

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

WLM-20

30 November 1989
Quito, ECUADOR

"When Less Means More"

Peter Bird Martin
Executive Director
Institute of Current World Affairs
Wheelock House
4 West Wheelock Street
Hanover, NH 03755

Dear Peter,

Ecuador's Quichua Indians and Andean condors call home the central sierra that surrounds Chimborazo, this country's highest mountain at 6310 meters. These condors, bare-headed and white-cowled, are often the sole witnesses to the first hour of dawn, when the startling blue daybreak sky affords crystalline views of the countryside. Demonstrating uncanny skill, the condors' finger-tipped wings catch the wind currents to spiral upward and, then, float on a hot blast to stop in mid-air and hover immobile, watching.

Along the narrow and steep ridges that separate Chimborazo from its companion peaks, Carihuairazo (5020 meters), fields of wheat and barley dance in the highland gusts, rooted to plots that may exceed pitches of 40°. Below, a pair of Indian shepherds -- cloaked in woolen ponchos to brace themselves against the chill of the still-shaded trail -- rides horseback westward to check the small herds of cattle sometimes left for weeks to graze unhurriedly among the lichen mounds and boggy flats of the valley floor. Further down the pass an occasional waterfall freely gushes the melt of Chimborazo's crevasse-pocked glaciers, throwing up a misty spray of momentary rainbows to animate the gold and emerald base of the summit. And there are the glaciers themselves: huge, living masses of ice and moraine that can be heard to creak and groan under the blaze of the equator's rising sun.

Hours to the south of Chimborazo in the present-day province of Cañar, archeological evidence dates the first sedentary, agricultural settlements back to 400 A.D. Around Pilaloma the Cañari culture -- which sacrificed maidens in bloody worship of the moon -- was but one of numerous pre-Inca societies that flourished in Ecuador until the late 15th Century. Then invading Inca armies marching north from Cuzco, Peru, arrived between 1470-80 to impose the Empire of the Sun and the Quichua language. In the Cañaris' case, the prize of Inca victory was a cut-stone temple built near Pilaloma to serve the Cañari gods of the night. The Incas razed the temple, but spared the lives of Cañari priests in order that the priests maintain

William L. Melvin is a Fellow of the Institute studying South American Indian societies and Andean affairs.

Since 1925 the Institute of Current World Affairs (the Crane-Rogers Foundation) has provided long-term fellowships to enable outstanding young adults to live outside the United States and write about international areas and issues. Endowed by the late Charles R. Crane, the Institute is also supported by contributions from like-minded individuals and foundations.

peace among their newly conquered brethren. Near the year 1500, a new temple named Ingapirca was built atop the remains of the old complex. By incorporating the Cañari moon temple and raising their own devoted to sun worship, the Incas created the most important religious and ceremonial center of the Ecuadoran sierra. Ingapirca also served as a rest stop for the last uncontested Inca, Manco Kaypac, when he traveled the vast Inca Highway that stretched from Quito to La Paz, Bolivia. Ironically, the Incas were to divine the meaning of the summer solstice at Ingapirca for barely 30 years when civil war between Manco Kaypac's sons -- Atahualpa and Huascar -- left Huascar dead and the Inca Empire vulnerable to invasion from Europe.

When the Spanish conquistadors arrived in 1534, Ingapirca already had fallen victim to the Incas' civil war. But if the temples were down, the Spanish quickly discovered that the indigenous peoples of the Ecuadoran sierra remained rebellious. The early years after the establishment of the Audiencia de Quito (like the Audiencia in Lima, the administrative center of the Spanish Empire and home to the royally appointed Viceroy) were years of one Indian uprising after another. Unfortunately for the Andes' indigenous peoples, these first rebellions usually were betrayed by Indians who benefitted from the Spaniards' dominance. Such was the case in 1536, when the self-proclaimed Inca Yupanqui tried to stir up trouble in southern Peru. After Inca men around Quito were informed of events in Peru, they agreed to join the insurrection and kill all of Quito's Spanish residents. The Incas were frustrated in their plans when a former concubine of Atahualpa -- one Isabel Yarucpalla -- revealed the conspirators' movements to her new husband, the Spanish conquistador Juan Lobato de Sosa.

Those Indian revolts that survived treachery were put down with barbarous reprisals. In 1618 Quito's Viceroy, the Príncipe de Esquilache, granted 24 "encomiendas" (a colonial term to designate farm land that came with free labor attached) to Diego Vaca de la Vega. De la Vega promptly settled on the eastern slopes of the Andes, along the Río Santiago, and set to enriching himself at the local Mayna Indians' expense. By 1635, the Maynas could tolerate the abuse no longer and attacked the city of San Francisco de Borja, killing 34 Spaniards. As a result, the Spaniards went on a rampage, engaging in authentic manhunts that sent the Maynas fleeing into the Amazon basin and the tributaries of the Río Pastaza. Once Jesuit missionaries entered the region in 1638, they were greeted with horrors. The Jesuit priest Padre Figueroa described the scene:

... so many Indians taken to justice, so many bodies destroyed on "horcas" (a Spanish torture table) or cut into pieces and hanging from trees, [bodies] without ears, without noses ... [bodies] flailed open with canes, the better that the skin might flap in the wind ... cruelties that noone would believe if he had not seen them first hand

Indian attacks, and subsequent massacres, are pretty rare in 20th Century Ecuador. But the reasons behind indigenous discontent -- being dispossessed of tribal lands and treated as second-class citizens -- still smolder. Aware of that fact, current President Rodrigo Borja has made a priority of attending to Indian claims for justice. Ecuador's chief executive has journeyed almost constantly throughout the central sierra around Chimborazo this month, granting land titles to entire communities (for cooperative purposes) and individual Quichua farmers. Faced with a

government determined to take seriously Ecuador's Indians, this Andean nation is being forced to examine closely the role of those Indians in the sierra's rural economy.

Borja's more vociferous political opponents (among which must be included Ecuador's last president, León Febres Cordero), dismiss the present administration's emphasis on agrarian reform as political grandstanding. They do have a point. When President Borja and his Minister of Agriculture, Mario Jalil, turn over 2,500 hectares to 800 Quichua families in a ceremony scheduled to take place in Quito's Plaza de Independencia later this week, the redistribution of land will work out to little more than three hectares per family. Mindful of his critics, President Borja and his colleagues have taken to purchasing television time that features glowing spots on agrarian reform -- but strangely, prefer to number hectares in square meters. One hectare equals 10,000 square meters, or 2.471 acres.

Demagogic and deceptive as Borja's tactics surely are, the president could ably defend himself by arguing that manipulating figures to please poorly educated Indians is a practice as old as South America's various agrarian reforms. And unlike Mexico or Bolivia -- countries in which violent revolutions prefaced radical agrarian reform -- Ecuador has tried to exclusively legislate its way to equity in the countryside. The Agrarian Reform Law promulgated in 1964, and amended in 1973 (in both cases, military regimes carried out the initiatives), has framed a series of fitful measures aimed to parcel off unused land from the wealthiest hacienda owners and hand it over to the poorest Indians. Ostensibly, the goals of agrarian reform were to increase net agricultural productivity and iron out the mighty wrinkles in Ecuador's skewed distribution of wealth. Twenty-five years later, President Borja would find, however, that it can be fairly difficult to claim success on either count.

Noone now disputes the 1964 abolition of "huasipongo", or state of virtual slavery that obligated Indians to unpaid labor on haciendas. As for the need to redraw boundaries in the Ecuadoran sierra, there is greater debate. Emilio Bonifaz, member of this country's first Agrarian Reform Commission (1961) and outspoken -- if conservative -- farmer ever since, drew up an interesting analysis of landholdings here:

SIERRA LAND DISTRIBUTION BEFORE AGRARIAN REFORM: 1954

| <u>Size of Landholding</u> | <u>Number of Owners</u> | <u>Cultivated Land Area (hectares)</u> | <u>Owner-ship of Cultivated Land (%)</u> | <u>Pasture, Forests, Arid Land (hectares)</u> | <u>Total Land Area (hectares)</u> |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|--|--|---|-----------------------------------|
| | | | | (1) | (2) |
| < 5 hectares | 212,153 | 290,000 | 34.29 | 51,100 | 341,700 |
| 4-49.9 htrs. | 40,735 | 259,100 | 30.57 | 257,600 | 516,700 |
| 50-500 htrs. | 5,962 | 117,600 | 20.96 | 512,200 | 689,800 |
| > 500 htrs. | 719 | 120,100 | 14.18 | 1,352,100 | 1,472,200 |
| TOTAL: | 259,569 | 787,400 | 100.00 | 2,173,000 | 3,020,400 |

SOURCE: Republic of Ecuador, 1954 Census, cited in Barsky, La Reforma Agraria Ecuatoriana, 1988, page 112.

Notes: (1) Includes eroded areas, desert, roads, & mountain passes.

(2) The entire area of Ecuador's Andes covers 4,127,000 hectares. The 1954 Census measured only 75% of the region.

Bonifaz published his data while serving as head of the Zone 1 Farmers' Association in the 1970's. Zone 1 particularly influences agricultural policy here, since it encompasses the capital province of Pichincha -- prime real estate for some of Ecuador's landed gentry. So it is no shock that Bonifaz minimized the area of land owned by these grand old families when distinguishing between "cultivated" holdings and those designated as "pastures, forests, etc.". Bonifaz contended that this second category of land was highly unsuitable for agriculture, given the prevalence of deep erosion on steep pitches. Hence, his logic ran, such land should be left out of any agrarian reform schemes.

What Bonifaz failed to mention is that any observant traveler hiking through Ecuador's sierra will note that Indians commonly subsist on steep, eroded pitches even now. And once the 1964 Agrarian Reform provided for the seizure of lands left fallow for three consecutive years -- while individuals were limited to 1800 hectares in the sierra (this was changed in 1973, with the limit on ownership removed and a productivity quota put in place) -- many big landowners suddenly discovered ingenious ends for much of that previously horrible "pastures, forests, etc.".

In fact, the increased utilization of hitherto unused land is one reason why Ecuadoran territory devoted to cattle-raising leapt by 134.7% between 1970-1985 -- from 1,888,700 hectares to 4,432,700 hectares. In contrast, lands dedicated to foodstuff (cereals and vegetables) cultivation were subject to a mere 8.5% increase during the same period. Lands set aside for foodstuffs started the 1970's decade at 1,595,922 hectares, declined in area for 14 straight years until 1984, and then recovered finally to move past 1,730,540 hectares in 1984-1985. Though these figures represent nation-wide data, and include land purchased under government-sponsored colonialization projects in Ecuador's eastern jungle region, the trend is clear.

The statistics would not be so compelling if agricultural productivity had experienced notable gains. But that has not been the case. And production volumes have taken a dive. To cite just one example: wheat production fell from 81,000 metric tons in 1970 to just 18,464 metric tons in 1985, registering a percentage decline of 77.2%. Similar trends are plainly evident in other traditional sierra crops like hard corn and barley. The one area where production has risen lies outside the sierra. Rice harvests from 155,405 metric tons in 1970 to 227,882 metric tons by 1985. Trouble is, Ecuadorans needed 97% more land to reap a 47% gain in production: lands devoted to rice nearly doubled from a 1970 total of 76,000 hectares to 149,897 fifteen years later.

With Ecuadoran farmers producing less, Ecuadoran consumers are importing food. Some 388,000 metric tons of wheat alone were unloaded in Ecuadoran ports during 1985. It is no wonder. While agricultural production has been abysmal, Ecuador's population has stubbornly refused to stop growing. Farmers that had to feed 6.5 million mouths in 1974 must now feed an estimated 10 million in 1989.

Those Ecuadorans who favor continued agrarian reform claim that the small farmer is, of necessity, more productive than the great "hacendado".

Their opposing countrymen can usually drudge up their own calculations to prove that only rural economies of scale (grand scale, that is) are profitable and worthy. Whoever is right, over two decades of agrarian reform in Ecuador have created an incredible amount of tiny farm plots, giving rise to the term "minifundia" to replace the worn-out "latifundia". This ICWA writer analyzed the list of adjudicated cases processed by Ecuador's Institute for Agrarian Reform and Colonialization, (IERAC), from 1964-1985. The results are telling:

ECUADOR'S SIERRA UNDER AGRARIAN REFORM: 1964-1985 (1)

Size and Distribution of IERAC Awarded Land Claims

| Province | hectares / % percent of total | | | | Total (htrs) |
|------------|-------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| | < 5 hectares | 5 - 9.9 hectares | 10 - 19.9 hectares | > 20 hectares | |
| Carchi | 6,935/42.7 | 7,187/44.2 | -- | 2,120/13.1 | 16,242 |
| Imbabura | 5,365/41.4 | 5,240/40.4 | 1,230/ 9.5 | 1,123/ 8.7 | 12,958 |
| Pichincha | 28,186/43.8 | 30,883/47.9 | 5,342/ 8.3 | -- | 64,411 |
| Cotapaxi | 25,884/43.1 | 22,347/37.2 | 2,364/ 3.9 | 9,430/15.8 | 60,025 |
| Tungurahua | 10,334/33.0 | 12,714/40.5 | -- | 8,306/26.5 | 31,354 |
| Chimborazo | 20,338/17.8 | 5,593/ 4.9 | 56,469/49.4 | 31,884/27.9 | 114,284 |
| Bolívar | 1,041/ 9.8 | 1,047/ 9.8 | 8,564/80.4 | -- | 10,652 |
| Cañar | 4,192/10.2 | 9,753/23.7 | 6,953/16.9 | 20,224/49.2 | 41,122 |
| Azuay | 5,194/19.3 | 5,540/20.5 | 5,581/20.7 | 10,664/39.5 | 26,974 |
| Loja | 7,503/ 5.4 | 28,604/20.7 | 97,227/70.3 | 4,884/ 3.6 | 138,218 |
| TOTAL: | 114,972/22.3 | 128,908/24.9 | 183,730/35.6 | 88,635/17.2 | 516,245 |

SOURCE: Ecuadoran Institute of Agrarian Reform and Colonialization, compiled by WLM.

Notes: (1) 1985 last date for which figures publicly available.

Oddly enough, IERAC awarded not a single land claim for more than 20 hectares in the capital province of Pichincha. And in the rich province of Imbabura that borders Pichincha to the north, a piddling 1123 hectares were divided into plots measuring more than 20 hectares in the space of two decades.

An oversight on the part of IERAC? Probably not. If Ecuador's large landowners argue that they are short on land, they are often long on prejudice. One night last August, this writer had the opportunity to bed and board at a hacienda dating from the 16th Century. The current owner dedicates a sizeable part of his time to a rose farm on the property, and raises cattle as well. The hacienda owner made no secret of his acerbic dislike for Ecuador's Indians, remarking that "those damned Indians" are the reason Ecuador finds itself "underdeveloped" today. The owner told the story of how, when he first purchased the hacienda 12 years ago, Indians in the area were accustomed to crossing his land on foot. The Indians also led their livestock to pasture across the hacienda land. "I put a stop to that nonsense, believe you me", snorted the owner.

Walking daily around his spread with a 12-gauge shotgun, the farmer would spot an Indian trespassing and sic his black Labrador dogs on the unfortunate. The Labradors were trained to circle the Indian, who was left terrified until the owner could catch up to the dogs. The owner made the Indian take off his shoes and set them to one side. Then the owner peppered

the shoes with buckshot, telling the Indian, "Trespass again and you'll be in those shoes the next time I fire." Not surprisingly, local Indians now walk around the hacienda lands on their way to pasture.

Land in the fertile valleys around the provincial Imbabura market town of Otavalo -- where the 16th Century hacienda is located -- is fairly expensive, running at around US \$7,000 per hectare. "Of course," reflected the hacendado, "you can make up for the initial investment with cheap labor." Like sierra Indians in Peru and Bolivia, Ecuadoran day-hands rake in the princely sum of US \$1-2 for eight hours labor.

With working conditions what they are, quite a few sierra Indians prefer to make do with subsistence farming. Even if they felt otherwise, most IERAC land grants awarded since 1964 were for less than five hectares:

ECUADOR'S SIERRA UNDER AGRARIAN REFORM: 1964-1986 (1)

Size and Distribution of IERAC Awarded Land Claims
beneficiaries / average hectares per beneficiary

| <u>Province</u> | <u>beneficiaries / average hectares per beneficiary</u> | | | | <u>Total Persons</u> |
|-----------------|---|-------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| | <u>< 5 hectares</u> | <u>5 - 9.9 hectares</u> | <u>10 - 19.9 hectares</u> | <u>> 20 hectares</u> | |
| Carchi | 1,740/3.99 | 1,151/6.24 | -- | 81/26.17 | 3,068 |
| Imbabura | 4,659/1.15 | 832/6.30 | 70/17.57 | 45/24.98 | 5,606 |
| Pichincha | 8,772/3.21 | 4,065/7.60 | 452/11.82 | -- | 13,287 |
| Cotapaxi | 13,624/1.90 | 3,300/6.77 | 172/13.74 | 317/29.75 | 17,413 |
| Tungurahua | 3,495/2.96 | 1,279/9.94 | -- | 52/75.36(2) | 4,847 |
| Chimborazo | 6,510/3.12 | 932/6.00 | 4,329/13.04 | 1,355/23.48 | 13,129 |
| Bolívar | 321/3.24 | 168/6.23 | 473/18.11 | -- | 962 |
| Cañar | 1,131/3.71 | 1,289/7.37 | 505/13.77 | 394/51.33 | 3,319 |
| Azuay | 1,412/3.71 | 623/8.89 | 414/13.48 | 370/63.10 | 2,819 |
| Loja | 1,813/4.14 | 3,384/8.45 | 7,269/13.38 | 175/27.91 | 12,641 |
| TOTAL: | 43,571/2.64 | 17,023/7.58 | 13,684/13.43 | 2,793/31.73 | 77,071 |

SOURCE: Ecuadoran Institute of Agrarian Reform and Colonialization, compiled by WLM.

Notes: (1) 1985 last date for which figures publicly available.

(2) In 1977, one person alone was awarded 4,386.90 hectares. This was not calculated into the above average of > 20 hectare plots, given the unique nature of the settlement.

Agriculture Minister Mario Jalil recently admitted that growing pressure on land -- Ecuador's population currently doubles once every 24 years -- is one reason that Indians are leaving small country plots behind for cities like Quito. Jalil's vague answer: make life "more attractive" in the countryside. But it will take more than empty platitudes and promises to convince Ecuador's sierra natives. After all, it does not take too many generations before one hectare becomes two, four, or perhaps eight gardens. Now that is when less really means more.

As ever,

WLM

Received in Hanover 1/4/90