term study of change and adaptability among the Quechua indians of the Callejón. At present it is managed by Bill and Maxine

Blanchard of Cornell's anthropology faculty.

The indians of Vicos live in households scattered over the slopes above the hacienda buildings, so that the community is in no sense a "town." The houses themselves are the usual combination of adobe, thatch and red tiles found throughout Peru but here separated from their neighbors by pleasing growths of trees, bushes and flowers.

I was taken on a tour of Vicos by an indian named Juan, a small, dark skinned man with smallpox scars on his face. He was dressed in the prevailing garb of the male vicosino: a long sleeved bolero style jacket edged with colored embroidery, trousers with narrow tight legs flaring open at the cuff and decorated there with a vertical row red, blue and yellow buttons. Both of these garments were of black homespun wool. On his head he wore a weathered felt hat with its crown pushed up to a conical point, and for footgear he had rubber tire sandals with rope bindings.

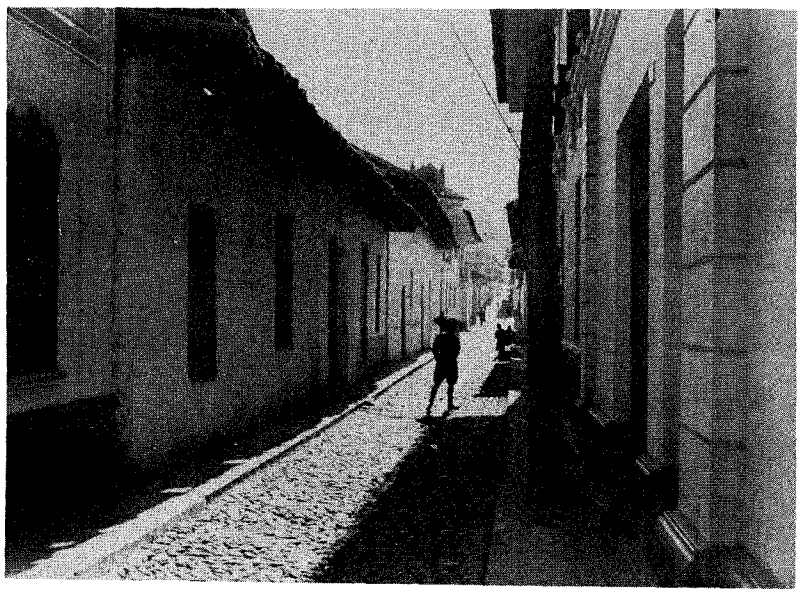
At first Juan was shy, but as we talked his delight in conversation - as intense as in the conquering Spaniard and his descendants - soon overcame this.

Juan's longest absence from Vicos was the time he spent in the Army. It was there that he had learned to speak Spanish. He told me that all the men in Vicos who knew Spanish had picked it up in service, but that not everyone who came back spoke it well. I asked him why he was so fluent and he explained that he had been in the army for three years.

"But, isn't two the usual time?" "Yes, but I was taken in Marcará." Marcará is the nearest town below Vicos, and Juan meant that he had been shanghaied there without due process by the Guardia Civil which often happens when quotas are unfulfilled.

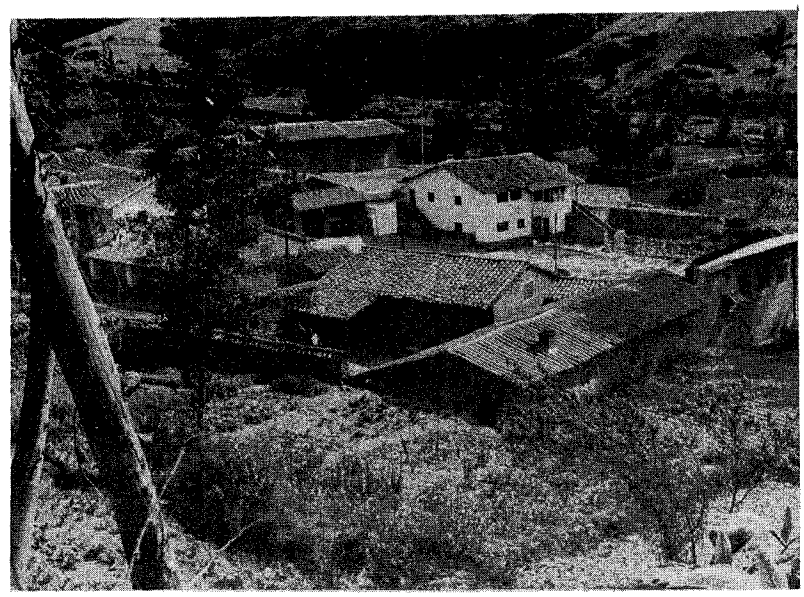
(This one act of the rural police causes them to be feared by the indians, perhaps more than any other, although the indian outside his community is apt to break laws of which he is often unaware, especially when drunk, and thereby is constantly running afoul of the police. And the policeman is not particularly gentle in dealing with the indian.)

When Juan's tenure was finally regularized he had put in three years. I asked if he liked the army. "One becomes accustomed to it," he answered, and added that he wasn't sure that he'd like to try it again. He had been married before going in and during the interim his brothers and wife had to take care of his fields. "Is this the



Street in Huaraz.

Hacienda Vicos.



usual procedure?" "Yes. There's no one else to do it."

Juan spends most of the year in Vicos, except when he goes to the coast to work as a cash laborer. "How do you like the coast?" "It's different from here but one becomes accustomed to it." "Would you like to live on the coast?" "No. This is my home here." It turned out that most of the men in Vicos follow the same practice of emigrating temporarily, some to the coast, some to other parts of the sierra. "Do these men always come back?" Juan seemed puzzled by this question and finally replied, "Yes. Back home."

We discussed President Odría whom Juan had seen while in the army and who was a good man he thought. "Are you going to vote in the elections next year?" "Vote?" "Yes, for the new president to replace General Odría." "Maybe." I had the feeling that Juan was not at home in the area of electoral process (which later proved correct) but that he was unwilling to admit this to a stranger.

I stopped to get my breath, for tramping up the steep path, slippery from the rains, at nearly 10,000 ft. winded me, although Juan was nor more bothered than if we had been at sea level, despite the seeming frailness of his body.

He pointed out a nearby house as that of his brother. "He was in the army too." There is some pride attached to having done military service among the vicosinos but it evidently does not give a man any special status in the community: upon his return he is expected to blend into his environment and be much the same as before he went away.

We moved on with Juan pointing out various houses in the area, supplying an occasional comment upon the owners. I missed the standard landmarks in Altiplano villages: basketball hoops and cleared spaces for soccer fields. Juan told me that the vicosinos played no sports. "Then do you have a lot of fiestas?" "Not too many."

I was tempted to ask, What do you do for relaxation, but let it ride as a probably meaningless question. In my experiences in other indian communities I found that relaxation is simply a state in which a man is not working, whatever else he might be doing. (The Blanchards told me that Vicos is just as fiesta ridden as any other sierra community so that Juan's "not too many" was a pleasant understatement.)

When we at last came back to the main house, Juan took leave of me with an "Hasta Luego, Doctor." Since the coming of Cornell

personnel most foreign visitors to Vicos are given this title. (In the mining areas around La Oroya where non-Peruvian engineers abound, the indian usually addresses the stranger as "ingeniero.")

Later, discussing my day with Juan with the Blanchards, I was told: "Life in Vicos is not very elaborate. The indian is not concious of having a political nor an economic nor even a social function beyond that of day to day living. He spends a good part of his non-working time just talking, of which a great deal is gossip, and horsing around. The vicosino is a great practical joker. Everything seems simplified if compared with our own culture."

Bill pointed out that Juan's behavior and his general reactions to life were not unexpected given the isolation of Vicos, the patterns enforced by the hacienda system which carry built-in restrictions upon the indian's activities and the fundamental fact that the Spaniards stripped away from the communities which they encountered many segments of culture which we take for granted in the United States.

Among these lost elements is the role of citizen in a larger context than the local community. To be a citizen implies a certain degree of self determination and the awareness of entitites larger than one's immediate social group. But interposed between the vicosinos and these two conceptions is a community life which does not encourage or provide for identification with any unit beyond it. Those who have governed Peru have acceded to this status quo and have maintained actively or through indifference the indian's traditional context.

The same problem is found in the area of economic function. Historically, and to a great extent today, the indian is the man who produces and the disposition of his production is formalized for him by outside groups. His choice is non-existent. Moreover, his produce goes to unknown consumption centers if he is lucky enough to harvest a crop which gives an excess beyond his own subsistence needs. He has little chance to learn of the mechanisms by which his potatoes find their way to the tables of Lima or how his wheat becomes a roll on someone else's breakfast menu. Lacking this sense of process, it is not strange that he remains unaware of his part in the total economic life of Peru.

Reinforcing the perpetuation of the vicosino's traditional life is the sharp distinction made in Peru between the role of the indian and all other possible roles. The indian is like a character actor trained in only one part and never allowed to act any other. The culture in which he grows up is one with the demands of the role and in the more isolated parts of the sierra few new elements find their way into the basic content.

For an indian to step outside the expected pattern of behavior is not encouraged generally nor would such an indian be prepared to fulfill any other role. In the United States a man from a small rurual town can go to a city with some assurance that he is capable of participating in many aspects of urban life for his local culture has similarities with that of the city. At a minimum he speaks the same language: in Peru, for the Quechua speaker, this is not so for the language of the other actors in the national drama is Spanish.

When an indian like Juan has to leave his community, he does not enter into a new situation (like army life) with the comforting feeling that he knows all about it in advance. He is faced instead with a non-indian experience not internalized in his own culture which is his primary teacher. So, he "becomes accustomed" to it rather than entering very deeply into it, which may mean no more than adapting to its demands so as to avoid punishment for a bad performance. There is a strong suggestion here that he remains essentially unaltered in his view of life and is just as much "indian" when he returns home as when he left.

Sincerely,

Charles R. Temple

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