

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WHM - 35
The President's Speech

Edo. de Habich 115
Lima, Perú
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
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522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

At nine o'clock on the evening of March third, President Odría broadcast a one hour and twenty minute message to the nation from the Palace of Government. His strong, slightly nasal voice was interrupted eight times by loud applause from an audience made up of members of the Government, the Partido Restaurador and labor unions which have pledged their support to the President. The language of the address was surprisingly simple when compared to the florid oratory which is the usual hallmark of a Latin American political speech. The actual content of the speech, however, was mostly a repetition of attacks and apologies which Odría, Cabinet members and the official newspaper had issued in the past. To many observers the most important lines in the whole message were those concerning the Government's new policy with respect to the long-persecuted APRA party.

"Fellow citizens:" said the President. "Once again the time has come for me to address the country to explain the situation which exists today (at a time) little removed from the elections.... which must take place this June and to indict the demagogic campaign unleashed by a certain sector of the extreme right which culminated in the lamentable and short-lived subversive movement of the Forest Division." Odría then devoted himself to the benefits which the political stability fostered by his regime had brought to the country - the rapidly growing volume of foreign investments in Perú and the steep rise in national income. All this, he said, was endangered by the subversive campaign of the "extreme right" and the Merino revolt.

To safeguard the progress which the country had made under his leadership, the President continued, he had called together representatives of banking, industrial and commercial concerns to talk about the coming elections. The meeting took place in February, 1955. Odría stated that at that time he told the representatives that the progress of the country (realized under his regime) would be endangered unless his successor could count on the support of the majority of the people and power groups of Perú. This idea of trying to unite all the national power groups under the banner of one candidate chosen by all of them has been one of Odría's pet projects. He is an experienced man in the field of power politics and is, therefore, decidedly opposed to holding an election which, in his own words, would be characterized by "the absence of organized parties and the scarcity of candidates who can count on wide popular approval."

As I explained in WHM-30, Peruvian politics has in the past been controlled by a large number of personalized "parties" -

actually small groups of acquaintances who for some reason or another have gotten together to voice their grievances or try their luck in the political arena. Squabbling, backbiting and personal or family enmities have often reduced these "parties" to a state which would be called highly inefficient by any U.S. politician. Obviously Odría, who has stayed on top of the heap because his modern and beneficial economic program is backed up by old style strongman toughness, does not want that to happen at this stage of the game. Before the Iquitos revolt there were at least ten small opposition groups aligned against him - groups which included personal political beliefs varying from socialism to fascism. The opposition alliance was held together only because of a common desire to force the Government to hold truly democratic elections. That desire took the form of a demand calling for the derogation of the repressive Law of Internal Security, the amendment of the Electoral Law and the declaration of a general political amnesty. The unity of the opposition was only skin deep, however.

The first part of the President's speech was an analysis, given from his standpoint, of his efforts to unite what he calls the "elements of order", the financially powerful families of Lima and the provinces and the heads of various business concerns. Because of his efforts to convince the "elements of order" that they should form in effect a united front to nominate one candidate, Odría said, his regime was accused of using dictatorial measures. "They (the opposition) began by accusing me without reason of trying to secure from the Parliament a constitutional reform which would annul that (clause) which prevents a President from succeeding himself." Odría went on to state that such a move never entered his mind. His only purpose in calling a meeting of the "elements of order" was to awaken public interest with respect to the extremely important election problem which theretofore had been considered or acted upon by no one. "The meeting, on the other hand, was the only possible measure which could have been taken at that time. The traditional parties had disappeared a long time ago from the political scene. Those formed after 1930 have either lost their popular support or have been forbidden to engage in political activities by the dictates of the law. 1. Parties, groups or nuclei sufficiently strong to make contact (with one another) and for the solution (to the problem) simply did not exist. That is why I called together those representative groups."

The President then started in on the opposition, aiming the full swing of his attack at the Coalición Nacional and its leaders. Rarely had any Government been subject to such malevolent attacks as those launched against his regime by the opposition, he said. Using every means to discredit and insult his Government, the CN and other groups had sought to provoke him into taking measures which they could use as propaganda in their attempt to convince the public that there was no liberty in Perú. In the midst of this movement, said Odría, the Coalición Nacional took the lead as an organization, "organized, inspired and subtly directed by the Director of "La Prensa". I would like to quote the entire passage relating to President Odría's conception of the alliance between the CN and LA PRENSA, as it is a good resumé of what the Government presents as its case against Beltrán,

1. APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana) was outlawed in 1948.

Rosselló and others.

This person (Beltrán) had obtained a series of signatures, certainly very few, in order to draw up the Declaration of July Twentieth.² To that new group (the CN), the Director of "La Prensa" sent a member of the paper's directorate, having previously received a conventional resignation from him so that the paper would not be compromised by his virulent political activities. This member of the directorate of "La Prensa" was joined by another person who publicly proclaimed his unfounded animadversion for me personally rather than for my Government.² Around these two gentlemen there gathered a small group of individuals who organized the so-called Coalición Nacional with the only specific purpose of constituting obstinate opposition against the present Regime. In reality this organization is not a political party since it lacks members, a program, ideology and statutes; it is merely a small group of people without electoral aims and, I repeat, organized with the one purpose, inspired by its intellectual author, of creating a climate of subversion. The official organ publicizing these criminal activities was the newspaper "La Prensa" of Lima. Thus constituted, the group began what it called the "pilgrimage of liberty", visiting diverse areas of the Republic and in all of them starting a repudiable demagogic campaign by means of virulent speeches in which all the members of the Government were attacked without limit....Although these activities were not well received and, in some localities, met with the frank repudiation of the people, the newspaper "La Prensa"..... hid the truth about the failures, making them out to be veritable successes. In this way a false atmosphere with respect to the psychological state of the people was being created - (an atmosphere which) led my enemies to believe that the public had been won over to their side. It is strange that a few months before the end of my mandate a political group should appear in opposition to a Government whose term was almost concluded, when during the six year course of that term no such opposition was present; it is stranger still that the aforementioned group of demagogues should direct its actions toward the clearly perceivable end of undermining the legal and moral authority of my Government.

It is public knowledge that the demagogic campaign of "La Prensa" and the provocative activities of the Coalición Nacional, (two groups) intimately bound together by common interests and purposes, were directed toward inciting the armed forces and the people to (revolt). Exhibiting proof of its tolerance

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2. A declaration setting forth the original demands of the CN and other groups: repeal of the security law, amendment of the electoral law and a declaration of amnesty.
 3. The President refers to Rosselló and Manuel Mujica Gallo respectively.

and respect for the constitution, the Government allowed this defamatory campaign to continue on to dangerous limits. It did not yield to overt provocation; it ignored the defamations and insults even though they reached the proportions of desecrations. It knew what ends were being pursued; it also recognized the unimportance of said group and the paucity of results it had obtained. In this state of events we reached the end of last year - a year in which a certain sector of the extreme right increased its demagogic campaign designed to create an artificial climate which would disturb if not destroy the elections which my Government sincerely wished to take place in an atmosphere of order and respect for the will of the people. The most serious aspect of the campaign, then, was not the impassioned criticism, the calumny, the deliberate twisting of the facts but rather the condemnable purpose of provoking a golpe del estado (coup)."

The President continued to press home his attack against the extreme right". The barnstorming tour of the Coalición Nacional through the northern cities was described as a demagogic campaign which not even the leftist parties had been able to rival in their history. Calumnies were the order of the day, said Odría. The CN offered no constructive program; it merely took advantage of the liberty extant in the country to cry for more. In Arequipa, he said, the CN leaders, "those false apostles of Democracy", provoked the general strike (WHM-28 and CRT-11) and incurred the repudiation of the arequipeños. That has been the official version of what happened before and during the paro general since the very beginning - a version which is not generally accepted in Arequipa.

Odría then discussed his selection of an all-military Cabinet to replace that which resigned in a body when Esparza was forced out. He chose high ranking officers instead of civilians, he said, because they were honorable military men who would be impartial in the face of political pressures. Vile attacks of the CN and its press notwithstanding, said the President, the Gabinete Militar was there to maintain order and protect the rights of the citizens. No attempt was being made by his regime to tamper with the electoral process by bringing the power of the military to bear on the citizens. To prove his point the President described in full his latest effort to unite the parties on both sides of the political fence by calling the conference which took place in the convent of General de Santo Domingo shortly after the installation of the military Cabinet. Odría mentioned the fact that shortly before the conference was convened, "an amnesty as broad as was possible, the reforms of the Law of Internal Security of the Republic and those of the Electoral Statute - measures asked for by the respectable sectors of public opinion 4 - were conceded." In addition, he said, he personally asked the Partido Restaurador, a party made up of "my political friends", to refrain from nominating its own presidential candidate at the conference but to

4. In an effort to explain the concessions which the Government made to the opposition, the President executed a neat about face. He accused the CN of taking advantage of the freedom in Perú to ask for more and then calls other sectors of the opposition who have been demanding the same thing "respectable".

back the candidate nominated by the opposition. Under the direction of the members of two powerful families (Luis Miró Quesada and Augusto Wiese) the Convention got under way.

Judged by any standards the Conference of General de Santo Domingo was a failure. Since the opposition blamed the Government for the lack of political guarantees necessary for the success of the meeting and, indeed, of the whole electoral process, it was only natural for Odría to turn the charges back on his opponents. In his speech he said: "The failure (of the Convention) was due to the fact that not one of the parties which took part . . . sincerely wished to arrive at an understanding." The President went down the list of the parties. The Revolutionary Union turned its back on the Government offers and allied itself with the Coalición Nacional, he said. (Odría threw some additional light on the question of why UR leader Luis Flores was wanted by the police in connection with the Iquitos revolt; according to the President, Flores made a speech twelve days before the uprising in which he said that the electoral problem was a Gordian Knot which could be cut only by a sword, not untied by votes.) The Movimiento Democrática Pradista "with conventional courtesy" would only consider its own solutions to the problems facing the Convention. The Christian Democrats refused to collaborate, and the Coalición Nacional used the Convention "as a tribune for its demagogic campaign."

Again Odría's attempt to send one candidate out on the hustings had collapsed. The opposition parties objected for several reasons. First, they believed that the idea was undemocratic - a nomination by the massed parties would practically be tantamount to the election of their candidate; no one else would have a chance, and the people would have little choice in the matter. Second, as I have explained before, not many of the small parties in the opposition see eye to eye with each other. Each has its own idea as to who the candidate for the presidency should be and which group should reap the benefits of his gratitude.

The President continued his attack against the Coalición Nacional and LA PRENSA. In convoking the Convention of General de Santo Domingo, he said, he had tried to "unite the forces of order so that during the change in Government the rhythm of national progress shall not change also, and in order to prevent the country from turning itself into a battlefield in which men dispute (the presidential power) among themselves and bring back discord and hate to the Peruvian family." The CN had deliberately brought about the failure of the Convention, Odría said, in order to continue with its scheme to originate a coup. The President said that CN members in bars and clubs boasted that his regime would fall before March. The Iquitos mutiny "was nothing more than the culmination of the activities of the newspaper 'La Prensa' and the members of that group of demagogues of the extreme right." Employing what his Government calls its proof of the accusation, Odría called to mind General Merino's "Message to the People" and said that the similarity between its demands and those of the CN was so striking that there could be no doubt of the link between the two movements.

The President devoted the next few minutes of his speech to his suspension of the constitutional guarantees as a result of the national emergency. He expressed his gratitude to the armed forces for their

loyalty to him: "Thanks to the firm attitude of the armed forces and the Peruvian people the uprising of the Iquitos garrison was doomed to failure." The President then made a statement which was to receive a great deal of publicity in the U.S. press. "In all this political activity the existing forces of the right have been blind. Instead of taking advantage of the opportunity presented to them of uniting to serve the nation as well as their own interests, they have lost the game under the joyful and expectant eyes of the left which, even though prohibited by law from entering into politics as a party, is cleverly capitalizing on the gross errors of its discredited adversaries." In order not to appear to be shaking hands openly with APRA, Odría was quick to add that he had never made a pact with any political group or party. This is a statement which he has made repeatedly during the last few months in an effort to squelch the stories that his Government and underground APRA leaders like Ramiro Prialé have entered into negotiations with respect to the coming elections.

The remainder of the body of Odría's speech was given over to a defense of the security and electoral laws, the Partido Restaurador and the budget and construction programs of his Government. With respect to the security law, he said: "The people who are listening to me should ask themselves if they have suffered in any form or manner from the Law of Security." It is true that the average person in Perú is as little affected by the security law as he is by any other political decree. The "hombre común y corriente", as the politicians have taken to calling him, is by his very nature outside the political arena. In reality, very few men have been hurt by the decree - only those members of the upper classes who for one reason or another have incurred the wrath of El Gobierno. The President's point was thus politically well taken, but it in no way disproved the opposition's claim that the security law is a dictatorial, repressive measure designed to muzzle men who happen to disagree with the authorities.

The Military Junta (which ruled the country from shortly after Odría's 1948 revolution until his election in 1950) actually reformed the electoral laws, said the President. The decrees of that period made the counting of the votes at the polls a mandatory operation. Before 1948 ballots were taken to the places where they were to be counted, and no precautions against illegal shuffling or stuffing were taken. His regime decreed that individuals or parties must be given upon request a certified copy of the election returns which had been tabulated at the polls. In addition, he said, the electoral juries as organized by his Government were boards to investigate charges of fraud and illegal maneuvers in order to safeguard the integrity of the elections. Harking back to the widespread criticism of the alleged pro-Odría bias of some of the members of the National Electoral Jury, the President stated that the Jury staff was elected by secret ballot by the Parliament, the Supreme Court and the University of San Marcos. The delegate chosen by the Executive Power had never been in politics and had exhibited no bias in favor of the present regime. Odría did not mention the jurors by name nor did he attempt to answer the attacks made by LA PRENSA against Temístocles Rocha (WHM-32).

The President's reference to the Partido Restaurador contained one interesting point: he would become the chief of the party after his term is over. With Odría at the controls, the PR should be able

5. The President was careful to point out that General Merino, the leader of the Iquitos revolt, was a member of his Military Junta, which instigated the security law.

to exert a great deal of influence in the higher echelons of the new Government that will be formed this June. Answering charges that the Partido Restaurador was an official instrument of his regime, the President stated that he had intervened in the party's activities on only one occasion (immediately before the Convention of General de Santo Domingo) when he asked the PR to refrain from nominating a candidate in order to give the opposition a free hand in reaching a mutual agreement. The party was made up of his political friends, he said, and as such could be favorably compared with the Democrats under Roosevelt and Truman or the Republicans under Hoover.

Two of the opposition's most important attacks against the policies of the Odría regime have to do with Government finances and construction programs. Under the latter a large number of ornate State buildings have been and are being built in Lima and elsewhere. The gist of the President's comments on these two points was that his Government had collected 4 billion soles (approximately US\$ 200,000,000) - a legal 20% of the national income - and with it had paid its salaries, carried out irrigation and other projects, supported the armed forces, etc. On the other hand, 80% of the national income went into private hands. "It would be interesting to find out how the capitalists who make up the Coalición Nacional use their part of that money," he said. As for the construction programs (which, I am told, have slacked off considerably in the past year owing to the fact that the Government has almost reached its limit of foreign borrowing) Odría claimed that all the recent buildings were necessary to modernize Government operations and, at the same time, provide labor for that proportion of the estimated 100,000 workers in the construction field in Lima which would otherwise join the ranks of the unemployed.

Towards the end of his speech the President spoke briefly on a matter which had held the attention of the national and foreign press for several days: the imprisonment of Pedro Beltrán. What follows is my translation of Odría's words.

Throughout my term I have respected the freedom of the press, and it is truly regrettable that I should have been compelled to impose, in this situation of national emergency, measures designed to control a certain newspaper (which has been) converted into the principal organ of agitation. The edition describing the mutiny, which would have been published the day after that uprising took place, practically said that the revolution was victorious and urged the rest of the armed forces and the people to join it. As proof of its undeniable complicity, it published the Manifesto of the rebel Chief, (a document which) could only have fallen into its hands before the insurrection took place. My Government respects the professional journalist - the newspaperman who is free from prejudices and who spurns all influences (and pressures)..... who devotes himself, although he may be in the wrong, to public affairs with honesty and straightforwardness, who points out errors and defects, and who tries to direct public opinion. But those politicians who use their powerful economic means to organize a (journalistic)

venture in order to take unfair advantage of the guarantees which the press enjoys and to conspire freely cannot be considered journalists. They are not free, for they are prisoners of their passions and interests and use the newspaper to further their own mean (ambitions). They are not impartial, for they are part of the conflict which they themselves provoke and of which they are the protagonists. The journalist is he who lives by his pen and makes a cult of the truth. But a politician who wears the garb of a journalist and who appropriates all the rights of the latter without recognizing any obligation (pertaining to those rights) cannot and must not (continue to enjoy the privileges and guarantees of the press). No Government can respect these individuals as journalists. Pedro Beltrán was not arrested (in the capacity of) a newspaperman; he was arrested as a politician who has endangered the peace of the Republic.

Concluding his speech, Odría again called for a union of the people, asking the citizens of Perú to form what he termed "electoral fronts" in support of the candidates of their choice. His attempts to unite the political parties had failed, he said, and so he was taking his plan to "the source of democracy: the people". The President said that the unions should include all Peruvians, inferring that political beliefs should not hinder individuals from joining the fronts. In the succeeding paragraphs he explained what he meant by "all Peruvians".

In my message of September ninth (1955), in referring to the parties which by mandate of the Constitution are outside the law, I said: "I must state that the immense majority of the APRA members who have shown themselves to be respectful of the laws have encountered during my Government the most extensive liberty and guarantees in the conduct of their normal activities and have not been subject to any persecution or molestation. Many have found a place and a stimulus to better their position in official organizations. The laws to which I have just referred were drawn up against APRA as an organization or party and against its leaders, who were responsible for the calamities they brought about in the country by defrauding the members of their own party. (APRA members) as individuals enjoy and will continue to enjoy all the rights and guarantees which the Constitution accords all Peruvians."

As a consequence (of the September speech), in the coming electoral process (members of) leftist groups can fully exercise their rights as citizens; they can join any electoral front or form part of the existing parties. The Constitution does not prevent them from making use of this right, and there is no law which forbids them to do so. They can take part, then, in this call for the union of all Peruvians and

in in this democratic process in which the public will have the last word

Let us realize that the destiny of Perú lies in our hands. Let us ask God to enlighten us, to give us the unity which we need and to permit us to consolidate the present and insure the future of the fatherland for the good of all Peruvians.

¡VIVA EL PERU!

I have tried to bring out the highlights of the President's speech - the points which met with the greatest applause and the greatest criticism both in Perú and abroad. From March third to this date a great many important events have taken place. LA PRENSA resumed publication; the APRA party held a big reunion outside Lima without encountering any police opposition; Pedro Beltrán and the jailed opposition leaders were released; and the decree suspending the constitutional guarantees was revoked. Several candidates in addition to Prado and Boza ^o (WHM-34) have been nominated by groups of citizens (although the law states that parties cannot be inscribed by the National Electoral Jury after March third, men with a sufficient number of signatures in their pockets can declare themselves candidates). Political parties in Perú represent no more than a small minority of the voters, but APRA is by far the most powerful political power in the country today. It is being courted high and low, the theory being that the candidate with APRA support behind him will be the next President of the country, barring possible interferences on the part of the armed forces.

My next newsletter will be devoted to opposition answers to the President and to the political events going on in Lima. With the election less than three months off, those events are taking place in a whirl of confusion as politicians and parties scrape their coalitions together, meanwhile keeping a distrustful eye trained on President Odría.

Sincerely,

William H. MacLeish
William H. MacLeish

(Received New York 3/23/56.)

6. Héctor Boza seemed to be the official choice of the President when his candidacy was first declared. It now is apparent, however, that the First Vice President is backed by a small group of financially powerful friends and not by the Partido Restaurador. The official candidate is still under wraps, although some observers say that lawyer Hernando de La Valle is the man to watch.