

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WHM - 11

Arequipa By Hindsight

Hotel Ferrocarril

Cuzco, Perú

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 Institute of Current World Affairs
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 New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

Some years ago, an important scientific expedition disembarked its equipment on an ice flow and started inland toward the North Pole..After days of blizzards and icy winds they were within a few kilometers of their objective. The expedition's leader raised his telescope to scan the expanse of virgin snow ahead of him and almost dropped the glass in his amazement. There, there smackdab on top of the Pole flew a small red flag. Below it was a low adobe building with the word PICANTERÍA painted on the front wall. Inside sat an arequipeño. He had brewed his chicha, put his picantes on the fire, and hung out that red banner which in any village around Arequipa means "Come and git it!" The arequipeño welcomed his guests with polite dignity and, seeing that they were gringos, naturally charged them triple for their meal.

It's an old and hoary story, but the arequipeños have livened it up with their own brand of humour and changed it around to fit what they think is a very important characteristic of their city - a well-muscled, don't-tread-on-me breed of independence. You don't have to look far to find proof of that characteristic. Peruvian history is filled with revolutions, but there is no other city in the country that can hold a candle to Arequipa when it comes to staging first class revolts. Arequipa is the Lion of the South, the place where aspiring generals and/or politicians go to start their coups d'état. If their plot finds favor among the inhabitants, or even if it is merely staged in the city - as was General Odría's 1949 revolt against then President Bustamante y Rivera - the chances are that their residence in the Palacio de Gobierno is just a question of time. Knowing this, the government

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 The Plaza de Armas

in power keeps a close watch on the comings and goings in this southern city. Lima is distrustful of Arequipa and, some say, fearful of her. In a country where centralization is a way of life, any threat to the supreme power of the Capital is bound to be highly resented. That the independence-loving arequipeños enjoy this resentment is evidenced by their stock of anti-Lima jokes. A friend of mine once told me, "You know, gringito, the reason why Lima won't give us more rein down here is because they're afraid we might secede!"

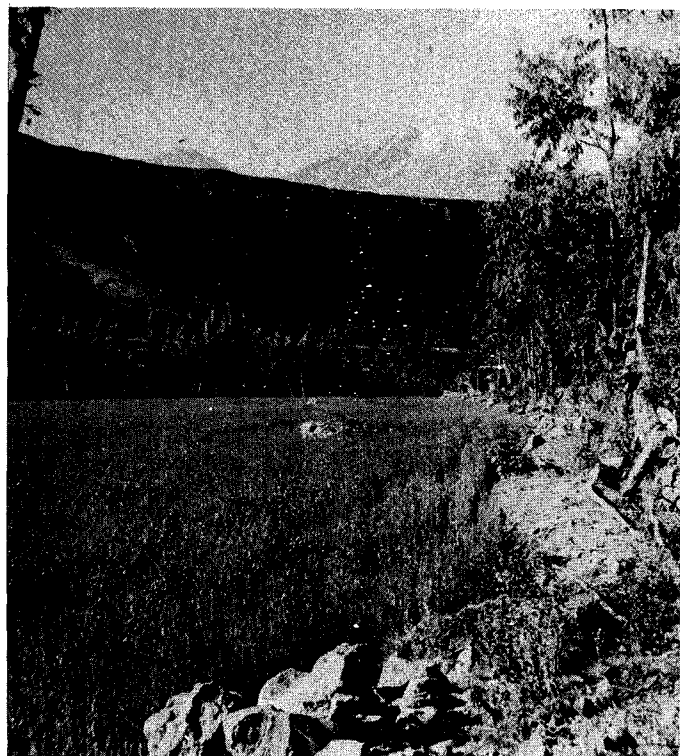
Lima's rein is indeed a tight one. Not only the Prefect but the City Council are appointed by the central government. The secret police service would be a credit to any government, witness the speed with which their agents picked up suspects in exiled General Noriega's latest plot against President Odría ^{1.} (two well known men



1. The plot, uncovered in January of this year, resulted in the exile of numerous important persons, among them a member of the powerful Miro Quesada family.

were spirited off to Lima, questioned, and released before many of their friends knew what had happened). The city's newspapermen must clear any story dealing with political matters with the Prefect's office. True, some critical cartoons and editorials appear from time to time, but in any moment of actual or suspected crisis, the lid is shut down tight. Papers are fed all important political stories from a Government information office or from the official poop sheet LA NACIÓN. Public meetings are frowned upon unless the powers that be know the nature of the meeting.

From a practical viewpoint, you cannot blame Odría's government for its caution and strict security measures. Arequipa is a stronghold of the illegal APRA party (WHM - 10) which can cause political havoc if not checked closely. The inclusion of communists in the party's ranks in recent times has increased its potential danger to the Government, for the Reds are past masters at heating up class and racial issues to the burning point in this country. Then too, there is a good deal of dissent in the city, political and otherwise. The Government realizes that dissent is a threat to its power. If allowed to grow, it will take the form of active and personal opposition to the President and his followers. Because there are no political parties in this country and therefore no machinery for settling differences other than that of revolution, exile and imprisonment, dissents of any kind cannot be tolerated.



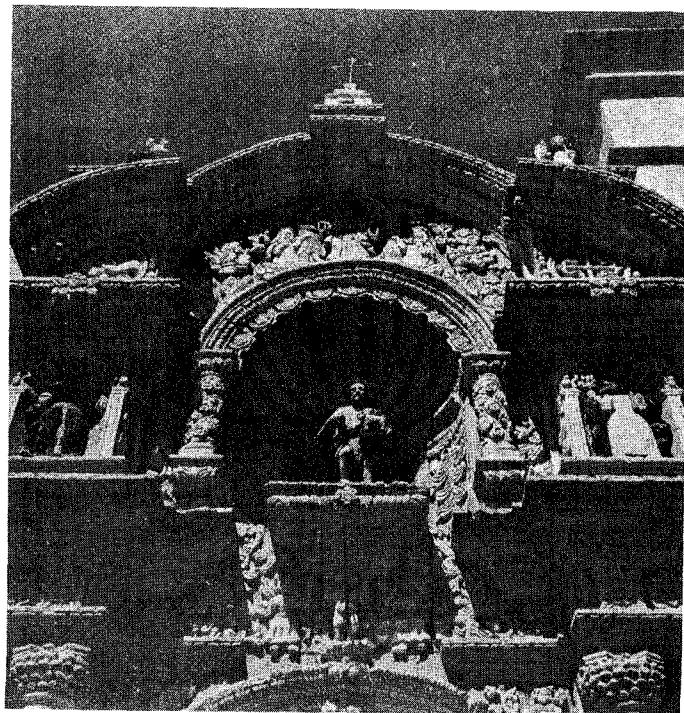
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Prime chacra in the Chili valley
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The arequipeño's love of freedom, cause of his frequent complaints against the domineering ways of the Capital, stems from the love of his land, his chacra. Although the city has grown from an agricultural center to a transportation and commercial hub, the focus of life is still rural and the chacarero still the symbol of fiery independence. The land in the Chili and Sabandía river valleys has been worked for centuries on a democratic basis - mutual aid during the harvest, respect for another man's property lines and irrigation ditches. As no large haciendas were established in these valleys, caudillismo or the feudal system of liege lord and vassal could never find a foothold, with the result that the farmer was and is his own master. In the vast areas where latifundio still operates in one form or another, such a man would be looked upon as a dangerous individual. In those areas, deprived of his tiny plot of land, the chacarero would soon lose his self-respect and his sense of freedom. A tragedy, yes, but no theoretical one. As the city swells with the flood of Indian nomads coming down from the sierra, as more and more adobe and concrete are thrown onto land that was once prime chacra, the tide of chacarero

emigration grows. Small farmers are being forced to leave or are quitting voluntarily. Still, there are more than enough land and farms left to preserve that bucolic sense of liberty which is the heart and brain of this city's life.

True to her nature as Perú's most conservative city, Arequipa is solidly and vociferously Catholic. At one time in her history, the town was a true City of God. Monks and friars, nuns and sisters outnumbered the laity in the ritual sundown stroll around the Plaza de Armas. In modern times, however, the Church has lost some ground

to the secular influence of new ideas and techniques, but not a foot of that ground has been given up without a fight. The priests recognize the fact that there are such things as cars, movies and that kind of social pleasures among the women, Canasta. But they do not take these things for granted. Now as before, their main concern is for the religious education of child by mother - an education which they think is being neglected in favor of the diversions of the modern world. During one exceptionally long sermon, Peggy heard a priest verbally castigating the womenfolk in his audience for their lack of parental virtues. Forget about Canasta parties, he said. Forget about going to the seashore. Forget about all those things which cause you to leave your children unattended and at the mercy of immoral and anti-Catholic elements. Stay at home, he told them, and tend to the moral and religious education of your child.



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The sillar façade of the
Yanahuara church.
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While the Church has lost ground on the material side, it would be difficult to say that it suffers from lack of members today. The streets are full of worshippers and the sound of the bells during Sundays and holy days. The dark clothes of the people turn jet against the white sillar of the church walls, and through the vaulted gloom of the portals the silver and gold altars gleam. Arequipa may have neglected to build proper roads, hospitals and schools, but she never stinted when it came to the embellishment of her churches. There are the silver images and the rich trappings of the saints, for Catholicism here is a religion of symbols and pomp. And this, in my opinion, is exactly as it should be. The poor and the little educated - in other words, the majority of the citizens of the city - have no use for religion on an intellectual level. What gives them comfort is the ritual - the altars and the images bought or perhaps built by their ancestors and themselves, the hypnotic chants, the sense of belonging to something rich and mystical. Such a religion is truly an opiate. Men and women can pass through a church door and leave all the squalor of their lives behind. In the presence of the images, it is easy to forget.

The opiate has its evils, however, and there are many critics who attack those evils, most of them good Catholics themselves. One criticism I have heard voiced several times attacks the fatalism produced by the Church's constant harping on the glory and spiritual riches of the Kingdom of God. With the goal of Heaven always in front of their eyes, most of the poor are inclined to shrug off the misery of their lives in this world. Instead of tackling or at least facing up to their problems in an effort to solve them, they accept their lot with a fatalistic "What can we do about it?". The future to them is Heaven, not a time to plan and work for with the hope of improving their lives.

Another criticism levelled against the Church - one which I have had a chance to verify - is that missionary zeal, so common among the churchmen of the Conquest and the Colonial period, has practically died out. Missionary work means an increase in village education and a subsequent breaking down of the walls of apathy which isolate one town from another, say the critics. It is the duty of the Church to make the townsmen realize that they are part of a nation as well as farmers or shepherds living in a village. In Arequipa, however, the majority of the priests

and brothers never venture out into the surrounding territory as missionaries. That difficult work they leave to such enterprising foreigners as the Maryknoll priests, young Americans who have made an enviable record for themselves in the training and educating of Indian and mestizo alike. Maryknoll fathers have taken over parishes in such outlying towns as Cerro Colorado as well as in several bleak sierra villages.

Despite its faults, however, the Catholic Church in Arequipa and in the rest of the country is the most important deterrent to social chaos. In a society which tends by its very heterogeneous nature to be unorganized, the Church is the strongest factor in favor of social organization. Lacking a sense of national unity or patriotism, lacking a common language, loyalty to a political party or other organizing elements common in countries less racially and territorially divided, Perú must look to the Church for whatever social unity she possesses. Perhaps in time social progress may solve the problem of its own accord through revolution or evolution, but until such a time, the church is the main buttress against the collapse of the all-important social status quo.

On the economic side of the picture, Arequipa is stagnating. I have been told by several well informed men that the city's financial problems stem from two basic lacks: money and land. The old, established businesses fare quite well, but the purchasing power of the 150,000 inhabitants is too low to encourage the development of new, modern stores and factories. The shortage of arable land is made more severe by the rapid growth of the population due to the influx of Indians from the sierra. There are, however, potential solutions to each problem on the horizon.

First, lack of money. The south of Perú is much poorer in terms of actual wealth than the north, whose cotton and sugar haciendas are among the biggest money producers in the country. Southern Perú's potential wealth, however, has recently been proved to be staggering. The Southern Perú Copper Corporation (WHM - 8) has uncovered a copper deposit large enough to warrant the investment of well over

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The sierra and the city meet.
An Indian girl in the old
dress and her son in the new.
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200 million dollars in the next few years. What will that mean to Arequipa? In the consensus of opinion, the short range effects of the project will be bad. Most of the city's businessmen shudder when they consider the prospect of so much wealth being suddenly dumped into an area so poor. For the next few years, Arequipa will suffer from an acute labor shortage, they say. Even now workers are leaving the city to look for higher paying jobs in the Toquepala area, site of SPCC's future copper mines. Some businessmen fear a sharp rise in the cost of living, while others see bitter competition between Arequipa merchants and others located in towns closer to the Toquepala area. All these fears and predictions have led to a rumor campaign. Favorite rumor: Toquepala will fold in ten years. "In ten years Toquepala will be a ghost town" or "They'll take all the copper out in a few years, and then where will we be?" Of course, few of the rumors are believed, but they are an indication of the unease with which the arequipeños consider Toquepala and the possible economic happenings in the next few years.

The long run effects of Toquepala upon the financial health of the city are considered to be excellent. George Bedoya, manager of the



San Pedro fish cannery at Ilo, told me that in his opinion, Toquepala would give Arequipa a new lease on life in the foreseeable future. When the first strains and bruises created by Toquepala's super-quick growth have healed, Arequipa will benefit greatly from the spending money and new markets offered by her coppery neighbor. Most important of all, the purchasing power of the whole region will be enormously increased.

The solution to the city's second financial difficulty - the lack of land - lies to the south of Arequipa: the great pampas of La Joya and Majes. Looking down from the desert foothills towards the pampas, the eye takes in an enormous sweep of plains red as a sunset cloud sloping sharply southward toward the coastal cliffs and the sea. Shifting dunes of volcanic, silver sand hook their arms to the northwest against the push of the wind. Those red plains can produce enough wheat or grow enough cattle to solve Perú's food import problems. So claim the experts. Throw water on that land, and you create an agricultural paradise. Private investors have irrigated a small patch of pampa near Santa Rita (WHM - 2), and the area consistently produces good truck garden crops. What is really needed, however, is a multi-million dollar irrigation project which will open the whole region to agriculture.

The Government, nevertheless, has not yet given the signal to procede with the project. At least two teams of experts have been sent to the area and have turned in identical studies and identical recommendations. Several million soles have been spent in this delaying action, and still no definite word one way or the other has come from Lima. Arguments against irrigating the Majes-La Joya pampas vary with the personal interests of the arguer. The project is too big, some say. There are not enough funds available. The most popular argument is that the enlarging of existing projects would produce the same effect for less money. Most arequipeños with whom I have talked believe that this enlarging-existing-projects talk is plain and simple politics stemming from Lima's fear of making Arequipa too self-sufficient and thus a threat to the policy of centralizing all power in the Capital. As for the lack of funds argument, any thinking Peruvian citizen realizes that his government is not a rich one, although it has made great strides in modernizing the economy and bringing foreign capital to the country. General Odría is widely praised in Arequipa for his economic policies. His government, however, has been bitterly criticised for its high, wide and handsome military expenditures (a highly revered custom among latino governments, to whom happy armed forces and long tenure of office are synonymous). Perú may not have the funds to finance the irrigation project, but in the opinion of the arequipeños, she could shoulder a much larger portion of the cost if the armed forces were cut down to a strength in keeping with the actual needs of the country, thus freeing millions of soles per year.

If and when the Majes-La Joya project goes through, Arequipa will become the granary of a revitalized southern Perú. Arable land will be hers for the asking, and the present congestion of her populace will subside as the chacareros cross the foothills to farm the new land.

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The San Camilo market. The fruit is brought in from the Majes valley provided that Lima's higher prices haven't lured it the other way.
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As she begins to grow as an agricultural center, the city's relation to and differences with Lima will become more and more sharply defined. The independent arequipeños may find themselves leaders of a powerful region where mining and agriculture are on a scale with that of the northern Departments. Faced with that possibility, it is no wonder that the Gobierno is hesitant to supply the wherewithal to give form and flesh to Arequipa's greatest dream - planting her crops on the red pampas of La Joya.

Sincerely,

William H. MacLeish
William H. MacLeish

Received New York 7/5/55.