

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WHM - 2  
The Oasis City

Casilla 35  
Arequipa, Perú  
October 19, 1954

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The Inca historian Garcilaso de la Vega ascribes the origin of the name Arequipa to the Quechua phrase "are quepay" - "it is well; remain here" - supposedly pronounced by the Inca Mayta Ccapac in reply to a petition of a number of his generals that they might remain in the valley of the Chili River. Recently, however, a different etymological theory has sprung up, one of whose chief proponents in Arequipa is Dr. David Salazar Yabar. Speaking at a Rotary Club luncheon three weeks ago, Dr.



Photo by J. Bravo Pineda

The Rio Chili, Arequipa, and the cone of El Misti

Salazar told his audience that no Inca in his right mind would have allowed his military forces to be so seriously depleted, especially in the midst of an arduous march back to Cuzco. Moreover, said Salazar, the Incas habitually named a specific area for its geographical features or its resident tribu (community). Thus, he suggested, the Quechua phrase "arir quepa" - "behind the volcanoes" in loose translation - would be more in keeping with historical fact.

The volcanoes in question are, from north to south, Chachani (6,076 meters), El Misti (5,821 meters), and Picchupicchu (5,571 meters). They completely dominate the city and the citizen. Arequipanian weather seems

to be born behind their peaks. When the thick mists of the nevada (somewhat similar to the garúa of Lima - WAM -1.) pour out of the passes and ride high over the town, "arequipeños" glare angrily toward the east and complain of headaches "caused by volcanic gases". When the skies are clear - and they are during a large part of the year - the townspeople call each other "mistiano" and insist that there is no volcano in Perú as pretty as their beloved Misti. They build their houses and churches out of volcanic sillar (hence Arequipa's nickname, "La Ciudad Blanca") and curse the mountains when an occasional terremoto (earthquake) topples roofs and shatters windows.

Caught between the volcanic barrier to the east and the arid hills of the coastal range to the west, ringed by miles of waterless pampas, Arequipa was until this century practically isolated from the rest of the country. It was a farming town, a warehouse for the rich crops produced by the irrigated terraces or andenes of the Chili and Sabandía valleys. The cholo farmers or chacareros spent every available minute working every available square inch of their small parcelas of land. In an area which had never known the feudal practices of latifundia and serfdom, so common in the Peruvian highlands, the cholos were free to develop a society of small landholders whose laws were based on a deep respect for individual property and water rights and for "peaceful coexistence", if you will pardon this somewhat hackneyed phrase. Today, as in past centuries, the outstanding characteristic of the "arequipeño" is his love for the land, his chacra (farmland).

Progress, however, was impossible under the conditions of acre-by-acre agriculture. Arequipa would have been doomed to stagnation if the British-sponsored Ferrocarriles del Sur del Perú had not broken through the isolating mountains. The railway linked Arequipa with the highlands - Puno, Juliaca, Cuzco - and with the sea - Mollendo and the new port of Matarani. The city became a transportation hub through which was funneled the commerce (chiefly wool) of the region. Although emphasis was naturally placed on urban development, the social thought of the town remained basically rural in outlook.

The outlines of an industrial community have been evident in Arequipa since the beginning of the century, and rapid development has been made in filling out the skeleton. The Census of 1940 showed that the only two predominantly industrial Departments in Perú were Lima and Arequipa. Mario Polar Ugarteche, an outstanding professor of history in Arequipa's Universidad Nacional de San Agustín, states in an article in the Lima daily LA PRENSA, "It is interesting to note that these two cities are almost the only ones which have solvent and autonomous electrical companies capable of promoting industrial development. The annual production of electrical energy of the Empresa de Arequipa is more than the

- 
1. Although Arequipa experiences many temblores (tremors) per year, the last really hairy 'quake occurred in August, 1868. It left many of the old Spanish houses and churches in ruins.
  2. Some of the pre-Columbian andenes are still in use in the Sabandía valley.
  3. The term cholo usually pertains to an agricultural laborer or an Indian who has left the mountains and adopted the western customs of the coast.
  4. The southern Railway was started by the fabulous Yankee, Henry Meiggs, who built the Central Railway (Lima-Oroya-Huancayo) out of tunnels and "switchbacks".
  5. Much of the information contained in this newsletter has been drawn from the articles of Dr. Polar. I apologize to him for the quality of my translation.

combined output of the Empresas of Chiclayo, Trujillo, Piura, Cuzco, and Ica. It is only just to recognize that the transformation of Arequipa into an industrial center is owing in part to the existence of an electric power industry founded and directed by arequipeños....."

"The future," says Dr. Polar, "is not too bright. The city does not control all the commerce of the interior. The highways which penetrate the Sierra and which do not run through Arequipa, are draining part of the production, especially from the region of Cuzco, into other areas. Therefore, it is logical to believe that sooner or later Arequipa will be seriously outflanked. The industrial development, on the other hand, depends upon the success which can be gained by the Empresa electrica in its efforts to augment its capacity, now that its current production is almost covered by the demand. And the agriculture, indispensable base in any healthy economy, far from increasing, is being reduced, at least in the surrounding countryside. The new suburbs are being extended into the old arable fields in an effort to keep pace with the housing needs of the population." In addition, a good deal of the water which might have been used in irrigating new lands is now being processed by purification plants in order to supply sufficient drinking water - none too healthy at that - to the expanding city. "Thus", says Polar, "the city is advancing dangerously toward the desert; reinforced concrete and asphalt are covering formerly wooded, fertile areas."

I have seen for myself the results of these urbanizaciones. Such suburbs as Cayma, Misti, and Miraflores are reaching out into the desert itself. Fourteen years ago, the street in which we live was a flourishing chacra. The most improbable housing project I have seen, though, consists of a series of small lots outlined with stones in the sand of a completely arid pampa on the northern lip of the Chili gorge. On Sunday mornings, the owners of these barren parcelas gather in a group under the red-white-red of a tattered Peruvian flag. They talk and point and scratch their heads, trying to figure out just how they are going to live in a waterless waste.

The chacareros, the original inhabitants of the valley, faced with the city's encroachment on the precious arable land, are packing up and moving away. The vacuum of their going is more than filled by an influx of Indians from the mountains. "They are incompetent and, in part, beggars", states Polar. Here is the same problem as that mentioned in my first newsletter. There is a greatly accelerated rate in population growth, without there being a proportionate increase in the means of production, agricultural or otherwise.

Serranos, the mountain people, are now swarming out of the Andes, settling in hut jungles above the town, and wandering through the streets dressed in a patchwork of rags. The majority of them find work as cargadores, human pack mules. It is not uncommon to see a cargador carrying two hundred pounds or more on his back, bent double under the weight, the soles of his feet caked an inch thick with the dirt and slime of the city streets. Some serranos earn their "keep" by selling lottery tickets; you can hear them in the Plaza de Armas at noon shouting, "¡Para hoy!".

The sanitation problem created by this influx is a difficult one to solve. My friend and fishing companion (the Rio Chili boasts some five and

six pound rainbows) Dr. Salazar - he of the "arir quepa" theory - is in charge of the children's clinic here. He told me that the mortality rate among the serrano children is frightening. Tuberculosis and other diseases resulting from malnutrition wreak havoc in the rows of huts above the city. The Government is constructing a tuberculosis clinic next to the "futbol" stadium at a cost of some seventy million soles. I can see it from my window - imposing, modern, and unfinished. It seems to me, if you will pardon an aside, that seventy million soles would have a better effect in the form of direct medical aid and hygiene education.

The Indian question is a hot one in Arequipa, especially among the wealthier elements of the town. The usual comment is: "These Indians are so lazy, so dirty!" Two weeks ago, however, I attended a cocktail party at which the guests were, for the most part, wealthy, intelligent, and States educated. I heard one gentleman say that if he had his way, he would tell the Army to go up into the mountains and shoot down every indio in sight. There was genial laughter at this remark. Of course, this was quite an extreme view, but not so extreme as to have provoked any rebuke worthy of the name. Indio is to an arequipeño what "nigger" is to a Georgian, except that the former term is applied indiscriminately to any member of the poorest class.

Why this clamor against the Indian? I have asked this question at every available opportunity. The following are, in my opinion, the two most plausible answers:

--- Edgardo Bedoya, a high official in the alpaca wool business of Arequipa and Tacna, told me that the indio is a Peruvian only in the sense that he lives within the national boundaries of Perú. His loyalty is to his land and his community rather than to the country. He has heard of Lima and perhaps has a vague idea about the Government and its laws. "The Indian knows that the Government has prohibited the killing of vicuñas, but he goes on killing them. He knows that the exporting of vicuña wool is equally prohibited, but he loads the wool on his llamas and walks across the border into Bolivia. Each year a good deal of Peruvian vicuña wool is shipped out of Bolivia".

--- Two days ago, Guillermo Villafuerte, a trained psychologist (Syracuse University) and a teacher of English at the Asociación Cultural Británico-Peruana, told me: "I have lived in the mountains for many years. I know the quechua language and quechua customs. In the U.S," he said, "European immigrants adapt themselves to the customs of the region in a relatively short time. They become fairly responsible citizens. Here in Arequipa, the Indians either cannot or will not adapt themselves to the westernized customs of the city. They remain impassive, resistant to change". This very resistance is infuriating to the city's upper classes, and not without reason. Four or five years ago, there were not very many serranos in Arequipa, not very many at all? Today, there are well over twenty thousand

---

6. A smaller and more graceful cousin of the llama and alpaca, the vicuña was until recently hunted for his fleece. The Government has protected the herds for some time in an attempt to save them from extermination. I have seen herds numbering twenty or thirty in the high yellow hills of the alti-plano.

of them, roughly one-seventh of the population<sup>8</sup>, and more are coming down from the mountains every month. "The problem is a national one," said Villafuerte. "What do you do with these people?"

The answer, according to Dr. Polar, lies in the opening up of new irrigation projects, new lands to unstopper the bottleneck of overpopulation and to restore a healthy agricultural basis to the economy. The great need<sup>9</sup> now is for the funds to start the ball rolling. "When Jean Despartmet<sup>9</sup> visited Arequipa," says Polar, "he declared publicly that the quality of the land of this area was a guarantee of large annual return; he stated that the irrigation of the Majes valley was highly feasible<sup>10</sup>. A wave of optimism greeted his words. In spite of this, however, the studies of these irrigation projects, in which the State has invested several millions, have been practically abandoned, and it has not yet been possible to obtain in the National Budget of the Republic the minimum sum necessary to terminate them. The pity is that while these studies remain unfinished, it will be impossible to secure a plan of financing, to negotiate for foreign aid, or to adapt the projects to the capabilities of either public treasury or private capital..... Arequipa has been waiting for more than twenty years to complete the irrigation project at La Joya (see 10.); to date no one knows when it will be possible to finish this indispensable work".

One needs to spend a very little time in Perú to see the truth of Mario Polar's statements. There is only a limited amount of arable land along the coast. The oasis is the exception, the desert the rule. The cities of the coast are trapped in these oases; with no room for expansion, they are forced by the pressure of overpopulation to expand. Their industry and commerce continue to attract thousands of the hopeful from the poorer regions of the country. If new areas are not opened up by means of irrigation projects, what is now the pressure of overpopulation may well turn into strangulation.

Arequipa is somewhat of a guiding light in these problems. Her farmers, reckoned by agricultural experts to be among the best in the country, have perfected a system of crop rotation and soil conservation which would be admirably suited to the Majes-La Joya projects, if and when they are completed. The city of volcanoes, then, stands a chance of ridding herself of her own headaches by pioneering in the new areas, by giving her chacareros the chance of their lifetimes - new land.

Sincerely,

*William H MacLeish*

William H. MacLeish

---

7. The Asociación is a well organized social club where British meet Peruvians, and vice versa. It is also an excellent instrument of British propaganda.

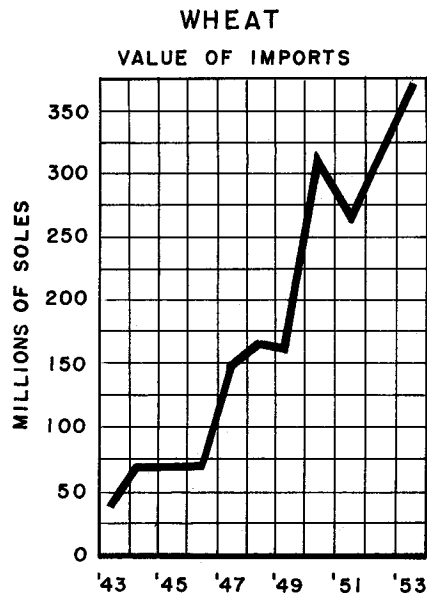
8. The census figures for 1940, the last census period, give Arequipa a population of 60,725. Recent estimates vary from 150,000 to 180,000. A new census is now in the making.

9. Head of the U.N. Technical Assistance Mission.

## FOOTNOTE 10.

The following article appeared in the October 10 edition of Lima's LA PRENSA. Although it suffers a good deal from my translation, the article is interesting because of the general plan of action it proposes, and because of the ruckus it caused in the Peruvian Senate. The facts and figures, the map and graphs are LA PRENSA's.

"Year by year, and in increasing proportion, Perú has had to buy enormous quantities of wheat from foreign markets. The increasing rate at which the product has been imported is really alarming. Scarcely eleven years ago, wheat purchases amounted to around 20 million soles; in 1953 it was necessary to invest 380 million soles in order to compensate for the deficit in national production. There is no reason why the figures should not go higher in the future.



"Perú is absolutely dependant on the foreign wheat market. The outbreak of an international conflict and the consequent interruption of free sea trade would place this country in a dramatic situation. The difficulties which we experienced in transporting wheat to our ports during World War II are still fresh in our minds. On the other hand, who can guarantee that there will not be a disturbance in the international market which will result in a drop in the prices of the products which we export, such as cotton, sugar, or minerals? Who can guarantee that the price of wheat will not rise as a result of bad harvests or some other cause?

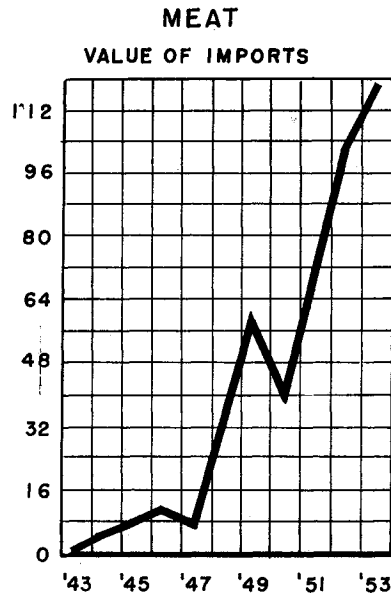
"In the complexities of modern economy, no nation is in a position to declare itself economically self-sufficient. The United States, the most powerful nation, does not forget that it must obtain primary materials needed by its industry from foreign sources, that it must sell part of its industrial products abroad. Economic independence, as understood in absolute terms, is nothing but a chimera. However, no one can gainsay the convenience of not having to depend on foreign markets to satisfy the most essential needs.

I. Although PRENSA does not seem to account for the devaluation of the sol in recent years, the increase is still appreciable.

Footnote 10. (cont.)

"If there arises a crisis in foreign markets, we can easily do without imports of luxury items. If there is a war, we can dispense with the importation of articles which, although useful, are not indispensable. Never, however, can we overlook our need for vital articles, such as wheat and meat, which we acquire from a foreign market.

"There is, therefore, facing this country a task which cannot be delayed - that of increasing our wheat production to the maximum..... The altiplano (tableland) produces very little wheat. Numerous experiments have been made in an effort to improve the condition of its produc-



tion in the valleys of the Coast. New varieties of wheat have been produced, apparently immune to la roya (wheat rust), but no variety has been able to resist for more than two years the devastating effects of this ....disease. Against each new variety of wheat, there developed a new variety of la roya. Because of the high degree of humidity, which favors the propagation of the fungus which causes this disease, the valleys of the Coast are.... not a suitable area for the cultivation of wheat.

"To make matters worse, wheat grown in the coastal regions is of poor quality, inferior to that raised in the fields of Arequipa and the neighboring irrigated land of Vitor and Santa Rita de Sigwas. Arequepeño wheat is better than the imported variety, more compact, richer in starch and nutritious qualities. Nevertheless, because of the reduced amount of land actually under cultivation - not more than 15,000 hectares (36,000 acres) - Arequipa, Vitor, and Santa Rita de Sigwas cannot remotely make up the tremendous deficit of our wheat production. The irrigation of the Pampas de Majes, however, would radically change the situation.

"The following are the factors which point to this zone as the most suitable one..... for the raising of wheat: there is brilliant sunshine during most of the year; the soil is rich in limes and phosphates; the climate is so dry that la roya could not take hold; and, lastly, the altitude of the zone, between 1200 and 1800 meters, has been proved to be ideal for the cultivation of wheat.

"It seems that Nature has provided everything in these pampas, even water, of which there is an abundance in the Rio Majes. Year after year it is lost in the ocean. It is up to us to accept the challenge, to draw the water from the river and spread it over the pampas, to do with the Majes what the Americans did with California". (There follows a flowery description of pioneers vs. Death Valley and vertigo)

"The project is technically feasible. The engineers to whom the Government entrusted the preliminary surveys have arrived at this conclusion. Hills must be burrowed through and tunnels constructed. A large canal must be dug from the confluence of the Colca and Huaruro rivers (see map) to the pampas. It must be equipped with secondary canals to distribute the water as required. Moreover, a dam must be built, such as the one planned for Sibayo, for the Colca - the name given to the Majes upstream from the Audamayo - is a river of floods and freshets, and its water level drops considerably during the dry season. But problems graver than these have been solved by the modern methods of engineering employed by India, the United States, and other countries. Peruvian engineers have well demonstrated their abilities along these lines". (LA PRENSA illustrates this point by referring the work of Peruvian engineers at Quiroz in the northern part of the country)

"To the technical possibilities of irrigating the pampas of the Majes must be joined the economic possibilities of doing it. The cost of the project has been calculated at roughly 2,000,000,000 soles<sup>2</sup>. In the current Budget of the Republic, this project could not be undertaken unless a policy were adopted to stop all public works, such as the construction of Ministry buildings, the building of tourist hotels, and the beautification of Lima's avenues, which are not of a reproductive nature. Having attended to its really necessary commitments, the Government should devote the remainder of its revenues to increasing the productivity of the country."

(LA PRENSA then discusses the desirability of securing a foreign loan for the project. As soon as the Majes begins to produce, it states, there will be an appreciable decline of wheat imports. The money thus saved can be used to pay off the loan, a process authorized by Article XV of the Constitution of the Republic. The paper further suggests that the Government sell the Majes land to settlers on a system of credit which would net it a sufficient amount of soles, which, in turn, would be used to buy dollars, to pay off the interest on the loan.) "In the light of the international confidence which are country inspires," (Perú is one of the most economically stable countries in South America), "there is no doubt that Peru could arrange for a loan for the furtherance of a project such as the irrigation of the Majes valley.

"In order to interest international credit organizations, it is necessary to present.....a detailed plan. Chile, which has secured many loans, where they talk about making use of the waters of Lake Titicaca which do

2. One must take these figures with a grain of salt. An interested party in Arequipa quoted me the figure of 1,800,000,000 soles.



## Footnote 10. (cont.)

belong to them<sup>s</sup>, has given us a good example. This consideration, above all others, should be sufficient to bring home the importance of concluding the studies of the irrigation of the Majes previously made by a commission of Peruvian engineers at the request of the Government. The long period of field work, which cost 10,000,000 soles<sup>s</sup> and five lives, is now over, except for reports and evaluations which would cost only 500,000 soles. Meanwhile the plans, geological surveys, and hydroelectrical investigations lie abandoned ..... in the archives of the Ministerio de Fomento."

(The above paragraph is the one which raised the Governmental temperature. Communiqués issued by El Gobierno attacked LA PRENSA as a teller of false tales. In its editorial of October 22, the paper returned the fire by saying that it was Felipe Santiago Rosas, Senator from Arequipa, and not LA PRENSA, who was responsible for the "archives of the Ministerio de Fomento" statement. It was not until the paper brought the statement to light that the Gobierno became irritated, declared LA PRENSA.)

"It has been calculated by the commission of engineers .... that the impounding of roughly 800,000,000 cubic meters of water behind the proposed Sibayo dam would guarantee a year-round supply sufficient to irrigate a minimum of 90,000 hectáreas<sup>s</sup>, of which 10,000 hectáreas would be planted in fruit trees, 50,000 in alfalfa, and 30,000 in wheat. Thus, the country could cut its foreign purchases of wheat by more than one-third. Moreover, the growth cycle of wheat is five months in duration, during the seven months in which wheat is not grown, garden vegetables can be raised.

"In the zone of Arequipa, the experience of a century of farming has proved that wheat should be rotated with alfalfa to conserve the soil. The Majes region is admirably suited to the raising of alfalfa. The quick changes of temperature every twenty-four hours - the average variation is six degrees Centigrade - serve as a natural insect control. The Anastrepha Peruviana, a fruit fly considered to be one of the worst plagues in Perú, does not exist there." ( The Majes, says LA PRENSA, would also help to solve the problem of the scarcity of meat, by virtue of its alfalfa pastures.)

"The promise of the Majes is amply guaranteed, not only by the engineers, but by a test case. Santa Rita de Siguan lies within the pampas of the Majes. It belongs to the same geological complex. There, twenty-five years ago, private capital started an irrigation enterprise which is now

---

3. The reference here is to a pamphlet addressed to Henry Holland, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, which made its appearance in Antofagasta while Holland was staying there. The thing that makes the Peruvians so hopping mad is that Chile wants to use Titicaca water, property of Perú and Bolivia, to irrigate Chilean land.

4. Senator Santiago Rosas gives the figure of 8,000,000 soles

5. One hectárea equals 2.4 acres.

## Footnote 10. (cont.)

in full swing. The results, in terms of wheat and alfalfa crops, justify all hopes for the rest of the pampas.....

"The commission of engineers which worked on the previous studies has recommended the construction of a cement factory near Querulpa, where there are deposits of high quality limestone. Plans are also afoot to take advantage of the waterfalls and rapids of the region by the installation of two hydroelectric plants which would develop approximately 80,000 h.p. - an energy far superior to that now at the disposal of the entire South of Perú.

"The commission has also pointed out the necessity of constructing roads to link the new lands with consumer centers. Even in this sense, the location of the Majes pampas is an advantageous one. The Pan-American Highway runs close by, and it would not be difficult to build roads linking the Majes with this main artery. In the future, if deemed necessary, a spur railway could be built out from the nearby Ferrocarril del Sur.

"The Peruvian Government must safeguard 'la conservación y difusión de la pequeña propiedad', under the stipulations of Article XXXXVII of the Constitution. The cultivation of fruit trees, of wheat and alfalfa, does not require the centralization of land and capital found in the sugar plantations of the Coast. On the contrary, what is needed is the small lot and the farmer who knows how to work it. For example, there has never been any latifundia in Arequipa. An arequipeño who owns 90 topos (30 hectáreas) is considered a large landowner. The number of rural landowners in Arequipa is ... higher than in any other area of the Republic. The middle class is more numerous and in better condition, and the basis of social structure is more solid.....

"These same conditions should occur in the Majes area. In the selling of these lands to settlers, latifundia must be avoided at all costs. If the work of irrigation is to be handled by private businessmen, they must be instructed to divide the land into small lots. With the 90,000 hectáreas which will be irrigated by the Majes project, the Government has an incomparable opportunity to exercise the Constitutional precept: 'favorecer la difusión de la pequeña propiedad rural.'

"The ... reduction of the scarcity of cultivated land, one of the greatest problems of the country; the development for the production of wheat and cattle of a land which offers the most favorable conditions for both objectives; the creation of small farms; the handing over of the lots to small farmers from all over the country, who will be shown by the farmers of Arequipa how to work them .... in short, the completion of the Majes project, will be, beyond all doubt, a work of national benefit.".....

