

NOT FOR PUBLICATION
INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WHM - 10
Education:
A Teacher's Criticism

c/o Iberico
Casilla 208
Arequipa, Perú
June 10, 1955

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Luis Fulano was born in the mountainous Department of Ayacucho in 1929. He was sent to a small school in one of the villages near his home for his Primaria or first five years of education. For his secondary schooling, his parents sent him to Arequipa's Colegio Nacional de la Independencia. Five years later, he enrolled in the Universidad Nacional de San Agustín de Arequipa. When he graduated in 1953 after five years of study, he had earned a bachelor's degree in pedagogy, a title of Professor of Secondary Education and a doctorate in Letters and Education. While a student at the university, Luis toed the political mark; he joined a leftist group and spent most of his free time listening or engaging in arguments and discussions filled with the hazy, muddled communist-socialist-anything-for-a-change political attitudes so common in the universities and secondary schools of the country. But after a short time, he got sick of the wild, free-wheeling attacks against anything and everything from final examinations to foreign capitalists. Luis did something which is rarely done here; he quit the organization cold and began his policy of thinking and fending for himself. Result: at the age of 26, Luis is a confirmed anti-leftist and anti-catholic. Perhaps agnostic would be a better term for him. His personal clashes with political and religious faiths have shaped his mind so that he is constantly weighing all angles of a problem, no matter how small that problem may be. The chances are, though, that when he does reach a solution it will be sharp and clear-cut.

Luis is now working as a boy-watcher or supervisor in a dormitory of one of the larger secondary schools in the city. In spite of his talent and love for teaching - I believe he would rather teach than eat - my friend spends most of his time picking up after his young khaki-uniformed charges. His living quarters consist of one very cold room hidden away behind a flight of stairs. There is a wash basin, a desk and a broken chair and, stacked away in a corner an exceedingly good collection of books - poetry, philosophy, political papers by French, English, American and Peruvian authors. Four or five mornings a week for the past three months I have sat in the rickety chair, my feet braced against its sudden collapse, & have talked and listened to Luis. Sometimes he would deliver himself of a lecture on Peruvian literature or on the language and customs of the Quechua Indians among whom he grew up. Sometimes I would tell him about life in the States, arguing against his belief that everything in the U.S. was machine made and machine run. In all our conversations, he displayed an open mind and an ability to discard anything that did not have a solid factual basis behind it. He never engaged in the usual bitter attacks against the persons and prejudices responsible for some of the gigantic problems facing his country. Instead, he built his criticisms out of common sense and logic, a remarkable feat in this land of peppery-tempered young men.

As an ex-student and a teacher, Luis has had experience in all levels of Peruvian education; as an agnostic, the picture he could give me would not be colored to any great extent by political or religious prejudices. Accordingly, I asked Luis to give me his opinions on the matter. His answer was typical of him. What problems should he discuss and to what length? Would I give him some

time to organize his thoughts? Last week Luis met me at the door of his little room waving a stack of notes. He was ready to begin. What follows is a condensation of what he told me:

"I think you should know a bit about the different levels of education in Perú. Then I will tell you what in my opinion are the virtues and the faults found in each level. Certain things, such as low teachers' salaries and lack of even the simplest training aids are common in almost all the levels, but their effects differ with the position of the teacher or the age of the pupils concerned."

"At first, a child is sent to what we call the Jardín de la Infancia. This is a kindergarten, a place where the child has a chance to become accustomed to school life. After the Jardín, one year of Transition, and then the pupil starts his five years of Primaria or basic education. The subsequent five years of secondary education are spent in general study and in elemental trade courses - mining, farming, commerce and other courses in this line are offered. Once through secondary school, the student is ready for his superior education. He may go to a university and enter one of the faculties or schools, such as Letters, Pedagogy, Law or the sciences; he may enter one of the professional schools - medicine, engineering, etc.; or he may go to a military school, be it army, navy, aviation or police academy."

"One of the great advantages of our primary and secondary school systems is that there is scarcely a village in Perú which does not have its small school. Although the teaching may be of poor quality and school supplies non-existent, at least there is an opportunity for basic education in the rural areas. When you take into account the mountainous terrain, the lack of funds, and the general apathy of the people of some areas towards western ideas and culture, you can see the tremendous amount of work that went into the establishing of the rural schools."

"The primary schools are riddled with faults, however. To my way of thinking, the most serious mistake lies in the teaching system itself. The pupils are instructed, not educated. They are taught facts and figures, but they are not shown how to use their minds. That basic failing continues through all levels of education in this country. Instruction tends to be completely theoretical without any practical aspects to it. Instead of showing a class a picture of a cow and asking the youngsters to count the number of legs and tails shown in the drawing, the teacher writes on the blackboard: 'A Cow Has Four Legs and One Tail'. The student, although he may never have seen a cow in his life, is expected to memorize that description. Have you walked past the classrooms of the primary school down the block? Well then, you must have heard the chicos reciting these phrases ad infinitum. When it comes to a test, however, the child's memory may play tricks on him. He may have twisted the phrase in his mind until it goes: 'A Cow Has Four Tails and One Leg'. I have seen that happen many times."

"Other faults connected with the primary school system you have heard me mention several times. The extremely low teachers' salaries, the lack of appropriate buildings and school supplies are direct results of the failure on the part of the Government to raise enough money for its schools. In my opinion, if Perú's budget were shifted from the support of a military machine all out of proportion to the size of the country and the character of the times to the support of an adequate school system, there would be ample funds to raise the educational standards to a truly satisfactory level."

"If a serious attempt at reform is ever undertaken, I think that the primary school should be reorganized to fulfill what I consider to be its major requirement - that of being a center of education for the workman and the lower classes. These people have neither time nor money to send their children to the secondary schools. Among the poor, children must start work at an early age. They cannot be spared from that work for such a luxurious thing as higher education. There-

fore, the primary school must teach them as much as possible in those five years."

"This is what I mean by reorganization. During the first cycle of three years, the pupils should be given general courses in culture - in their language, the history of their country, all in a very elementary form. They should also be instructed in what I shall call the formation of their characters. By that I mean the development of the habits of personal hygiene, social comportment, and at least some idea of the basic aesthetic values. In the second cycle - the fourth and fifth years - students should receive training in a profession or a vocation. They should have the opportunity to learn a trade well enough while still in school to be able to carry on with it when they return to their homes and to work. This is of major importance. Instead of placing most of the pre-vocational and pre-professional training in the secondary schools, to which most of these kids will never go, the authorities should give the primary institutions their due. Then the great numbers of school children who never reach the secondary schools would at least receive enough practical education to give them a little incentive, a chance to better themselves."

"One of the greatest faults in the secondary school system is the encyclopedic nature of the courses. In these schools, we seem to know a little bit about everything. A graduate of any acceptable secondary school can talk to you about the Greek philosophers, the English essayists, Einstein's theories or the best method of solving any given international crisis. Question him too deeply about any one topic, however, and he will change the subject. His knowledge covers everything - to the depth of a few inches. That same failing of theoretical rather than practical teaching methods found in the primary schools causes more havoc here. The students are no longer dealing with cows' legs and tails; they are working with more complex facts. And still the teachers either refuse to or cannot use visual training aids to help their students along. In the sciences, laboratory work is at a minimum due to shortage of equipment and what seems to be a natural preference for theoretical instead of practical teaching. Another result, of course, is that the students graduate without the slightest idea of how to write a business letter, fill in a form or prepare even the simplest report. I know. I'm a university graduate, and yet a few days ago I bought a book entitled 'The Peruvian Secretary's Guide' to find out exactly what constitutes a business letter form."

"Because of these educational failings, the graduates of our secondary schools are more often than not completely unadapted for the life in front of them. They are full of their own importance. After all, they know about so many things. Look at all the courses they have taken. On the other hand, any practical test would show that the majority of them are unfit to occupy any position of importance in the business or political world, as their knowledge is strictly on the theoretical side. The tragedy is that the average graduate usually applies for the top ranking jobs first. After several refusals handed him by men who know what type of education he has received, he applies for the mediocre jobs. Here too he meets with refusals. Unless he is very lucky, he ends up working under humble conditions. The results of this rapid fall to a low level are obvious: the graduate's social resentments make him an easy target for the leftist groups; his ego, so long inflated in the secondary school, is crushed; most important of all, his moral standards, and especially his feelings of patriotism are all apt to fall by the wayside. The graduates of the military secondary schools suffer the worst blows, I think. While in school they live like toy generals. Since the majority of them do not go to Chorrillos ^{1.}, they are forced to look for work for which they have had almost no practical training. The obrero, the day laborer, you see, must start from the bottom;

1. The West Point of Perú

he has a chance to work his way up to a good position simply because he educates himself in his job as he progresses. The young graduates of the secondary schools prefer to start their job hunting from the top. From there they slide rapidly to the bottom rungs of the ladder, where they are no match for the already semi or fully trained men who have been working in their jobs for several years."

"A friend of mine - a graduate of a secondary school and the university here - recently told me that he had visited every large business house in the city and had been refused by all of them. To the businessmen, he said, his graduation certificate seemed to be just so much paper. He spent six months looking for a job; then out of necessity he went to work as a common obrero over at the new tuberculosis hospital they are building. My friend played around with leftist ideas when he was in school, but now he is a confirmed Aprista 2. He is completely fed up with a society which brought him down to such a menial position."

"Another criticism I have of the secondary schools, although it applies to all levels of education, is the pay. The average monthly salary of a secondary school professor is about 800.00 soles 5. In the social system here, teachers are supposed to represent the peak of the middle class; yet they receive the salary of an obrero. Under these conditions, it is natural for the teachers to resent the society which forces this paradox upon them. Again, they are natural prey for the communists and the leftists. Many of the teachers of my age - the majority I would say - are either Apristas or communists, although perhaps they do not carry a party card. Many of them I would call completely immoral. They drink a great deal, they tell dirty stories or read pornographic literature in the presence of their students. They are completely lacking in anything resembling patriotism or faith in the future of their country. Naturally, the boys try to copy them in every way. I have heard students insulting teachers to their faces, using the same language they learned from another group of professors. Once I saw a group of boys give the school director a mild but definite roughing up."

"In the privately operated schools, the situation is worse than it is here. You know, of the 18 secondary schools in Arequipa, only three are State operated. The Government, as I have said before, simply does not have enough money to keep up the educational system, so many schools must be privately supported, usually by Catholic clergy or laymen with strong Catholic convictions. The teachers' salaries are lower in the private schools than in the State supported ones. Professors usually receive an hourly wage of 5 soles. Since they can hope to work only 24 hours a week maximum, their monthly pay is under 500 soles. In addition to the low pay, the school buildings are often completely inadequate; old houses are rented for the purpose, sillar blocks used as seats, painted boards for notebooks. The teacher-student relationship could not be worse. As the students pay for their education, they feel they have the right to treat the teachers as employees. Professors in the private schools have been intimidated, insulted and beaten up. The result is that many of them are scared to flunk any more students than they can help. If a teacher has a class of fifty boys, he wouldn't dare flunk more than three or four. If he did, he would probably be removed from his post. Private schools cannot afford to lose paying students or make enemies of influential parents. Under these conditions, it is easy for the sons of the rich and powerful families to go through school without opening a book. Through pull they are sent off to the universities and military academies. Through pull they graduate, then go on to occupy top public posts."

"Naturally, the first step in any reorganization of either primary or secondary school systems would be the building of clean, modern school buildings equipped with training aids, libraries and laboratories. In the matter of the courses to be taught in those new buildings, though, I would like to see more

2. APRA (Alianza Revolucionaria Popular Americana) is the only thing even approximating a political party in Perú. Now illegal, it has in its 36 year history embraced socialism, Marxism, Inca worship, etc. Its chief, Víctor Raul Haya de la Torre, is now in exile.

3. About US\$ 40.00 per month.

emphasis placed on such basic subjects as personal hygiene, social etiquette and courses devoted to aesthetic subjects. Teaching a boy to brush his teeth, give his seat on a bus to a lady, or realize that El Misti is something^{more} than a big bump in the landscape is much more important than it might seem to you. For instance, I am a good example of the lack of education in social comportment. If you took me to a cocktail party in Selva Alegre, I would be terrified. I wouldn't know how to act or what to say. I believe that one of the reasons why there is such a gulf between the upper and the lower classes stems from the inability on the part of people such as myself to associate with the rich and the cultured on their own ground. If a youngster knows what good manners are, if he knows that there are such things as art and aesthetic beauty, he is so much farther ahead in his struggle to better himself. And if he has received practical instruction in a few pre-vocational or professional courses instead of the usual smattering of theory covering scores of subjects, he will be in a position to compete with other young men for good jobs."

"On the university level, all the errors of education found on the lower school levels come to a head, as logically they should. I think that a university should be founded on the following bases: it should be a teacher of universal culture; it should aid materially in the solution of problems which afflict the country; it should be the receptacle and guardian of the national culture; and it should be an institution where professionally-minded men can prepare for their careers. In Perú, only the last mentioned basis or aim is in operation. The universities here are 'factories' for the professions. There are, however, so few existing fields of study in these 'factories' that the country is crowded with doctors, lawyers, engineers and teachers, yet almost totally lacking in Peruvian-trained agricultural experts and other sorely needed technicians. Because the universities take little or no interest in helping to solve national problems, the public in general isn't interested in ameliorating university problems. Therefore, while each year hundreds more doctors and lawyers are turned out in a country already glutted with abogados and medicos, the country takes no interest in giving a helping hand to those men who have tried to educate themselves in technical fields which will greatly aid the national welfare. The Government would much rather call in foreign technicians than give the job to Peruvians. I am speaking particularly about agricultural and irrigation experts."

"The professor-student relationship within the universities is often similar to that found in the private schools. The students are all-powerful, as you can tell from reading the newspaper articles about the strike in San Marcos ⁶⁶. A professor is safe in his job only when he is careful not to make enemies among his students. This means that he must flunk as few students as possible. He keeps his political opinions to himself, especially if those opinions happen to differ from those of his class. Those professors who have been appointed to their posts through political pull must be doubly careful in this respect."

"The same lack of practical instruction found in the secondary schools is common in the universities. Men preparing for the legal or medical profession are apt to get most of their knowledge from books. There are very few trips to the laboratory or the courtroom. When these professional men graduate, many of them look upon their profession as a modus vivendi - a means of making money, period. They ask high prices for their services, irregardless of the financial status of their clients."

"Where do most ambitious secondary school and university men go after their graduation? Lima is usually their first choice, then Arequipa, Trujillo or Cuzco. The national and departmental capitals are bulging with doctors, lawyers, engineers and teachers, and the rural areas suffer because of it. Chances for a comfortable

4. Peeved because several of their number didn't make the grade in the medical school entrance examination, Lima's San Marcos University students declared a strike. Police moved in to occupy the buildings while the students enjoyed themselves, went on hunger strikes and speech making jags.

life run higher in the big cities, and exceptional indeed is the man who sets up his practice in a small provincial town. The tragedy of the whole thing is that rural regions are in far greater need of doctors and engineers than the cities. Yet they must stagnate while the professional men are combing the cities for rich clients. I don't blame the men too much; life in the provinces can be dull and unrewarding. Still, the centralization of culture, knowledge and wealth in the big cities is one of the greatest problems I know of in Perú."

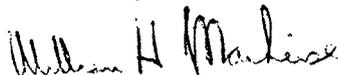
.....

I would be rather skeptical of Luis' remarks had I not heard the majority of them voiced many times by other teachers and had I not seen the appalling conditions which exist in all but the best schools in the city. Aprismo lives in these squalid conditions, and communism could and has taken advantage of the poverty of teacher and student to make new recruits in the schools and the university.

I would take issue with Luis on one point. The I'm-the-cock-of-the-roost attitude exhibited by so many youngsters in the schools I have visited is not, in my opinion, merely the result of the mile-long, inch-deep education they receive. The youngsters whose parents I know and whose homes I have visited are spoiled beyond belief. It is a rare parent who ever unbends to the point of giving his son or daughter a real cooling off. The idea seems to be to let the school handle that sort of thing. As the teachers are usually too busy trying to stay on the good side of the boys, the system just doesn't work. Students are spoiled both at home and at school. It is no wonder that they become disillusioned when they find out about the facts of life the hard way - by bumping into them head on.

Being an ex-leftist has caused Luis some bad times. Colleagues who are actively engaged in Aprista activities have often made it plain that they think it would be a good idea if he were to transfer to another school, or to another profession. On the other hand, Luis' firm belief in the right of an individual to do his own thinking has won him many friends among the older and more responsible members of his profession. A rarity among latinos, the majority of whom are inclined to believe in the leader, not the platform, of a political party or group, Luis reserves his support for those movements, political or otherwise, which seem to him to be based on sound principles and good judgement.

Sincerely,


William H. MacLeish

Received New York 6/23/55.