

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WHM - 36
The Political Vacuum

Pensión White
Lima, Perú
April 6, 1956

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

Dear Mr. Rogers:

What President Odría prophesied in his March third address to the nation has come true. Despite his call for a unified electorate, the innumerable parties and organizations of the country have continued to go their separate ways. This refusal to co-operate has resulted in a political situation which becomes more dangerous as the weeks go by. With 58 days to go until election time, Perú faces a political vacuum in which each new hat thrown into the ring dissipates still more the meagre power of the candidates already registered. No popular candidate has come forward or, to be more exact, the voting public has not aroused itself to back the candidates of its choice. Checkmated on every side by lack of support, the presidential hopefuls in Lima can do little but exist in the vacuum and keep their eyes fastened on the Palace of Government. The only campaigning done to date - aside from junkets taken by various party committees into the hinterlands - has been in the pages of a horde of party weeklies the majority of which are read by a small minority of the voters. With overt political activity in the deep freeze, concrete information is extremely difficult to come by, and the Lima grapevine is swollen with unsubstantiated and misleading rumors. Anything is possible in this silent confusion; the power vacuum is an open invitation to the advocates of the coup and the revolution.

Who is to be blamed for the present situation? The opposition parties point to President Odría, saying that by refusing to accede to their demands (repeal of the security law, general amnesty, etc.) he has made free and honest elections an impossibility. Odría has repeatedly stated that the trouble lies with the unwillingness of the political parties to unite and give their chosen candidate a solid and wide base of support. In a way, both sides are right. Repressive and unpopular laws are certainly not conducive to free elections; neither are squabbling parties who refuse to play unless the rules of the game are changed to suit them. But the problem goes deeper than party demands and presidential policies. Its roots lie in the traditions which have risen out of four hundred years of Peruvian politics and customs.

Strongest of the traditions is the popular belief in and reliance on the strongman, the father of the people who rights all wrongs and who safeguards the lives of his subjects. As I mentioned in WHM-30, the first of the strongmen was the caudillo, the feudalistic landowner who ruled as king over his tenants. The Indians called him wiracocha, a word which in quechua mythology refers to the Creator. The Spaniards called him patrón,

the boss. The caudillo is still very much in existence in Perú. He can be found exercising his ancient rights in the primitive haciendas of Puno or managing his workers according to more modern and benign methods in the huge estates of the coastal valleys. Four centuries of caudillismo have left their mark in the minds of present day Peruvian voters. Despite the new prosperity, the rising standard of living on the coast, and the subsequent strengthening of belief in democratic ideas, voting Peruvians are still inclined to leave politics to the upper class, the caudillo class, to which it traditionally belongs. Only when a real threat to personal liberty and honor arises does the man in the street take matters into his own hands, witness the recent general strike in Arequipa (WHM-28 and CRT-11).

In a recent article a Lima journalist attacked the heritage of the caudillos. "In Perú as in few other countries", he said, "the idea of the messiah has prospered - the idea of giving a man or a movement the mission of 'saving' the country..... We are temperamentally and historically inclined to hand over all our hopes to an individual and, at the same time, expect him to solve all our problems." Summing up his version of Peruvian history, the writer added: "The blind regimes, the autocratic governments, have based their power on the erroneous idea that progress in Perú could only be achieved by their stubborn methods. In the speeches of all the strongmen we have heard pretentious words expressing the conviction that such methods were used to accomplish the task of restoring Perú to the place in the world which history accords her. Fortunately, there has always been a general awakening, a multitudinous clamor against these governments resulting in repeated promises to restore liberty to the fatherland. However, this condition has often been used to replace personal messianism with party messianism, and we have been mistreated by the imposition of an exclusive and inflexible ideology. The pernicious remedy for this state of affairs has been the caudillo, the strongman, again the dictator."

If President Odría's plan to unite the "forces of order" (the conservative upper class) under the banner of one candidate had succeeded, the country would probably not be suffering from the present political indecision and inactivity. The fact that the plan did not work illustrates the basic disunity of the upper classes in Perú. Individualism has always been one of the guiding lights of the gente decente; beyond joining a small group of friends to buy up land, start a business concern or enter the political arena, the rich and powerful as a class have never fully accepted their position as leaders of the country. They are divided by regional boundaries, professions and family backgrounds, by personal interests and memories of old quarrels. Many of them depend upon an outdated agricultural and social system for their livelihood, while a few - a very few - are convinced that Perú can prosper only when feudalism has been abolished. From these innumerable divisions, most of them based deep in the past, has come the seemingly hopeless situation of today: a growing list of candidates rendered almost powerless by the lack of support accorded them by the voting public.

One of the many reasons for the cautious silence which exists

today is the Peruvian institution of the pre-candidate. In practice, an individual is approached by a committee of men who think that his family name and professional reputation will stand up well with the voters or the pressure groups which control the voters. If he gives the committee permission to use his name, the pre-candidate can expect to find posters crowded with his name, his picture and a slogan or two plastered on the walls and buildings of greater Lima. If the public response is sufficient - if the backing committee can round up enough votes to register him as a presidential candidate and guarantee him an appreciable chunk of the political pie, the individual may begin to make declarations and act like a politician. Although some pre-candidates are content to run only if they think that their chances of becoming President are good, many enter the race for the sake of gaining seats in Parliament for themselves or their backers. In any case, if the committee of supporters finds that their man can climb to a high rung on the political ladder, they urge him to take their advice and become a full-fledged candidate. The drawback inherent in being a pre-candidate is that one must be very careful not to make any public statements until he knows where his support, if any, will come from.

Several weeks ago I went to see a pre-candidate: Héctor Boza, a man who is widely respected for his political acumen. Although the streets of Lima from Miraflores to the Rimac bridges are decorated with red and blue posters, photographs and handbills declaring that he is a "President for All Peruvians", Mr. Boza is still not officially a candidate. His present position (First Vice President and President of the Senate) makes it imperative that he be doubly careful about issuing declarations of any kind. Accordingly, when I was ushered into his office located high in a building facing Plaza San Martín, I was not too hopeful about the results of the interview. However, friends of mine with years of experience in Perú had told me that if I wanted background information and factual material about the present situation, the man to see was Héctor Boza.

My conversation with the Vice President lasted less than five minutes. I explained that I had been studying the country for over a year and a half and that I would like to ask him a few questions about the factors causing the present political crisis. Mr. Boza was kind, courteous and to the point. I could understand his position, he said; he could make no declarations about the matter to anyone; perhaps I could get the information I was looking for by reading the periodicals. That was the end of the interview.

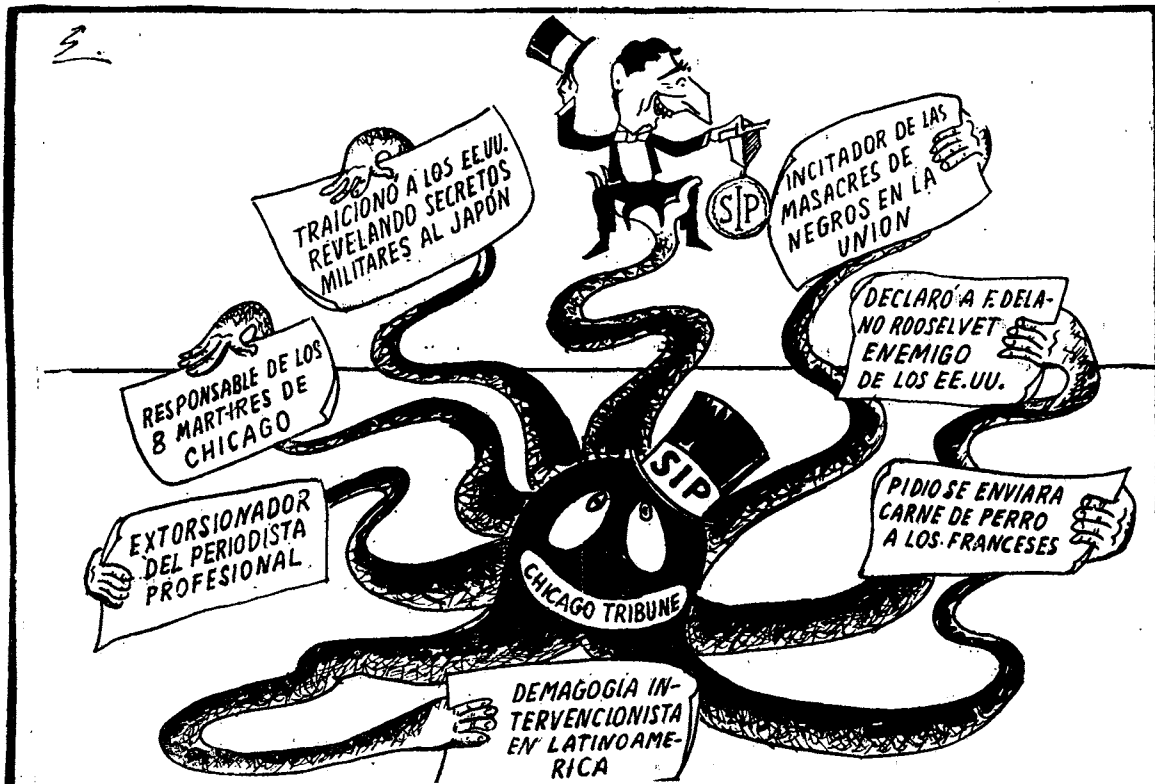
The periodicals fall into three classes: the independent dailies; the party organs, and the so-called "independent political weeklies". Of the three classes, the dailies exert by far the most influence in and out of Lima. ULTIMA HORA, the evening paper affiliated with LA PRENSA, has the largest circulation in the country (a little over 100,000). LA PRENSA itself boasts of a certified circulation of 62,020, although the paper claims that at least five people read each copy and, therefore, the actual circulation (excluding the Sunday edition) is 310,000. The other important papers, EL COMERCIO and LA CRONICA, with smaller circulations, still exert influence in the larger cities of Perú. Despite their newsgathering facilities, however, the independent dailies have been able to throw very little light on the happenings

of the past two months. LA PRENSA, with its modern organization and well trained reporters, now limits itself to publishing editorials calling on the people of Perú to shake off their apathy and find themselves a candidate. The only concrete political news comes in the form of packaged proclamations issued by candidates or by committees and "fronts", and these announcements are carried in the party organs as well as the dailies. It should be obvious, then, that if the most efficient daily in Perú must spend more time editorializing than reporting, there is very little political news in Lima which can be sufficiently documented and substantiated to make publication worthwhile.

The party organs, although their real influence rarely goes farther than the ranks of their respective organizations, must be read thoroughly if one wants to keep abreast of the latest changes in party platforms and interparty alliances. It could be said that these four-to-six pagers fill the gap left by the silence of the candidates themselves. Among the most informative of the party organs are DEMOCRACIA (Christian Democrats), LIBERTAD (Social Progressives) and IMPACTO (Apristas). The Coalición Nacional's weekly COALICION disappeared from the newsstands during the rash of political arrests which followed the Iquitos revolt (WHM-33) but others have taken its place. There are now so many groups, parties, fronts etc. that it is extremely difficult to keep accurate count (there are ten or more comparatively large organizations and at least double that amount of smaller groups) and the number of party organs grows weekly.

The shortage of news has, of course, caused a rash of so-called "independent political weeklies" to spring up during the past few months. Some of them make an honest attempt to sift through rumors and print only those which may have some basis of fact, but all of them exhibit a decided bias in favor of the Government or some opposition party. Those weeklies which have been in existence for some time have shifted with a vengeance from social events to the political circus. A good illustration is CARETAS, whose directress was arrested during the period of the Iquitos revolt while trying to take copies of her magazine from the presses to the distribution points. Miss Gibson, first woman in Peruvian history to become a political prisoner, is still hopping mad about her arrest. CARETAS has in recent editions cut down its society pages to carry pictures showing the police assault on LA PRENSA and the release of Pedro Beltrán from prison, and whole pages have been given over to controversial political topics.

Unfortunately, the responsible independent political weeklies are far outnumbered by the muckraking sheets. The biggest offender in this line is PULSO, whose articles rarely make sense but whose goal is obvious: PULSO is out to smear Pedro Beltrán. Despite his arrest and 26-day imprisonment, the director of LA PRENSA is still feared by groups in the Government and out of it. His wealth, his newspaper and his personal character make him a formidable enemy in the eyes of his opponents. I have talked with Beltrán at length on two occasions - at his home and in the editorial room of LA PRENSA - and I will not soon forget the personal magnetism of the man. He has the mind of a scholar and the drive of a good managing editor. His capacity for work is famous in the LA PRENSA building, a friend on the editorial staff told me. However, for all his



.....

When the Interamerican Press Society (SIP) announced that it was considering the nomination of Pedro Beltrán for the "Hero of the Press" medal, PULSO printed the above cartoon in its March 16 edition. Mr. Beltrán is depicted as the puppet of the SIP and of what PULSO considers to be a monstrous member of that organization - the Chicago Tribune. The legends accuse the "Trib" of treason, race baiting, etc.

drive, Mr. Beltrán is not a cold man. To the LA PRENSA employees he is "Don Pedro", a friend as well as a boss.

The Government, however, does not think of Beltrán as "Don Pedro". There is little reason why they should. Beltrán told me that only one thing counted with him as far as the forthcoming elections were concerned: a democratic atmosphere. All else would have to wait until that atmosphere was created. He has been personally active in the formation of a group of parties around the Coalición Nacional to fight for the measures which he considers essential if a climate of democratic liberty is to be encouraged (repeal of the security law, etc.). When the Government arrested Beltrán, it accused him of being "a politician who has endangered the peace of the Republic." ^{1.} Beltrán and his friends, said the Government, had staged the Iquitos revolt in an effort to force President Odría to his knees. However, the published proofs of Beltrán's alleged complicity in the Iquitos insurrection were weak and inconclusive, and LA PRENSA was able to release documents which went a long way toward clearing its director's name. By now it is fairly obvious that the Government jailed Beltrán not for any act of sedition or treason but for the equally unpardonable crime of starting a political cam-

paign which was at odds with Government policy and too successful to be allowed to continue.

The short imprisonment of Beltrán and others and the censoring of LA PRENSA came close to backfiring in the Government's face. The clamor for political liberty grew stronger instead of weaker. When Hernando de Lavalle was asked by Odría to try to form an effective coalition out of the hopeless snarl of parties and fronts, he accepted on the condition that Beltrán be released and that more ample political liberties be guaranteed. The Government acquiesced to Lavalle's demands, and Pedro Beltrán went back to LA PRENSA with confetti in his hair and blood in his eye. Since his release he has continued to publish his ideas in a series of editorials which were rough-drafted during his stay at "El Frontón". The Inter-american Press Society (SIP) has decorated him, and a petition from Arequipa containing 700 names has asked him to run for President (he refused). It is small wonder, then, that the pro-government political papers such as PULSO are trying to degrade and discredit their powerful enemy.

The degrading and discrediting has taken some interesting forms of late. Perhaps because of the rumored pact between the Government and the anti-imperialist, anti-"yanqui" APRA party, the United States has been dragged into the political picture and painted to look like the greedy partner of a diabolical Beltrán. Again, the little weekly PULSO has taken the lead in the anti-U.S. campaign, but other sheets have followed the trend. Articles and cartoons debunking the U.S. have appeared in both APRA and pro-government periodicals. Because its Peruvian edition is printed on LA PRENSA presses and because it devoted a good deal of space to criticisms of the Government's actions during the Iquitos mutiny, the NEW YORK TIMES came in for a large share of the abuse. PULSO and other papers claimed that the TIMES owned part of LA PRENSA and that Beltrán was the hireling of the "yanqui" journalists.

Another U.S. concern which has been under fire is the International Basic Economy Corporation, a non-profit organization sponsored by Rockefeller funds. IBEC teaches latino businessmen, small and large, the most efficient methods of operation by actually directing business undertakings in the countries involved. The organization has been very successful in Venezuela and elsewhere and is now building a shopping center and supermarket near the Sears Roebuck store in Lima. As many national products as possible will be sold at the center in an effort to raise the standard of living of the area (by selling at low cost) and to inspire Peruvian manufacturers to expand and diversify. One of IBEC's top men, Mr. Wallace Bradford, came to Lima recently to inspect the new project. He was interviewed by the Government newspaper LA NACION, and the resulting story was not very favorable to IBEC. PULSO got hold of the article and blew it all out of proportion. The board of directors of the IBEC project in Lima is made up of some of the most controversial names in Peruvian politics: Hernando de Lavalle, Manuel Mujica Gallo, Oscar Berckemeyer (brother of the Peruvian ambassador to the U.S.) and others. Many of the directors are top officials in the largest banks in the country, and almost all of them are members of powerful families. This, of course, was a natural for a sheet like PULSO. "Lavalle,

Prado ² and Mujica Gallo Negotiate with Rockefeller", cried one headline. Ignoring the real purpose of IBEC, PULSO charged that the powerful and conservative bankers of Lima were working hand in glove with "Wall Street" to rob and cheat Perú.

The United States makes a perfect whipping boy for politicians who want to set themselves up as the champions of the "hombre común y corriente." Despite the efforts made in recent years to create an atmosphere of understanding through "good neighbor" and "good partner" policies, the U.S. has never been able to wipe its South American slate clean; latinos still remember the occasions during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the "Colossus of the North" treated the entire continent as though it were a private protectorate. This is essentially a case of the "haves" versus the "have-nots"; like many other Latin American republics, Perú depends heavily on the U.S. for loans, technical assistance and, indeed, her very livelihood. The United States buys most of this country's cotton and sugar on an allotment basis, and every time our Senate makes a heavy-handed show of changing those allotments it sets in motion a chain reaction of fear and apprehension in Perú. Since fear can be used to great advantage by skillful politicians, it is small wonder that "Yanquilandia" is axed time and again during political campaigns here.

As I have mentioned before, the APRA party has been adamantly "anti-yanqui" on various occasions. Its founder, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, based the ideology of his "People's Party" on the teachings of Marx and the practices of Moscow as he saw them in the 1920's. Party organization was initially borrowed from the above sources but later adapted to conditions in Perú. In the early 1930's, just after the party's inception, Haya and his lieutenants preached the separation of church and state, the overthrow of the feudal system of land tenure, the nationalization of industry and land, and - most important - the destruction of "yanqui imperialism" as a force in the country. "Our productive riches are mortgaged to the yanquis", said Haya in 1924.

Discipline and zeal held the "People's Party" together through two decades of police persecution, imprisonment and torture - decades in which Apristas assassinated their enemies and were in turn shot down by the police. Emerging triumphant as the majority party which placed José Luis Bustamante y Rivero in the presidential chair in 1945, the Apristas suddenly changed their philosophy. They voted for the approval of U.S. private investments in mining and oil which would have been labelled "imperialista" in the early days. Marxism was vanquished by capitalism once the Apristas got a taste of power and the money that went with it. When APRA was declared illegal by Bustamante after the unsuccessful revolt in Callao (October 3, 1948) the organization went underground. It infiltrated sports clubs and social groups and kept its discipline by means of secret meetings between the outlawed leaders and the ranks. Now, after almost eight years of suppression, the APRA party is openly active again. It is an illegal organization in name only, for it runs its own newspaper, holds meetings in Lima and the provinces and publishes its manifestos in the periodicals.

¹PULSO refers to Mariano Prado, brother of candidate Manuel.

The APRA paper IMPACTO, the offspring of the old party organ LA TRIBUNA, reflects a new change in the Aprista platform. Gone are the sweet words about "yanqui" money. There is little trace of the Haya de la Torre of 1948 who said that U.S. capitalism had changed into a beneficial element and that he did not fear "the imperialism of Wall Street because it guides us The grave problem is not the power of the great countries like the United States but rather our inferiority complex". Latest word from Haya has a different tone. IMPACTO published an article of his entitled: "Eisenhower is Looking For Gauleiters Instead of Good Neighbors in Latin America" ². Other Aprista writers concern themselves anew with problems like "Imperialist Penetration in Perú". Although IMPACTO is comparatively reserved and dignified in its "anti-imperialist" articles, the fact remains that the powerful APRA organization is heading up a pre-election campaign which is using facts and rumors - some of them distorted beyond belief - about U.S. economic activity in Perú to patch up the old "Colossus of the North" bogeyman in an effort to whip up interest among the voters. However, with a long tradition of friendship toward the United States behind her, Perú is not apt to take this campaign too seriously. The nuisance value is considerable, but above and beyond giving certain leftist politicians something to talk about its effects are negligible in my opinion.

When one considers that a new President must be elected and the political spoils divided between the contending parties, 58 days is a very short time. Presidential candidates may declare themselves until the end of this month, and it is to be presumed that the list of candidates will grow until that time. Although it is almost impossible to tell from week to week who is a pre-candidate and who a candidate, there are now seven men who have either made declarations of their intentions or whose names have been presented to the public by committees or parties. Grand old man of the list is Manuel Prado (WHM-34) who is now recovering in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida from his December, 1955 heart attack. Backed by the Movimiento Democrática Pradista, Prado's considerable popularity among the lower classes is based on the numerous back-slapping, abrazo-giving, barnstorming tours which he made during his 1939-1945 presidential term. It has been announced recently that Prado will return to Perú at the end of this month.

Hardest working of the lot is Hernando de Lavalle, a respected lawyer who has accepted the difficult task of trying to establish an atmosphere of convivencia (political unity) in the country. He has received solid support from the APRA party and other groups, but his call for unification has not been answered by the Coalición Nacional - Unión Revolucionaria - Demócrata Cristiana sector. These three parties have cut down their demands concerning electoral and security law reform, but no one knows whether they will throw in their lot with Lavalle.

Most silent of the seven is Vice President Héctor Boza. The political weeklies have been trying unsuccessfully for some time to get some kind of a declaration from him. The most voluble candidate so far is young architect Fernando Belaunde Terry, whose

3. Haya is referring to the U.S. policy of sending arms and material aid to latino countries now under the yoke of dictators.

candidacy is proposed by a youth movement calling itself the National Front of Democratic Youth, Then there is lawyer Luciano Castillo who is backed by the Socialist party. General Carlos A. Miñano, a highly respected professional soldier, has thrown his hat in the ring, as has Carlos Miró Quesada, member of the powerful family which controls the newspaper EL COMERCIO, and chief of a groups known as the Renovation party.

In addition to the seven men named above, two individuals are often mentioned in the Lima grapevine: ambassador to Washington Fernando Berckemeyer and General Zenón Noriega. Berckemeyer is an extremely capable diplomat, and rumor has it that he may replace Lavalle as the next man to take a crack at the diplomatic problem of interparty unification. Zenón Noriega, the man who has twice tried to unseat his former friend Manuel Odría, has started a campaign in the north of the country to work up support; it is probable that he will announce his candidacy sometime in mid-April.

While mellifluous Spanish words like "convivencia", "unidad" and "peruanidad" crowd the pages of the periodicals and cascade from the lips of party spokesmen, that very small sector of the Peruvian populace which is truly interested in the outcome of the 1956 elections is becoming worried. If Lavalle fails in his mission, if the divided and redivided body politic cannot be patched up within a few weeks, what will happen? The majority of the people with whom I have talked think that President Odría is sincere in his desire to retire from the Palace of Government and that he will not personally take a hand in the situation. But if the one steady hand in Peruvian politics today is withdrawn, who will make the first grab for power? Judging from the country's history, the armed forces would be first in line. They have been pampered by the Odría regime, and they completely control the present Cabinet. The power of the armed forces in Perú cannot be denied. Rather than relinquish that power to a candidate backed by a shaky coalition of small parties it is possible that they might take matters into their own hands and seize control of the country by means of a coup. Again, the rumors are flying as to who would engineer such a golpe del estado. The whole thing is in the realm of wild surmise, but one name which emerges from the grapevine is worth mentioning: General Zenón Noriega, the man who was deported after his unsuccessful coup of August, 1954 and who reputedly masterminded a second attempt in early 1955. The General is ambitious and is obviously experienced in such matters. Why he was allowed to return to Perú by President Odría is anybody's guess.

And so it goes. Dissention and party splits have drained most of the atmosphere from the 1956 political campaign and have left a vacuum which threatens to endanger the peace of the Republic if a solution to the dilemma is not found soon. The desire and demand for liberty and democracy are still strong, but they can make no headway until the vacuum is destroyed.

Sincerely

William H. MacLeish
William H. MacLeish

Received New York 4/18/56.