

## INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WHM - 28  
¡Libertad!

Casilla 208  
Arequipa, Perú  
December 27, 1955

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

From the night of December twenty-first until Christmas Eve, Arequipa was a ghost town of shuttered windows and locked doors, a mob town with bands of students and workers marching in the streets and building barricades of paving stones. One man had an eye slashed by a saber point, another fell with a bullet through his throat; others suffered from gunshot wounds, bruises and tear gas poisoning. For three days the city was ruled by crowds, confused by rumors. Yet, strictly speaking, this was not a revolution. In the lingo of Latin American politics, it was a paro general or general strike. Its object: to remove from office the Minister of Government (and head of certain police forces) Alejandro Esparza Zañartu.

The events leading up to the paro were of a political nature, although the strike itself was put into effect by a non-partisan people's committee. As I have mentioned in other newsletters, a presidential election will be held next June. In preparation for the elections, two major parties - each a coalition of splinter groups - are in the process of being formed. One, the Partido Restaurador del Perú (PRP), is the party of President Odría. It has been in operation for some months, and its influence has spread to the larger cities in the provinces. The PRP leader in Arequipa is Javier Landázuri Ricketts, manager of a large commercial concern in the city. To combat the Partido Restaurador a coalition of Christian Democrats and other groups has been formed. Known as the Coalición Nacional (CN), the party bases its platform on the repeal of the Law of Internal Security (which if invoked can give the Government dictatorial powers), a revision of the electoral laws and a general amnesty for political prisoners and exiles. The two parties have been feuding in the local and national press, calling each other names. The Government paper LA NACION refers to the CN as "Contigo Nadie" - "no one is with you" - and the Coalición press calls PRP men "restaurantadores". At a CN rally in Lima a short time ago, a small group of opposition agitators tried unsuccessfully to disperse the crowd by starting a fire. Aside from a few small scrapes of like nature, both parties refrained from open warfare. But the uneasy truce was called off when the CN decided to hold a big meeting in Arequipa.

Coalición Nacional and Christian Democrat leaders in the city obtained permission from the city government to hold their rally in the Municipal Theatre the evening of Wednesday, December twenty-first. Handbills announcing the meeting flooded the streets, and the lamp posts were girdled with the red and white emblem of the CN. At six o'clock on the twenty-first, the interested and the

curious headed for the Teatro Municipal to hear the speeches of millionaire Pedro Rosselló, a leading CN spokesman, and other Coalición partisans. However, the crowd was met by an unscheduled reception committee - a group of restauradores, some native sons and some professional political agitators imported from Lima ("Black Killers", as the local paper EL PUEBLO called them later). Landázuri and others harangued their supporters by means of leathern lungs and loudspeakers, and the agitators incited the PRP group to block the entrance to the theatre. Infuriated by this illegal attempt to break up their rally, the "coalicionistas" broke through the cordon and filled every seat in the Municipal.

Peggy and I joined the growing mob of spectators at this moment. The voice coming through the loudspeakers was urging the crowd not to listen to "rich man" Rosselló, who treated his own workers in Lima like dirt. Put your faith in Manuel Odría and the Partido Restaurador del Perú, said the voice, and drive the Coalición Nacional from the city. A bedlam of noise issued from the open doors of the theatre; outside, the intersection was jammed with demonstrators and spectators. Then the mounted police arrived, naked sabers held at the ready. A well-disciplined squad of men and horses, they put on a demonstration of mob control which would gladden the heart of any cavalry enthusiast. Within two minutes they had cleared the intersection and cordoned off the entrances to the theatre area. Then they waited, four men abreast in the cobbled streets, until the crowd calmed down.

We ran with the mob, keeping close to the buildings to stay away from the moving horses and the sabers. The police behind us stopped their mounts at the end of the block, and we turned to watch. The horsemen used the flats of their swords on the laggards, but they were careful not to stampede the mob into a trampling, crushing flight. As groups of people began to drift apart from the mass, we caught sight of friends who had been swept up in the initial rush. Many of them had been shopping in the holiday-decorated stores near the theatre when they heard the shouting and went to investigate. A young doctor looked worried. "Get out of this; get your wife home as quickly as you can", he told me. We reached the pickup truck and forced our way through the crowd to an open street. It was lucky we were able to do so. Within an hour, Arequipa exploded.

In relating the events that happened after the PRP "contra-manifestación", I must rely on the stories of a few excited eyewitnesses and the accounts given by the Arequipa dailies, NOTICIAS and EL PUEBLO. The latter, which became the public information organ for the strikers, adopted the technique of screaming headlines and lurid descriptions, sacrificing accuracy for emotional punch. NOTICIAS, however, remained fairly calm during the emergency (after publishing a front page blurb to the effect that it was not a mouthpiece for any political organization whatsoever) and

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Demonstration on the twenty-second  
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reported the proceedings as simple facts instead of earth-shaking events.

According to the above sources, then, the Guardia Civil (national police) restored order to the area around the theatre. In doing so they were perfectly within their rights. The real trouble started, however, when a squad of policemen entered the Teatro Municipal and threw tear gas bombs into the audience, despite the pleas of Rosselló and other men standing on the stage. EL PUEBLO stated later that the official excuse for this action was that the police saw a group of PRP agitators enter the building and used their tear gas to flush them out, thus preventing them from starting a nasty fight inside the theatre. In any case, audience, agitators and speakers were all forced to leave in short order. To the freedom-loving arequipeños, this deliberate breaking up of an authorized political meeting was the last straw. No longer were political issues involved, although the leaders of both parties tried to take advantage of the theatre episode and the subsequent events to disgrace their opposition. In the mass mind, the police and the PRP agitators had stained the honor of arequipeñismo, that great ideal created out of intense regionalism

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Scrambling for handbills  
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and fostered by generations of poets and orators. Fair liberty herself, that much used word, had been dragged in the dust. The crowd knew it, and tempers were hot.



Determined to carry on their meeting, the "coalicionistas" moved on to the Plaza de Armas. But, as politics had no place now in the indignant shouts of the crowd, no meeting was held. Instead there began a slowly growing struggle between the people and the police. At first the pushing and shoving, then the prying up of cobbles, and then the inevitable blood fight. At first the police fired above the crowd, but later on in the two-hour battle they were forced to

lower their aim. Result: eight men were hit by the bullets, the majority of them in the legs or thighs. The youngest of the eight, Edgardo Guzman Pacheco, 16, received a bullet through the throat.

I was not at the Plaza de Armas when the fight began, but from the accounts given it is evident that many of the bullet wounds were caused by ricochets. Although the police were roundly condemned by the Arequipa press as wanton killers, it should be obvious to anyone familiar with fire arms that if the Guardia had deliberately chosen to end the fight then and there, it could have done so with one well placed volley. Such an action would have been hideously brutal and would have resulted in violent repercussions throughout the country. But the fact remains that even when pushed to the extreme, only a few members of the police force chose to fire into the crowd.

In the United States, tear gas is known as one of the most efficient weapons in existence for use against mobs. Except in rare

cases, streets are cleared rapidly once the gas has been used. In the Plaza de Armas, however, tear gas bombs used by the police had little effect other than to burn and blind. Instead of retreating from the gas, men moved forward over it toward the police lines. In some cases they picked up bombs with pulled pins and were severely burned when the cannisters released their contents. Several men were taken to the hospital completely overcome by the gas. In a way the crowd reaction to the tear gas was a measure of the battle lust and anger which developed in the Plaza de Armas.

The weapon of the mob was the adoquín, the paving stone. Whole areas of the Plaza and adjacent street intersections were torn up to make barricades and provide arms for the crowd. One policeman was hit full in the face by a stone; the nose and cheek bones were crushed. Fists and feet were used when there was nothing else. One professional PRP agitator was recognized by a group of men and severely beaten. Against the police horses, empty gasoline cylinders were used. The cans were rolled down the sloping streets under the horses' hooves.

By nine-thirty the crowd had been dispersed. The Plaza lay empty, its pavement torn up, its lawn soaked with tear gas. According to EL PUEBLO, shortly after midnight a Guardia Civil truck arrived in the square with a crew of workmen. They replaced the adoquines and erased the words hastily scrawled on the walls by the crowd. EL PUEBLO published a picture of one of the slogans allegedly written with the blood of one of the wounded men: VIVA LA LIBERTAD. The picture was snapped before the cleanup squad arrived. By morning the square looked peaceful, perhaps a little cleaner than before. There were a few bullet marks on the walls of one or two shops. Aside from that, nothing.

During the fight in the Plaza, the outlying districts of the city could only wait, remember the bloody riot of 1950 and hope. The telephone lines were jammed as friends living near the square reported the news to more distant areas. Windows were barred and household landers inspected. It looked like a long siege.

On the morning of the twenty-second, the paro general began. At first no one knew what would happen. Then, around noon, the committee representing the Frente Unico (united front) of workers and students released a communiqué announcing a general strike to continue until Esparza Zañartu resigned from office. The same communiqué stated that Landázuri and others had been declared "traitors to Arequipa" by reason of their activities on the night of the twenty-first. The issues were simple. The man behind the police rifles and tear gas was said to be Esparza; the Frente Unico wanted him removed from his post. The man behind the PRP agitators was said to be Landázuri; the Frente Unico wanted his scalp. To accomplish its ends the Frente was relying on the anger of the arequipeños over what had happened at the Teatro Municipal and the Plaza de Armas as well as the sympathy of the labor syndicates and universities in the rest of the country. This reliance was well founded on historical fact.

The first day of the paro was quiet except for the parades and demonstrations held by the Frente Unico in the streets and main square. Only a few cars were moving. All taxis had disappeared, and privately owned vehicles were locked in their garages. Train, trolley and bus service stopped abruptly. Steel shutters covered the shop windows.

Trucks coming in from the farms with loads of meat and vegetables stopped in the outskirts of the city, and women lugged the produce in to the central market on their backs. Only ambulances and cars carrying red crosses were allowed to pass. The rest were stoned.

During the afternoon, the demonstrators paraded through the streets. They shouted "Li-ber-tad" and clapped their hands to the rhythm of the single word. In front of the Teatro Municipal they sang the national anthem and the Arequipa hymn. Then they hoisted crudely lettered banners and continued the march. Above their heads the strips of white sheeting stretched taut, the lettering spelling out "Down with Esparza" and "Viva Libertad". The marchers were orderly. Despite the banners and the memories of the preceding night, the barricades and the shuttered stores, this was no angry mob. Aroused, but not angry. This was a general strike and not a revolution, and the marchers acted accordingly.

After the marching, the speeches began. There were no loudspeakers, and the orators on the Cathedral steps strained their voices to be heard. The crowd stood quietly, some men cupping their ears to hear the speakers. A man standing on a bench politely asked a group of marchers to lower their banner so that he could see what was going on. Some of the more politically minded speakers tried to link the events of the twenty-first to the PRP, but most were content to circumvent all political talk and raise the battle flag of arequipeñismo and Libertad. There was an occasional mention of the hated Law of Internal Security and the necessity of establishing a true democracy in Perú, but the most popular subjects were the fight in the Plaza and the valiant warriors of Arequipa.

On the second day of the general strike, the tension began to build up. There were rumors that the city's water supply might be cut off. Bath tubs and beer bottles were filled against the possibility. Barricades were erected on the city side of the two bridges leading in from the airport and districts on the other side of the Chili River. Residents of these districts had to walk several miles to the central market to buy whatever food they could find. Although they were torn down at noon, the barricades added to the paralysis and confusion.

As the day wore on, news came through that the Prefect of the Department of Arequipa had resigned. His replacement was popular among the arequipeños: General Ricardo Pérez Godoy, commander of the Third Light Division. Pérez Godoy had been one of the leading figures in the peaceful settlement of the student riot of 1950. The appointment of the new Prefect was taken by many people to be a good omen, especially when it came at the heels of an announcement from the national bank workers' union declaring a strike for the twenty-sixth of December. The students of powerful University of San Marcos, in its own right the birthplace of many similar demonstrations against Lima authorities, had sent a note to the Frente Unico pledging its support. The movement was gaining in strength.

Demonstrations were held on the twenty-third, and Rosselló spoke at one of them. The Plaza was crowded with listeners and, as on the previous day, police occupied the roof of the Cathedral as a safety measure. From the square you could see an occasional helmet bobbing above the parapet. Eight or ten members of the

Guardia Civil lounged in the shade of the trees near the Plaza fountain. They carried rifles and cased tear gas masks. But the crowd was as orderly as on the preceding day. This was not a blood and guts mob but a organized group with a purpose in mind.

In the late afternoon the only truly illegal action on the part of the people took place. A group of men went after the Radio Continental station, Arequipa's strongest transmitter, to broadcast their views to the nation. The police were waiting for them, and a fight started. As before, the Guardia used tear gas and bullets. Three young men were overcome by the gas and one was 'shot in the hand. The storming of the radio station was repudiated by most people to whom I talked. Radio Continental was private property, and the Guardia were perfectly justified in defending it against the attackers.

The attack on the radio station was an indirect result of the refusal of the national radio in Lima to broadcast any news whatsoever about the paro general. We listened to Radio Nacional for three hours on the twenty-second and heard only one announcement remotely connected with conditions in Arequipa: the appointment of Pérez Godoy. The same news broadcast, however, included a bulletin which brought smiles to the faces of many arequipeño listeners. The announcer described an ornate military luncheon honoring President Odría and thanking him for the twenty per cent. pay raise for the armed forces which he had just approved. Many friends here thought that the pay raise seemed more opportune than coincidental.

Similarly, in the Government paper, LA NACION, a completely opposite view of events in Arequipa was given. The Guardia Civil was praised for its efficiency, and the CN condemned for having started the whole thing. In its December twenty-second edition, LA NACION ridiculed the Coalición Nacional in a cartoon showing Rosselló and his cronies fleeing from an irate, well-muscled Misti. It seemed to the arequipeños as though Lima was trying to squelch the paro by not paying any attention to it.

As the strike wore on, it became obvious that Lima could not ignore the Frente Unico's demands, especially since those demands were backed up by the support of entire city. Friday evening, the rumor mongers had a field day. There was a cabinet crisis in Lima, they said. The cabinet - and, therefore, Esparza Zañartu - had resigned (in Perú it is customary for the entire cabinet to resign in a body to save the face of the particular Minister who has caused the crisis). There was no official news as yet, and far-fetched stories circulated in the city.

So far, we had not been personally effected by the paro general. We had kept the pick-up truck off the streets and, except for several trips which I made to the Plaza to witness the demonstrations, we had stayed on our side of the river. Friends kept us informed of events by telephone. There was enough food in the house, and the water had not been cut off.





Aside from the boredom that comes from a state of continuous tension, the paro might not have existed as far as we were concerned. But then, on Saturday morning, I made a very foolish mistake. There was a Christmas turkey waiting for us near the Leche Gloria milk plant, so Peggy and I took the truck and crossed the bridge into the city. Another demonstration was going on in the Plaza, but the armed Guardia Civil at the bridge told us that things were quiet in the side streets. We had driven as far as the residential district of Vallecito when a group of men stopped us. They shouted at us, asking why we had violated their rule by driving a car in the city during the paro. Then one of them tried to let the air out of my tires while the rest of them used their fists in an attempt to break the windows. Gringos or no, we were in danger of being roughed up. Talk was useless. I deliberately jerked my foot off the clutch, and the truck jumped forward. The man bending over one of the tires leaped back with a shout, and we heard stones bouncing off the tail gate.



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Careful spectators  
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Then we were free - free and scared stiff. We dodged into side streets to avoid running into another group of hoodlums. The police and recently organized squads of civilian patrols were too few to deal with the minority of the crowd who wanted violence for violence's sake, and we had to rely on speed and good brakes to get us out of the mess we were in. I tried several streets but found each one barricaded. There was nothing to do but to retrace our route to the bridge. I leaned on the horn and pushed the accelerator to the floor. However, except for a group of men nonchalantly playing soccer among the dislodged paving stones, the street was clear. We were very lucky; several cars were badly mauled that morning.

I telephoned Bob Temple, who had come down to do some work in Arequipa, and told him about the stoning of the truck. Bob was living at the Hotel Turista and, as the hotel was running very low on food for its guests and petroleum for its water heater, he was taking most of his meals with us. When he heard the news, Bob wisely decided to take the overland route to the house. Instead of going by way of the bridge, he crossed the Chili River on foot. Halfway across, he dunked himself thoroughly in the icy water but, in true area generalist tradition, saved his notes from the grasp of the treacherous flood.

It was the day before Christmas, and we were still without our turkey. A friend of ours had rescued the bird and was holding him for us in his house near the hotel. Gunny sack in hand, pockets empty of all money and valuable papers, Bob and I ventured into the city feeling like the Three Kings in disguise. Much to my surprise, there were no overturned cars or shards of broken glass. The streets were full of people - housewives coming back from market and cargadores looking for work. Without mishap we walked up the long hill to Selva Alegre and our bird. Following the Peruvian custom, I fed the turkey pisco (brandy) until he

collapsed. Then, with the bird hiccuping and chirping in the gunny sack, we walked home again.

By then the news had come in. As EL PUEBLO put it, Arequipa had won. The cabinet had resigned and a new one, made up entirely of military men, had been named. Esparza was out. A meeting was called in the afternoon by the committee of the Frente Unico, and the paro was called off. The radio stations announced that the stores and banks would open and the public transportation companies would resume service. It was Christmas eve, and the violence, the demonstrations and the waiting had ended.

For the store owners, the end of the strike was a blessing. Although commercialized Christmas, American style, came to Arequipa only at the end of the second world war, it dropped roots and sprouted quickly. Stores of every description emptied their shelves of stock and filled them with metal and plastic toys from the States, Japan and Germany. Many merchants made more money during the month or so of the Christmas season than in the eleven months which followed. The strike had killed business for a short time - three shopping days. But those three days had cost the Arequipa store owners a lot of money. The manager of a large grocery store specializing in foreign imports told me that he had lost over \$2,500 as a direct result of the paro.

Shortly after the strike ended, Arequipa returned to normal. Cars and buses filled the streets, and a noisy crowd of shoppers descended on the stores. Christmas carols blared from loudspeakers, the English and German words sounding strange in the babble of Spanish. The policemen were back on the street corners directing traffic in their white pith helmets instead of the painted steel pots used during the strike. An extra edition of EL PUEBLO appeared with the banner headline: "RESONANTE TRIUNFO DE AREQUIPA" and an editorial entitled "Arequipa in the Breach". Men stood in little knots reading the paper and talking. There were smiles on their faces, partly because it was Christmas Eve and partly because the "Republic of Arequipa" had won another round.

The aftereffects of the paro will continue for some time. Although it is too early to determine what the outcome will be, this much is certain. The Partido Restaurador del Perú lost a great deal of its prestige by staging the "contramanifestación" in front of the Teatro Municipal. Several important members resigned from the party because of that episode. Javier Landázuri sent a cable to Lima's EL COMERCIO renouncing forever his political connections. It is doubtful whether he will ever exert any popular influence again. In Lima, students and workers staged a demonstration against the new military cabinet and the furor abated only when the people were informed through an announcement issued by the leader of one of the PRP affiliate parties that the cabinet was temporary in nature. At the same time, the Government showed its strength by reminding the people of the law governing public meetings. In the future, said the official communiqué, the law would be observed to the letter. Authorities would be notified at least forty-eight hours in advance, and the nature of the meeting would be stated in detail before official permission would be granted. Except in rare cases, only one meeting would be allowed to take place on a given day by municipal authorities.

In the U.S. mind, the strikes and revolutions of Latin America



are lurid illustrations of the political immaturity and Latin brashness which, according to the traditional American press, are two of the most salient features of life in this continent. After all, that sort of thing isn't necessary in the United States of America. We settle our conflicts by vote and not by armed conflict. Why can't those hotheads south of the border grow up and run their countries like men? Before coming to Perú, I used to read the accounts of South American uprisings (it is strange that U.S. papers usually publish articles on earthquakes and revolutions and omit the everyday stories which are of so much value) and ask the same question. Now, after living here for sixteen months, I would like to turn the question around. Why have the people in the United States forgotten so soon about their own personal struggle for liberty? Why do they look upon their own revolution as an act of God and scorn the latino revolts as boyish nonsense? The road to democracy in Perú is longer and in far worse condition than that which stretched in front of the American colonists. But the spirit and the yearning for freedom is just as strong, perhaps stronger.

I think that Tom Paine would have liked to have been in Arequipa last week. He would have seen violence and bloodshed, and he would have seen a calm, dedicated group of citizens win their point by the pressure of their will. He would have seen support come in from Lima, from the sierra and from the nation of Chile. Verbal support, true, but strong. But, most important, he would have seen men marching in the streets and listening to the speeches - impatient men to whom Libertad was a fiercely personal, iron strong ideal. I don't think Tom Paine, with memories of the weak, squabbling colonies and the strong men who fought for their liberty fresh in his mind, would have called the general strike a piece of boyish nonsense.

Sincerely,

*William H. MacLeish*  
William H. MacLeish

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