

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WHM - 25
 Cuzco: A
 Final Look

Casilla 208
 Arequipa, Perú
 November 29, 1955

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

In a recent ceremony - the crowning of "Miss Cuzco Employee, 1955" - the mayor gave a long and typically florid speech the gist of which was a comparison of Cuzco with Rome. For fifteen minutes the alcalde harangued his enthusiastic audience with superlatives describing the grandeur that was Tawantinsuyu. The names of the great ruins - Sacsahuaman, Ollantaytambo, Machupicchu - came rolling off his tongue. He spoke of the far flung borders of the Inca state, the genius of its rulers, the skill of its artisans. The Empire had its Julius Caesar and its Rome, he said, and Tawantinsuyu had its Pachacutec and its Cuzco. But with all his oratorical skill, the alcalde seemed to be forgetting an important point: whereas the city on the Tiber has sprouted from its ruins to become an important capital, the city on the Huatanay can at present boast of little else than its title of Archaeological Capital of South America; whereas Rome is the center of a powerful and relatively united nation, Cuzco is still struggling to rid itself of the ancient three-tiered social system which for centuries has impeded progress in every field.

In Arequipa and other coastal cities, Indians and all things Indian are looked upon with scorn and, at times, hatred. Being outside the areas which have a heavy Indian population, the coastal cities choose to play ostrich and forget about the problems of their Quechua and Aymara compatriots. The sierra cities, however, find it a bit difficult to contemplate their navels and disregard the problems and misery of the majority of their citizens. Conscientious cuzqueños have no choice but to look the Indian in the eye, acknowledge his presence, and take an interest in his way of life. Quechua is spoken in the streets and studied in the university, and the customs of the indios are part of the city's culture. Despite the existence of the three-runged social ladder of Indian, mestizo and white, there is a growing realization in Cuzco that the racial structure of society must be destroyed if the region is to be guaranteed an economically prosperous future. Juan Quispe and Felix Mamani must become active, contributing members of the community.

The bottom rung of Cuzco's social ladder, the Indian communities are the rock upon which the mestizos and whites stand. Whether they are hacienda parcialidades or independent ayllus, the communities form the basis of cheap labor, the bulwark of serrano society from the Conquest to the present. Although most of the more brutal forms of feudalism employed by Cuzco hacienda owners disappeared with the advent of the Republic, the atmosphere which surrounds the Indian in his daily life is still feudalistic. The white men are still the "wiracochas", and the Quispes and Mamanis still doff their hats in their presence. To be sure, campesinos are no longer forced to serve

as slaves in the town houses of hacienda owners (pongaje) or sent in gangs (mitas) to work in the mines. Enforced slavery and physical punishment of Indians in modern Perú are punishable by the confiscation of lands and, at times, the imprisonment of the guilty hacienda owner. According to law, Juan Quispe has his inalienable rights. But in Perú, as in other countries, the just and humane laws of the land are sometimes not worth the paper they are printed on. Because of the widespread illiteracy in the ayllus and parcialidades, only a few campesinos know what their rights consist of. And of these few, only a handful would dare to stand up to a white or a mestizo who was deliberately disregarding those rights. Centuries of oppression have bred a submissiveness to the will of the mistis which allows the latter to ride roughshod over the campesinos at their pleasure.

In the light of the above, it is obvious that any attempt on the part of Cuzco or foreign whites to improve the lot of the Indian will meet with passive but hostile opposition in the beginning. Unless the stranger can prove his sincerity and friendship rapidly and concretely, his efforts are doomed. This misti has come to take away our land, the campesinos will say; he is an agent of the government come to force our young men to serve in the army. Only by patience and an early showing of results can the agricultural, educational or health technician succeed in breaking down the wall of suspicion which was raised against him the minute he set foot in the community. Righting the wrongs of centuries is a tough job, and the various Point Four and United Nations organizations now working in the Cuzco area are to be congratulated for the patience and perseverance which they have practiced.

If the basis of a society is inert, non-productive, it stands to reason that the rest of the system will suffer. Small manufacturing concerns in Cuzco would prosper, if they could sell their goods to the predominantly Indian communities of the region. The city would be practically self-sufficient, if the buying power of the Department as a whole could be raised. But these are big "ifs". The economies of most of the communities in the area is closed. the campesinos produce very little merchandise of their own except for a few odds and ends for the tourist trade. Agriculture is their life, and primitive agriculture at that. In the high lands like the district of Chinchero (WHM - 23 & 24) the Indian farmer can barely produce enough to satisfy the needs of his own family. In the valleys of the Huatanay and Urubamba rivers, the land is rich enough to practically guarantee a good crop at harvest time, but the subdivision of family and community fields through the centuries has resulted in the creation of a complex of postage stamp lots too tiny to produce a surplus crop which could be sold in the cities.

This is not to say that all the Indians in the Department of Cuzco are paupers. Some valley communities are rich in arable land, and several parcialidades belonging to haciendas which I have visited own more livestock than the hacendado. But the point to be remembered is that there is no machinery for putting this potential wealth to work in the economy of the region as a whole. The campesinos know little more now about the value of money than they did when the Conquistadores first brought it to Perú. Their economic life is based on bartering crops for household needs or livestock for coca and alcohol. They do not buy consumer goods, for they have no use for them. They are naturally suspicious of entering into business deals with the mistis, and they are prone to distrust any and all

banks. The problem of creating purchasing power, then, is twofold. The system of economically closed communities who have locked their doors in the past against the deceptions of the mestizos or whites must be destroyed; at the same time, the suspicion and distrust which have been created by those very deceptions must be replaced by mutual trust. It should be evident that many years, decades, even centuries must pass before the problem can be completely resolved.

If the Indian is the basis of the old, three-tiered society, the mestizo is the hope of a new and more democratic one. A city dweller by preference, the mixed-blood is the small businessman of the sierra. He owns the corner hardware store and the grocery shop up the street. He speaks Spanish and is apt to be able to read and write. In the small villages with predominantly Indian populations, he is the local official - the mayor or the policeman. But above all, his is a truly amorphous class; there are no rigid levels which mark the top or bottom of his niche in society. Indians who adopt western ways, who learn to speak Spanish well and to read and write, pass themselves off as mestizos. Some of the leading families in Cuzco society are mestizos, and many more claim to be pure blanco. As it is impossible to trace family trees back to the dim days of the colonial period, any light-skinned individual can make this claim and get away with it. But in general, the term "mestizo" calls to mind the picture of a middle class in its formative stages, an image of a social class which is neither Indian or gente decente in its makeup.

As a member of a middle class which as yet is not sufficiently organized to make its voice felt in important national issues, the mestizo is a victim of a strange disease. You might call it apathy or inferiority complex or social inertia. His is the middle layer of the social sandwich, and he feels the bind from below as well as from above. The apathy which he feels is born from the fact that he is a man who can have no big dreams. Of course, he can become a store owner, a landowner, or a leading member of Cuzco society. But as a large and growing group - a middle class - the mestizo sees no stars he can reach for. Far from being geared to the operations of a middle class, the country exists on the agricultural, rural level of progress. As there is a lack of purchasing power, so there is a lack of factories, commercial houses and small businesses - elements essential to the life and prosperity of a middle class. As an individual, the mestizo can set his sights high, but as a group he is frustrated by the paucity of things he needs to become powerful. As an individual, he can climb to the top of the ladder, but no matter how high he climbs, he cannot forget the conditions under which his friends and relatives live.

Stung by the frustration of being a member of a businessless business class, the mestizo is apt to make the Indian the whipping boy for all his troubles. For centuries he has heard the upper class call the indio "animal" and ridicule their abject poverty, so that to him the Indian blood he carries in his veins is something of an insult in itself. The result is that the mestizo mistreats the Indian. He takes advantage of his abilities to speak Spanish and influence lawyers and public officials to rob the campesino of land and crops. As the mayordomo or foreman of a hacienda, he is apt to be overly cruel in his dealings with the tenants of the estate. The attitude of mestizo toward Indian can be partially explained by the fact that the social position of the former places him in close

contact with the campesinos, but in many cases the cruelty and deception are a direct result of the mixed-blood's deep sense of frustration and inferiority.

At the top of Cuzco's social heap, the gente decente, the class made up of hacienda owners, military officers, bankers and the owners of the few large business concerns in town form the upper crust. Although the value of land ownership as a mark of social prestige has declined somewhat in recent years, haciendas still form an economic basis for the continued rule of the gente. For the most part, the estates near Cuzco are well run, and the hacendados take pains to improve their land and livestock by the use of modern farming methods and the importation of blooded animals. The haciendas, however, are the lineal descendants of the old encomiendas - those great tracts of land and groups of Indians given over to deserving Conquistadores by the Spanish crown. As such, they depend entirely upon the Indian for their continued prosperity. In terms of modern agriculture as we know it in the United States, the majority of the haciendas are inefficient in their very concept. Large portions of potentially arable land lie fallow for years, while fields and pasture land in use at the present time are allowed to be maltreated by the tenant farmers and eroded away by natural processes.

Were it not for the cheap labor with which the Indians pay the rentals on their hacienda-owned fields, the estates would quickly collapse. Their owners could not stand the expense of buying machines to work their land, and in many cases the topography would not permit the use of tractors and mechanical ploughs. The Indian farmer, working off his debts to the hacendado by ploughing his fields and herding his livestock, cannot be replaced by gasoline engines and steel harrows. The hacienda owner knows this and, therefore, is apt to fight any movement which would in any way change the age old submission of the campesino to his will. In the region of Paucartambo, for instance, there are several hacendados who refuse to give work or rent land to any Indian who has served in the army. They have had experience with a few service veterans who have returned to urge their people to protest against the injustices of the system which overworks and underpays them. If the veterans' advice had been taken, the hacendados could have been in real and nasty trouble.

The Indians' submission to the life which he has led for centuries is a matter of concern for the government in Lima. Realizing that national economic progress is impossible unless the Indian is integrated into society, Odría's government has put forward a program designed to enlighten Juan Quispe, to make him aware of the fact that he too is a citizen of Perú. Point Four and United Nations-Peruvian projects are already at work in Cuzco in the fields of education and agriculture, and they are receiving support from some of the more forward looking hacienda owners. Although this would seem at first glance like a form of economic suicide, several of the hacendados with whom I have talked (most of these are engaged in ventures outside of and apart from their haciendas) realize that Cuzco will remain backward so long as a part of its economy is tied up in a backward system of land tenure. They see the handwriting on the wall and count the existence of those haciendas located in rich, accessible areas in terms of years and decades. The educated Indian of the future, once he knows his rights, will demand that they be respected. When that happens, many of the haciendas will die a quick death.

In other sierra regions, the passing of the hacienda system could bring about economic dislocation for a period of time. In Cuzco, however, such a dislocation would be improbable. The city is already looking toward the jungle lowlands for the solution to her economic problems. Development of the montaña is a slow and costly venture, but sufficient progress has been made to further the conviction that Cuzco will be the center in the future for the rich, diversified produce of the southern Peruvian Amazonian area. Cuzqueños are buying up land both in the jungle proper and in the valleys leading down into it. From Qosñipata to Maldonado, tracts are being purchased and stored away until the day when the growth of road, rail and river transportation make them profitable investments. It is quite possible, therefore, that the opening up of the jungle will bring an era of prosperity to Cuzco which could never have been realized under the economic sovereignty of the haciendas.

In its physical aspects, Cuzco is as three-tiered as its society. Inca walls line its narrow streets, beautiful colonial churches cast their towered shadows on its plazas, and modern buildings stand high above the adobe houses on the Avenida del Sol. There is no continuity of architecture, no signs of an orderly growth. The Council for the Reconstruction and Industrial Development of Cuzco (WHM-23) has paved a few streets and erected a housing development on the outskirts of the city, but in reality the job of modernizing Cuzco has just begun. The task itself is made more difficult by public opinion. Any attempt to tear down old buildings hopelessly wrecked by the earthquake of 1950 or relocate historical monuments whose present sites block the plans of the Council engineers has been met with a sincere and vociferous storm of protest. In the eyes of its citizens, Cuzco is Rome. History still lives in the alleys, the ruins, and the houses of the early Spaniards, and history should not be torn down or relocated. Faced with this sentimental but sincere argument, the Council may have to abandon some of its schemes for creating order and efficiency out of Cuzco's ancient turnings and twistings.

The political life of the city exhibits the usual conservative-radical mixture of other Peruvian urban centers. Although most of the well heeled cuzqueños prefer dancing until dawn at the luxuriously furnished Club Cuzco to meddling in politics, a few of them have organized the local party headquarters of the Odríista Partido Restaurador del Perú and are taking an active hand in organizing the area in preparation for next June's presidential elections. As to be expected, the upper classes are conservative in their political thinking, preferring the election of an Odría man or, perhaps, a candidate like ex-president Prado to that of liberal-minded ex-president Bustamante or a socialistically inclined candidate. In Peruvian cities, political organization is apt to be governed by personal friendships, and Cuzco is no exception. Liberal and radical parties seem to be as badly organized as the conservative factions.

The so-called "radical" activities in the city are usually limited to drinking bouts and a certain amount of casual agitation among workers' organizations. I never found any signs of disciplined, Moscow-directed activity in the fiestas which the leaders of the Communist party in Cuzco threw in the Hotel Ferrocarril bar. Most of the men would probably be hard pressed at any time to state the platform of their party or what it meant in simple terms. I am of the opinion that in Cuzco as elsewhere in Perú, communism is a con-

fused excuse for being "agin" everything in general.

The Hungarian manager of the Hotel Ferrocarril told me that the closest the commies came to kicking up their heels was after the fall of Dienbienphu. A group of the "party" leaders swaggered down to the hotel wearing red ribbons across their chests and making cracks about the weakness of the degenerate capitalists who had just been whipped in battle. When they found that the manager was a Hungarian, they took him to be one of their own and invited him to join in the mud slinging and whiskey drinking. The manager, a graduate of both Nazi and Russian concentration camps, lit into the red-ribboned gentlemen with the fury of one who has learned his lesson first hand. He gave them five minutes to clear out, and his order was obeyed with alacrity. The dispirited "Reds" trudged back to town to find quiet surroundings in which to vent their spleen.

Sincerely,

William H. MacLeish
William H. MacLeish

Received New York 12/8/55.