

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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A Day at the Market

c/o American Embassy  
Lima,  
Peru  
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522 Fifth Avenue  
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

One day last month I was talking with a group of indians about fiestas. The conversation turned from the details of organizing and running a fiesta to the question of which kind of fiesta was the most enjoyable. One man was for marriage celebrations which, he claimed, were both more fun and more "respectable" than any of the others. (By "respectable" it turned out that he meant there were less fights.) Another was for the saint's day fiesta not only because it too was respectable but also because it seemed to him the most elaborate. A third shook his head at these comments and said: "Fiestas are all right but what I like best is to go to market." The rest thought about this for a few minutes and then there was a shaking of heads in agreement. One of the older men commented: "I have been going to markets for many years and still enjoy myself as much as always. Maybe they are more fun than fiestas: at least they're cheaper."

I have attended many indian markets in Mexico, Bolivia and Peru and was always impressed by the numbers of people who came to them, and even more by the range of types one sees: from the indian who lives in the town and dresses like the mestizo to the unsmiling coca intoxicated farmer from the highest mountain slopes. There was always an air of liveliness and good will in these markets and an unexpected noisiness from the sometimes too subdued indian. With the comments of my informants in mind I went to the market in Huancayo a while ago.

Huancayo, the capital of the Department of Junín, is 260 miles from Lima, on one of the best favored basins of the Mantaro River which runs parallel to the coast. The trip from the coast to Huancayo takes one through almost the full variety of Peruvian landscapes. First, the dry coast, with the green fields of the Lima oasis watered by the Rimac River; then into the low lady finger like coastal foothills, smooth and rolling like something out of a Benton painting; on into the high sierra with its disorder of towering peaks and deep canyons. Mount Meiggs, named after the American engineer who was responsible

Huancayo Market.



Huancayo Market:  
Woolens Section.

for the Central Railway, is snow covered and bears a metal Peruvian flag. Before and after La Oroya (about 200 miles from Lima) the ugly barren operations of Cerro de Pasco, a U.S. mining company, spread out. But then one finally enters the Huancayo basin and the richness of the valley is seen on either hand. What immediately takes the eye is the casual vegetation of bush, grass and Scotch Bloom filling in the spaces between the cultivated fields: in the Andes there is usually little of this natural growth.

The valley is rich, producing among other things 40% of all Peruvian wheat, and it supports a large population in comparative agricultural richness. Huancayo reflects this in its many blocks of paved streets, well dressed inhabitants, three movie theaters, stores selling the same products as Lima and even a Caffé Espresso shop furnished with one of the large and rather pretty coffee making machines favored by the Peruvians and imported from Italy. The population of the town is given by various authorities as about 20,000, but I personally would favor a figure of about double that at present. So it was with no surprise that the Sunday market proved to be a big, complex affair.

Early Sunday morning, by truck and bus, sometimes on foot, the indians moved into the town. By eight o'clock along the wide main street stretched four lines of booths for nearly twelve blocks. Each booth was made of four poles supporting white or pink and white striped cloths under which various wares were displayed either on tables or on the street. The neatness and order of all these arrangements was striking.

At one end of the street metal beds and mattresses were offered; at the other huge sacks of grain and potatoes. Between these two anchor points the booths held an amazing variety of products. Scarves, jackets of factory make, whole suits, work clothes of khaki and denim, shoes of many styles; plaid and solid color shawls, blankets, straw and felt hats, and chullos; chairs, tables, low stools; cutlery, kitchen ware including a full supply of pots and pans in many sizes, primus and kerosene stoves, and Neapolitan style coffee makers; gourd bowls, dishes and wooden spoons; pretty satin baby bonnets (much used in this area); spices, garlic buds, vegetables lying on brown mats but intensely colorful with the reds of the dried peppers, the orange of carrots, the green of avocados; freshly stripped sheep and llama hides; prepared food and chicha, both the yellow kind and one a sickly gray; and even an open stand given over to paper bound books, among which was a huge leather bound volume of early twentieth century Peruvian laws.



Huancayo Market:  
Kitchenware.

Huancayo Market:  
Baby Bonnets.



The people who ran these stands passed their time between sales in gossiping, eating, drinking, playing with or suckling young babies. In a vegetable stand a handsome young mestizo exercised his charms on a pretty india, not to win her affections but to get a better price on some garlic he wanted to buy. Nearby an old woman was weeping loudly because her youngest daughter had run off with an "undesirable." At first she complained only to one of her sons-in-law, who nodded sympathetically, then her anger overcame her restraint and the passersby were rung in to hear her tale.

Under a pink and white canopy an indian was making tentative approaches to a handsome dark india, while in another nearby a middle aged wife made a few angry and choice comments to her husband for having gotten drunk so early in the day. By a pile of brightly colored blankets an eleven year old was making sure that her younger sisters saw the tourists wandering by, with their "funny clothes" and cameras in hand.

The chatter of conversation and the wailing of children was blended with music coming from the stores and bars along the street, sometimes U.S. popular songs ("Stardust," "Lili"), sometimes huaynos and marineras, national dances. The sound of a flute, reedy and assertive, joined in occasionally. But the loudest music came from a stand about halfway along the street where the owner was demonstrating a record player to a delighted audience.

Off the street in a permanent building was the meat market, even more crowded than outside. Wooden counters carried first, second and third class cuts of beef and sheep; shiny streams of orange and brown sausages hung on hooks above the counters over gray and white heaps of fat lumps. The building was not only noisy but it was permeated with a stink made up of the meats, food cooking in booths to the side and unwashed humans. Underfoot, dogs, of every mongrel possibility, hustled from booth to booth wolfing up the scraps which fell.

Most of the butchers were large women with long black braids, wearing white blood spotted aprons, who slammed cleavers into meat cuts with an apparent indifference to a possible mangling of hands or fingers. They kept up a steady conversation with the customers and exchanged jokes with the men, most of which seemed to be obscene.

The people buying in the market were largely indian, although there were some Huancayo housewives followed by servants carrying

shopping baskets. Old men from the hill sides with beards and mustaches, odd heavily oriental faces set in a cast of idiocy, and wearing repatched and filthy homespun jackets and trousers, trudged around looking like a popular conception of one of Genghis Khan's mongol horde. By contrast, I saw a number of couples, mostly elderly, with fine features and dressed in handsome black clothing. These women wore a curious square cotton mantle, fastened at the throat with a huge silver pin, which didn't quite reach over their shoulders.

But most of the women to be seen wore white blouses and colored skirts and either low shoes, moccasins, loafers or platform sandals. On their heads were low crowned broad brimmed panama hats with colored bands or high crowned panamas with elaborate black ribbons. Their men wore the variety of clothing combinations so often found in the Andes, ranging from the purely indian cum poncho garb to combinations of indian and Western clothing. Only the more conservative (or poorer) wore sandals for shoes seemed to be the order of Sunday.

Below: Vegetables  
for Sale.



It was easy to see that the fair was a time of pleasure and relaxation for all concerned, including the people who sold. Every sale involved a long conversation, not only about the price and quality of the article but also gossip and the like. Nobody hurried his purchases nor his strolling through the streets, and when a man felt like a drink he would go into one of the bars while his wife waited outside to begin their tour again.

As the afternoon wore on, the crowds showed no signs of retiring and the hilarity increased as more chicha was consumed. It wasn't until four that the first booth was struck. From then until dusk the market began to disappear, piece by piece, to be loaded into trucks or onto the roofs of busses taking the buyers and sellers home again. By six the streets were empty except for one couple late in stowing away their goods. Traffic

resumed its normal flow and in the morning the streets would be swept of the litter of the day's activities.

The market is the main distributing agency for manufactured goods to the indians of the Huancayo district. Only those who live near the town come there to buy during the week. The rest wait until Sunday to make the oftentimes long trip. Couples who come with a folded blanket in the early morning leave in the afternoon with a huge bundle, usually on the woman's back and sometimes containing a baby as well as merchandise.

Manufactured goods are not only purchased here by the indian but sold by him as well. Only a small percentage of the booths were run by mestizos. Few of the vendors would tell me what their profits were and I was told by people in Huancayo that they were "large," "moderate," or that many people went into trade just "for the fun of it." Most of the booth attendants I questioned relied on that flexible Spanish word "regular" to describe their business which in practice may mean anything from total loss to one hundred percent profit.

Handicraft goods were also available, and these too had entered the market on a middleman basis, having been bought up by one or two people from the various houses in which they were made. Individual families selling the products of their own home industry didn't seem to be present in any great number, which may reflect the fact that the local indian is first an agriculturalist and only second a manufacturer of some saleable item.

There was a startling amount of money exchanged during the day. As might be expected each booth owner had a large pile of bills and coins with which to make change. I watched one woman counting her funds and they totaled to over 75 dollars, a considerable sum in the Andes. Yet the customers too carried equally large amounts of cash, mostly in worn and dirty bills, with which to make purchases. Nor was this money spent only on necessary items: the baby bonnets, aprons, new hats and shoes, various kinds of jewelry moved rapidly. Much deliberation went into these purposes but this seemed to enhance the pleasure of the transaction rather than a thing dictated by economy.

The market tradition is one of the oldest items in the history of the indian countries of the New World having been in existence long before the Spaniards arrived. Bernal Díaz, in his True History of the Conquest of New Spain, says this of an Aztec market:

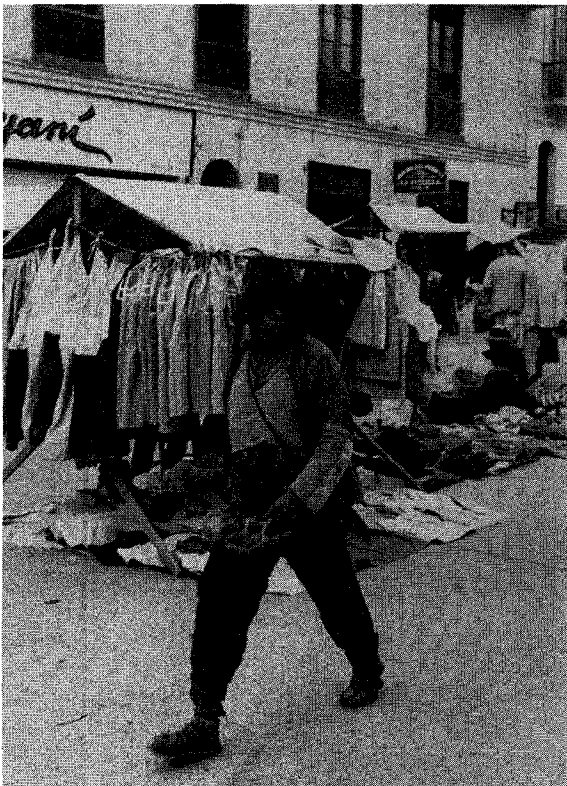
"We were astonished at the crowds of people and the regularity



which prevailed, as well as the vast quantities of merchandise.... Each kind had its particular place,, which was distinguished by a sign. The articles consisted of gold, silver, jewels, feathers, mantles, chocolate, skins dressed and undressed, sandals, and other manufactures of the roots and fibers of nequen, and great numbers of male and female slaves, some of which were fastened by the neck, in collars, to long poles. The meat market was stocked with fowls, game, and dogs. Vegetables, fruits, articles of food ready dressed, salt, bread, honey, and sweet pastry, were also sold there. Other places in the square were appointed to the sale of earthenware, wooden household furniture... firewood, paper, sweet canes filled with tobacco mixed with liquid amber, copper axes and working tools, and wooden vessels highly painted. Numbers of women sold fish."

With a few modifications this description would fit markets as I have seen them in various countries. Not only does the market illustrate one of the aboriginal activities existing prior to the Conquest which has persisted through the centuries in a relatively unchanged form but it is also one of the things which has helped to keep the indian consumer apart from the white-mestizo lines of consumption. Aside from the economic implications of this, it has meant that attitudes and opinions (from the white-mestizo world) which often pass over the counter with merchandise have not reached the indian in that way. This has had its effect in maintaining the apartness of indian culture in the Andes.

Below: a Customer  
From the High  
Slopes.



The indian's consumption needs are time and time again involved with his general subsistence existence, that is they are met mostly by a minimum of purchase since they extend over only certain basic wants - shelter, food, clothing, some ornamentation. If one can sit on the ground why purchase a chair or a table from which to eat? The contents of the Huancayo market duplicate these need satisfactions rather accurately although with a greater



spread than in many of the smaller markets which can be barren of any but subsistence items.

A recent market analysis made by a large firm dealing in textile goods showed that 70% of sales were confined to the Peruvian coastal area with its white and mestizo populations. The same firm had tried to increase sales in the sierra by sending a caravan around rural areas with much hoopla and rather like a medicine man's show. It was thought that the bringing of the goods to the customer might stimulate sierra sales. As it turned out the experiment was not successful despite the novelty of the presentation. This seems to underline the essential conservatism of the mountain indian and to illuminate the extent of his felt needs.

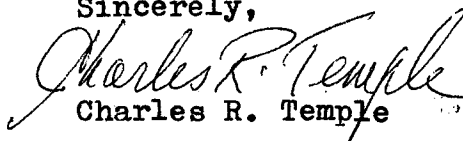
These considerations impinge upon the general problem of integrating the sierra indian into the Peruvian economy, especially with regard to one of the commoner solutions offered by observers: "Let's give the indian a chance to become a consumer of new items. Through this entrée we'll be able to introduce ideas for change as well as linking him directly to the economy of the country."

But standing between the idea and its realization are just such things as the Sunday market pattern, which is accepted, well known and in keeping with the indian's tastes and desires. It renders in concrete items and process the premises which underly his current behavior patterns. That it has too the characteristics of a social event bringing together people who may rarely see each other during the week gives it added merit. It is the indian who exploits the market and the market which fits itself to the indian's demands.

As with so many things "indian," the indian is tenacious in retaining them without great alteration. What belongs to him in the total cultural inventory of Peru is guarded jealously. But perhaps the most important quality of a thing like the market is its personalism and familiarity.

I asked the group I mentioned in the first page of this letter if they enjoyed buying in town stores, and there was unanimous agreement that they did not. One man summarized the group's opinions in this way: "I don't see anyone I know in the store; I don't know the man who's selling me something; and I can't be sure that I won't be cheated. It's not the same thing at all as going to Sunday market."

Sincerely,

  
Charles R. Temple