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Dear Mr. Rogers:

In terms of topography and climate there is little difference between the coastal regions of Perú lying north and south of Lima. From Tumbes to Tacna the desert runs in a belt broken by some two score irrigated and irrigable valleys. The winter fog banks, the strong southerly winds and the long reaches of sand and barren hills are almost monotonously similar in "el Norte" and "el Sur". But the two areas are markedly different in other respects. The South is a region poor in industry; its agricultural economy is based on the small haciendas and the many, tiny plots of the independent chacareros. The North, on the other hand, is the cradle of Perú's infant heavy industry; its economy, still basically agrarian, centers around the rapidly mechanizing, giant haciendas and the production of Perú's number two crop - sugar. Imported by the Spaniards, the caña dulce brought fortune to many northern families and sufficient power to control the internal and foreign affairs of the country for decades. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when the aristocracy was made up of landowners, the sugar plantations of the North often decided the policies of government. Today, when the rural aristocracy is being replaced by an elite of urban businessmen, the plantations exercise a lesser but still important influence over national political, economic and social life.

Early in the last century the sugar plantations prospered under a system as feudalistic as that of the primitive sierra haciendas. In their efforts to improve the working quality of their field hands, hacendados brought in Negro and Chinese workers, some of them on a contract basis and some of them as outright slaves.<sup>1</sup> The folklore of the North is full of tales and ballads relating the brutality of proud landowners and the equally brutal reprisals taken by the imported workers. Slavery was abolished in 1854, however, and in later years the government established unusually liberal labor laws. Today a cane cutter is apt to live a healthier life and earn higher wages than the worker living in a coastal city.

At a quarter to five on a damp, overcast morning last month I stood with the owner of one of the North's most famous sugar haciendas watching the field workers lining up for the day's work. The coastal fog bank had worked up the valley during the night and now hung like a shroud overhead. In the lines of workers men hawked, spat, leaned on their spades as they waited for the section bosses to load them onto the trucks. The weak light of a street lamp fell on their faces showing a confusion of features and color, the results of centuries of cross-breeding between

1. Number one: cotton

Indian, Spanish, Negro and Chinese.

As the trucks pulled off into the sticky darkness my host took me around the hacienda town. Although sugar cane production has been modernized in recent years, a large if decreasing number of hand laborers are required to weed the fields, tend the canals so that the precious water of the valley is used as efficiently as possible, and work in the shops and mills. It is only natural, therefore, that during the development of the hacienda a sizable village should grow around the nucleus of the hacienda headquarters. Unlike the Indian tenant farmers who form the labor force of the sierra haciendas, the plantation hand works for a salary and for bonuses in the form of food, recreation, education and medical care. Land does not usually enter into the picture except in so far as the planting, irrigation and cutting of the cane are concerned, so that the plantation worker is essentially a village dweller. Moreover, in comparison with the Indian of the sierra hacienda, the sugar estate obrero is an urban sophisticate.

The urban qualities of the hacienda town were more than apparent to me after having seen the cinema, the schools, the hospital and the swimming pool. The streets were paved with the molasses-like dregs of the sugar processing mills, the rows of houses were freshly painted, the street lights gleamed. The hacienda town, containing some three thousand people, was far superior in terms of cleanliness and modern conveniences than towns of comparable size lying outside the boundaries of the plantation.

Despite the modern structure of the town, however, the hacienda still bore some of the marks of its feudalistic past when worker cringed before owner, when punishment and reward - at times brutal punishment and extraordinarily generous reward - were meted out by a godlike hacendado. As I walked with my host, I observed that when speaking to his workers he became a different person - a commanding general who expected and received the respect due his position. Men saluted him on the street, women bobbed their heads. Even the field and office managers treated him as an immensely superior individual. Seeing his attitude, I was reminded of the Yábar brothers at a festival in Kusipata supervising the activities of their "children" (WHM-15). We passed a queue of women lined up in the near dawn at the door of a warehouse. They were the wives of workers, waiting to receive their daily ration of free meat, rice, salt and beans from hacienda clerks. Again I thought of the Yábars handing out coca and aguardiente to their Indian tenants. Paternalism, a traditional paternalism, was still as much the order of the day in my host's plantation as in the lonely estates of the mountains. The sharp difference between the paternalism in the haciendas of highlands and lowlands, of course, is that in the latter change in the form of modern equipment and agricultural techniques has been introduced, and in the former change is resisted by the very rigidity of its feudal organization.

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1. Negroes were brought to Perú between 1493 and 1812 under the terms of various regulations. A great surge in the importation of Chinese contract labor occurred in the first half of the 19th century.

During the following days we drove between fields of hook-leaf cane covering thousands of hectares. Frequently we stopped to allow my host to inspect a newly planted field or the rutted network of a drainage system. In between the halts, the hacendado talked frankly about his plantation and about the men who worked in its fields. His views represent years of hard and at times exasperating work; they are totally lacking in rosy idealism but are based on the prejudices and on the practical facts of his experience.

Knowing that I was engaged in writing reports about the various regions of Perú, my host was polite but direct in describing what he called the unfortunate and incorrect articles concerning the northern plantations which had been written in the past by visiting U.S. journalists. Managers and owners of other plantations had been far more brusque in telling me their opinions of certain U.S. correspondents; one manager lectured me for half an hour on the subject of what in his opinion were untrue articles written by badly informed reporters - damaging articles describing hacendados as despots, haciendas as feudal manors and workers as slaves. The particular article which was responsible for the manager's broadside appeared some time ago in "Fortune" magazine; it contained a number of criticisms of hacienda management which enraged the owners of one plantation to such an extent that they have barred U.S. reporters ever since.

While my host welcomes tourists, scientists and researchers to his hacienda, he is convinced that a great number of his U.S. guests arrive and depart with the same preconceived ideas about the "oppressed Indians" being driven to work in the cane fields by the whips of mustachioed overseers. As he took me around the hacienda town in the pre-dawn of that first day, my host pointed to the schools, the hospital, the theatre and the market. "Many Americans come here expecting to see plantation workers living like U.S. laborers.", he said. "They are either ignorant of the nature of these people or else they are blinded by their own ideals. Now look - where else in Perú can a field hand buy milk and vegetables so cheaply? Where else can his wife get free meat, rice and beans? Where else can the family go to the movies for two and a half U.S. cents or receive such inexpensive benefits in other fields? Where is there better job security? Do you see what I mean? And yet, when I tell some of my American guests that a basic wage for my workers is \$ 9.10 a day" (approximately 50 U.S. cents) "they look at me as though I were getting rich off the sweat of my men. They forget that when the benefits I mentioned are added in the sum would come to twenty solés; that's higher than the basic wage of some government workers in the city."

When I asked my host to describe the men who worked as cane cutters and weeders for him, he replied: "By and large they come from the sierra above the head of this valley. They are not like the Indians of the South. A great many of them speak Spanish and wear western dress. Most of them are mixed-bloods, mestizos. The Quechua language and the old customs have died out in many parts of this northern sierra."

"These people are really children", said the hacendado. "They

must be treated like children. Perhaps you won't believe me, but it's true. They are lazy and have no thoughts beyond filling their bellies and having enough money to buy food and liquor. Here's a concrete example for you. In 1945, when the Aprista-controlled government raised wages, cane harvesting was cut in half. Our track layers and hand loaders were paid by the ton, you see. With their increased pay, they figured that with half the work they could earn just as much as before. They didn't think about working the old hours and making more money. They just don't like to work."

"It seems to be a common idea among the Americans who come here that we don't try to improve the lot of the workers. That, of course, is false. Years ago the previous owner bought iron bedsteads for each house. At first no one wanted them. Then, when they became a mark of prestige, families would put one in their sleeping quarters, pile their belongings on top of it and sleep on the ground under the bed. When we tried to put in modern toilet facilities using privies behind the workers' houses, we had to put a guard on them to make sure the people went inside and didn't use the outside walls of the privies."

"There are many other ways in which we help our workers. The law requires that each plantation install a school which will teach the first three grades of primary education. Here the schools include all the grades. In some cases we have gone against the labor laws to help our own people. According to the law, workers here must be attended by a doctor located miles away in case they have an accident. It would take an ambulance two hours to pick a man up and get him to the clinic; a badly wounded man could bleed to death in that time. Therefore, we have installed a clinic right here to give immediate attention to injured men."

The hacendado went on to a criticism of his country's labor laws, - a criticism which is widespread in the South as well as the North. "The laws as they are drawn up in Lima look good on paper", he said. "They are liberal and in some cases more advanced than their counterparts in the United States. But they are blanket laws - they apply equally to all sections of the country. That, as you know, is an impossibility. What holds true here would not necessarily hold true in the jungle or the sierra. With our centralistic type of government there is little interest in the particular needs of each district; what is good for Lima is supposedly good for the country."

To illustrate his point, my host referred to the law which would have forced his men to travel miles to see a doctor, then moved on to the child labor regulations. "That is a stupid law", he said. "Let's say a field hand has eight kids; that's a big family to maintain. His older children should help him out by doing light work in the fields or elsewhere. This wouldn't interfere with their schooling; they could go to night school or do part time work after school hours. But the law will not let them help out their family." (According to Peruvian child labor laws, a child may go to work at the age of 12 if he has his parents' permission and a permit from the Ministry of Labor; this permit is required for minors up to 18 years of age. It is possible that the small amount of paper work required in obtaining the permit

might scare off the parents of eligible children).

Despite his conviction that his workers were childlike and lazy, my host did not think that they would remain that way forever. "The process of educating these people and making them self-sufficient is very slow," he said. "However, I can show you signs of progress along those lines. My harvest manager, for instance, was once a cane loader. And my irrigation manager came from an ordinary field hand's family. As a matter of fact, his father is now one of his laborers. There are a number of other examples, but you must realize that they make up a small minority of the workers here. They are the exceptions. It will take decades, perhaps centuries, to reach a point where the rest of the workers will be really interested in improving themselves."

The plantation owner did not think that today's labor organizations would help in improving the standards of the field hands. "Labor unions in this region are just a thing of the minute", he told me. They are controlled by a few men who dominate the rest. Therefore, a strike is apt to benefit only those men who happen to be in control of the union. On several occasions workers have gone on strike in the plantations without knowing why they were doing so. Many of them wanted to keep on working, but the strike leaders wouldn't let them. When agitators try to get my men to walk off the job, however, they rarely succeed. The workers here know that I will give them whatever concessions have been gained by strikers on nearby plantations, and they won't have to miss several days' pay to obtain them."

With respect to the flow of emigration from the northern sierra to the coastal cities and plantations, my host had this to say: "In the past the haciendas have required large labor forces to prepare fields, plant, weed, cut and process the cane. Jobs were plentiful then, and we drew most of our workers from the sierra. Men came to work on the plantations, stayed for years or went back to their tierra when they became sick or homesick. In this manner there was permanent, personal contact between the mountains and the coast with its higher standard of living. Now, however, machines are taking over many of the jobs of the unskilled laborers. In the future, when the haciendas are almost completely mechanized, our labor requirements will dwindle, and the personal contact between coast and sierra will be broken. The people in the mountains will thus be isolated from the one area which has been slowly teaching them the ways to improve themselves."

What could be done to offset this growing isolation of the sierra from the coast? My host thought that if the mountain haciendas were modernized, they could play an important role in improving the lot of their tenants and/or workers. What he meant by "modernization" was certainly not land reform or redistribution. "The real evil of the hacienda system in the sierra is the absentee landlord", he said. "If you force the owner to live on his land and do something with it in an intelligent manner, then you have a basis for progress in the sierra. I have already told you that these workers are lazy, that they have no real wish yet to improve themselves. If you broke up an hacienda and gave each campesino a big chunk of it, you would find that except in a few cases each man would go on farming his own land and pay little attention to

his new gift. No, you need someone there to show them how to farm along modern lines, someone to keep after them until they begin to take a real interest in making money, selling and buying. A good, intelligent hacienda manager or owner is the answer."

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The cinemas, swimming pools, housing developments, schools and hospitals of the northern haciendas are a far cry from the primitive adobe buildings of the remote sierra estates. The comparative luxury of the plantations has placed at the disposal of the field hands goods and privileges which are completely outside the normal life of a sierra Indian. And yet the plantation workers are still lumped with their relatives in the mountains under the categories "childlike" and "lazy". It would seem as though modern housing and conveniences had resulted in little real progress of the field hand toward two accepted norms of western life: responsibility and initiative. This point, I think, is illustrative of the basic error in the thinking of many hacendados and - on the other end of the scale - the idealists who are inclined to champion the "down-trodden Indian". In both groups there is the idea that if the plantation worker or the hacienda tenant is given enough modern comforts and facilities, sooner or later he will become "mature" and responsible in his way of life. The error, in my opinion, lies in the fact that the recipients of these donations - these well-built houses and cinemas - will react in a predictable and negative way to their gifts. They themselves did not have to work or think hard to get their new houses and schools; the buildings were simply placed at their disposal. Knowing this, the workers feel no additional compunction to come out of their traditional shells and engage in the life going on around them - life on a higher plane.

As an illustration of what I think is a much more basic and successful attempt to bring the backward, rural majority of Perú into what is called here "the national life", I refer to the supervised credit program (CREAS) now going on in a small community near Cuzco (WHM-23 and 24). Under the terms of this program, everything the campesino receives in the way of modern kitchen pots and pans, seeds, fertilizers and farm implements he earns quite literally by the sweat of his brow. They are not gifts from a person or organization upon which he is dependent for such basic items as wages and land. Upon his own shoulders lies the responsibility of working hard and long enough to pay off his loan. If he becomes interested in the program and works with it, he is apt to develop that sense of responsibility and desire to improve himself, his family and farm which are the first steps in the departure from the way of life which has been characterized above as "childlike" and "lazy".

A national supervised agricultural credit program, however, would be very expensive for the first few years. Advisory technicians would be needed in quantity as well as farm implements, seeds, etc. In addition, the program would be successful only where the campesinos owned their own land either communally or individually - as in the ayllus - or in the haciendas whose owners thought enough of the scheme to give it their full cooperation and attention. The program would not be of much value in the sugar or cotton estates

of the north where the majority of workers are neither small land holders nor tenants. In the northern plantations some other method must be adopted to cause the worker to be the source of his own progress. Some of the younger officials at one plantation I visited believe that small labor unions set up and, at first, controlled by the hacienda management as an educational experiment would result in an awakening of the workers to their rights and - perhaps more important for this discussion - their responsibilities. In any case, the workers' sense of complete dependence upon the hacienda owner or manager who employs them must be deliberately, slowly and intelligently removed if the "children" are to become active participants in the activities of the country.

As an individual, my host does not exist. As the spokesman for the ideas I have heard and the quotes I have picked up, he is alive and kicking. His prejudices and his practical honesty can be found in many of the plantations where modern techniques are face to face with backward, retiring people. And, as it is highly doubtful whether the vast estates of the North will be broken up and re-distributed during my lifetime, my host represents a general type of men who will be responsible for coping with the possible unrest and probable slow and hesitant progress of a mass of working men and women who have yet to wake up to their rights, responsibilities - and power.

Sincerely,

*William H MacLeish*  
William H. MacLeish

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