

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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Design for
the Future

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

Barely ten days after its inauspicious beginnings, the military revolt in Iquitos quietly folded. Rebel leader General Marcial Merino Pereyra called the commanding general of the army during the night of February 25-26 and told him that he had decided to surrender. The ten days of revolt had produced no armed conflict. The rebels expected to be bombed by the flights of government planes circling the city, but the aircraft merely dropped leaflets. River gunboats loyal to Odría stood by to bombard strategic targets, but not a shot was fired. A United Press release listed one "casualty": Roger Bravo, a local radio technician, who was electrocuted while trying to repair a military transmitter.

In an emotional message to the "People of Perú", General Merino stated that he had seen fit to end the revolt in order to save Iquitos ("the city I love so dearly") from supposed bloodshed and destruction of personal property at the hands of avenging government forces. The body of the message, however, indicates a far more important reason for calling it quits. Merino states that "the success of the (uprising) depended upon the approval which the people of Perú and certain elements of the armed forces could have lent to it." That support and approval did not materialize. Instead, the armed forces remained loyal to Odría; army area commanders replied to Merino's pleas that they join him by sending messages to Iquitos and Lima repudiating the rebels and declaring themselves loyal to the President. APRA and other civilian power groups made no move to help Merino; labor syndicates, some of which are the perennial camping grounds of the Apristas, sent delegations to the Palace of Government to praise Odría. Opposition groups which might have used the revolt as a battle flag had been efficiently squelched. General Merino, therefore, had no choice but to surrender to the government.

In Lima the news of the surrender was received with little excitement. By the end of last week the failure of the uprising seemed to be a foregone conclusion. Without fuss or fanfare a few high ranking military men were sent to Iquitos to take over the reins of the Forest Division and restore order in the area. General Merino and his associates retired to the Brazilian consulate in Iquitos and asked for protection. However, when notified by the Brazilian embassy in Lima that the consulate as such could not offer them refuge, the rebel leaders took up residence in private homes. According to EL COMERCIO, Merino

will be brought back to Lima in a few days to face his punishment. If the old traditions pertaining to such cases are followed, he will be deported.

Throughout the emergency President Odría was obviously trying to maintain at least a show of normalcy in Lima. The decree suspending certain important constitutional guarantees is still in force and will probably not be revoked before its official expiration date of March sixteenth. In accordance with the provisions of the siege law (WHM-33) platoons of police carrying gas masks are stationed in the downtown areas which are apt to be crowded at certain times during the day. There are several large movie theatres in the center of Lima which spew thousands of people out onto the sidewalks in the space of a few minutes, and the police are placed at vantage points from which they can launch attacks to break up any mob which might form. No riots have taken place, and throughout the city the government seems to have everything under control. Except for the rash of political arrests which accompanied the outbreak of the insurrection, police violence has been kept to a minimum.

In all fairness it must be said that President Odría has handled the emergency with great skill. His actions, judging from the political criteria of Peruvian history, have been well timed and highly successful. His opposition has been physically crushed, and the key to his power - the loyalty of the armed forces - remains in his hands. There has been only one internationally embarrassing result of his actions. LA PRENSA, one of the most powerful papers in South America, refuses to start its presses again until the two government censors have been removed from its editorial offices. All LA PRENSA employees report for work every morning and carry out their regular assignments. Stories are written and edited, pictures are captioned and pages are sent to the layout department. But not one word is published. Obviously enjoying its role as a martyr, LA PRENSA maintains its inoperative status by refusing to tidy up its articles to the satisfaction of the censors. While its director, Pedro Beltrán, languishes in the penal colony of Frontón, the paper is attracting the attention of groups and individuals throughout the world who believe in the principle of freedom of the press.

As a result of the revolt and the political arrests some of Odría's most vociferous opponents have disappeared from the political picture. To fill the vacuum two parties - one Odríista and the other mildly in opposition to the government - have come forward with their presidential candidates. Today marks the end of the period during which parties and candidates can be inscribed by the National Electoral Jury; although the President may extend or renew the subscription period, the fact remains that only two parties have sneaked in under the wire. The nature of these parties indicates the design of future political activity in this country.

In the morning edition of today's EL COMERCIO there appeared a full page spread announcing the candidacy of Héctor Boza, first Vice President of Perú (there are two) and President of the Senate. Boza's name has come up in several conversations I have had with

businessmen and conservatives in Lima and elsewhere. He is an "elder statesman", an experienced politician who has served in various posts during recent regimes. He is very popular among the powerful conservatives who control this country's destiny to all intents and purposes and yet some of his support will come from elements of Lima's burgeoning middle class and labor groups. Boza is a civilian, a fact which will be much to his advantage when he begins his campaign in a country which is apt to mistrust the military. Although he will be backed by the pro-government Partido Restaurador, he himself is not a party functionary. With years of political experience behind him, Boza seems to be the ideal choice to continue Odría's policies during the 1956-1962 presidential term.

The other candidate whose name is to be brought before the all-powerful National Electoral Jury is Manuel Prado y Ugarteche, 67, head of the government from 1939 to 1945. His supporting party, the Movimiento Democrática Pradista, claims 40,000 signatures on the petition to be submitted to the Jury - double the amount required by law. Prado is something of an enigma in this country. He has been living abroad in recent years, and his party is under the direction of his lieutenant, Manuel Cisneros. Whether he can stand up to the rough and tumble of a political campaign is a doubtful point (Prado suffered a heart attack in the U.S. last December and is in delicate health). I have been told by a journalist here that Prado's speeches during the peak of Hitler's power were decidedly pro-Nazi. Actually, this is not a unique indictment; many members of the upper classes in South America, both civilian and military, were admirers if not imitators of the European dictators during their years of glory. On the other hand, Prado's record contains two achievements which are of interest to U.S. observers: first, he was highly instrumental in aligning his country and its important strategic materials on the side of the United States during World War II; second, he offered the country a democratic election in 1945 and, when defeated by Bustamante y Rivero, quietly turned the reins of government over to the victor. This is a feat which is uncommon enough in Perú to warrant some publicity.

President Odría has announced that he will address the nation in a radio broadcast tonight. He is expected to shed some light upon his plans for the future, and he may extend or renew the registration period mentioned above. The failure of the revolt has given him time and strength to work out his design for the future and to put it into practice.

Sincerely,

William H. MacLeish
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