

Kerri Carrington

# Not the Pope's Peru

Peru, yet another South American country under the thumb of U.S. corporate and international capital, has recently had an election. The Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana (APRA) candidate, thirty-five year old Alan, has become Peru's latest and youngest ever president. But will he maintain power without forming a coalition with the U.S. backed military? Kerri Carrington was in Peru before the elections and wrote this special report.



*Images unfamiliar to Western Eyes: students rioting in the streets of Peru over the imposition of martial law.*

A third of Peru is now under martial law. Human rights activists, socialists, students and left leaning church leaders are sought by the military police. Many have been jailed without trial. Still more are missing, suspected buried in one of the mass graves found by a UN human rights group near Ayacucho last year. On 1 December 1984, the military enforced the closure of the state's universities in response to student rioting and demonstrations against the government. The subsequent slaughter of students and academic staff resulted in a reported one hundred deaths and many more casualties. This is the country that Reagan has heralded as a fine example of Latin American democracy.

Since 1960, Peru has witnessed historic social and political changes and conflicts of great significance. It has been a period characterised by petty bourgeois populism and heightened peasant rebellion. APRA (Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana), a populist party with strong grass roots organisation, won the 1962 elections, promising land reform to appeal to the rural Indians and improved working conditions to appeal to the urban masses. The military power, however, declared it fraudulent and called for elections the following year (Lloyd, 1971:185). APRA has since moved further to the right. Its candidate in this year's election, Alan, is a charismatic leader with corporatist

style politics, who owns three newspapers and one television station. Initially a revolutionary party, APRA has contested elections since 1932, with only one brief moment of glory in 1962. The following year Belaunde was elected president with the support of the military and, having promised land reform, with partial support from the peasants. The reforms never materialised. These populist regimes endeavoured to obscure class inequality and hence curtail peasant revolutionary fervour by offering them token benefits and minimal reforms (Huizer, 1973:152).

The frustration caused by false promises and empty deeds resulted in organised peasant rebellion. In Cusco, Pasco and Junin, in the early 1960s, peasant groups occupied the landowners' haciendas, seizing control of local agricultural production (Quijano, 1982:51). It was at this time that Hugo Blanco, a well known revolutionary, developed a reputation as an agitator and organiser of peasant movements in Peru. Blanco saw the

**"The Sendero Luminoso attempted to foil the Pope's landing in Lima by blowing up the electricity plants. To make their point even clearer to the Pope, a towering hammer and sickle was set ablaze on a nearby hillside overlooking the blackened city..."**

struggle for agrarian reform as part of a revolutionary strategy to win power for peasants and workers, beginning in rural areas (Huizer, 1973:77). The Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), a guerrilla group most active in the central and southern Andean ranges of Peru, pursue a similar strategy today. But, predictably, in 1964, Belaunde unleashed the troops in an attempt to repress the momentum of an increasingly organised peasant movement, killing scores of its members and arresting its leaders, most notably Blanco, who received a 25-year jail sentence (Huizer, 1973:80).

The repression of peasant organisations and the denial of land reform have significantly protected the interests of a landowning class of agricultural exporters, forty or so families who have dominated political life in Peru for many decades (Lloyd, 1971:183). The Belaunde government's economic policies, particularly the devaluation of the Peruvian sole, further enhanced the position of the agricultural bourgeoisie at the expense of the urban industrial capitalists (Bamat, 1983:130). In a worsening economic climate, with a foreign debt of \$200 billion and foreign investment at a standstill, and with the erosion of the profitability of industry coupled with escalating peasant rebellion over land reform, the military assumed government with popular support.

**T**he 1968 populist military coup led by Velasco introduced agrarian reform, some worker participation in industry and tighter state economic controls with the object of modernising industry. The

International Petroleum Company was expropriated and the foreign banks nationalised. Agrarian reform was largely accomplished through drastic changes in landholding. The expropriation of large haciendas gave way to the formation of Cooperatives Agrarias de Produccion (Quijano, 1982:52). Velasco claimed dramatically, "the landlord will never again feast on your poverty" (Bollinger, Lund, 1982:18). Land reform liberated Indian peasants from the servile social relations of pre-capitalist forms of domination. The reproductive base of the traditional agricultural bourgeoisie was partially eradicated. However, it was essentially a change in the social relations of agricultural production and not a change in the economic base of production. The main reason for this cosmetic change in the relations of production is that the Velasco regime did not have a coherent plan to abandon private enterprise (Bamat, 1983:146). Although Velasco's policies undermined the dominance of the agricultural bourgeoisie, they strengthened the interests of the urban industrial capitalists, leading to historical changes in the balance of power between the factions of capital. The policies of the Velasco period of government did not address class inequality, or challenge the capitalist basis of the means of production. The overall effect, therefore, was the reproduction, expansion and modernisation of industrial capitalism in Peru (Bamat, 1983:134).

**B**y 1974, both the industrialists and the landowning bourgeoisie opposed the military government's reformist policies, pressuring for either a return to bourgeois democracy or a change in military leadership. At the same time, divisions within the top ranks of the military worsened. The 1975 takeover of military government by Morales was welcomed by both international and domestic capital. The conservative officers such as Morales, Montagne and Mercado Jarrin resented the military's attempted incorporation of Indian peasant groups (Phillips, 1980:427). It is telling that these conservative officers were trained at the Centro de Altos Estudios Militares, a largely US financed military training college (Phillips, 1980:427). A fairly common strategy of imperialism is to train military personnel under aid programs so that such personnel emerge reflecting the interests of imperialist powers. It is a strategy tried, tested and systematised in Africa, Asia and South America.

Within two years, the conservative policies of the Morales military government had thoroughly reversed the reforms initiated by the seven years of Velasco's leadership. The agricultural co-operatives were dissolved and foreign banks re-entered while foreign investment and ownership increased, largely unregulated. These reactionary economic measures, arguably pressured by the IMF, have exacted an overwhelming toll in disease, death and hunger from the rural peasants and the urban masses (Bamat, 1983:148).

**A**fter five years of rightwing military rule, Morales abdicated authority to civilian government. Belaunde was elected the first civil president since 1968. The return to bourgeois democracy in 1980

therefore succeeded a thoroughly entrenched rightwing military dictatorship reluctant to relinquish power. Given the increasing repressive activity and the unrelenting presence of military personnel on every corner in almost every city or village in Peru, it is highly questionable whether the military has ever relinquished its authoritarian role in the maintenance of capitalism.

The imminent 1985 elections, like the 1980 elections, are little more than an exercise in painting a democratic face onto a US supported neo-fascist regime. The elections are an attempt to legitimate the military's continued existence, thwarting demands for a return to "democracy" while maintaining a stable economy for predominantly US foreign investment. It may have had the intended effect on the less perceptive of world observers, most notably Reagan, but to the Campesino peasants and urban poor, repression, starvation, sickness and abominable poverty wreck their lives. Hence the continued and heightened peasant resistance to their exploitation through revolutionary organisations such as the Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) and the Puka Llacta (Red Fatherland).

results and thus detrimental to the revolution (Che Guevara, 1961:26). Acts of sabotage are more generally organised, targeted, effective and rarely cause the loss of human life. Examples of the latter can be seen in the Sendero Luminoso's numerous attempts to blow up communications, power supplies and the American Embassy in Lima. More recently, in February this year, the Sendero Luminoso attempted to foil the Pope's landing in Lima by blowing up the electricity plants. To make their point even clearer to the Pope, a towering hammer and sickle was set ablaze on a nearby hillside overlooking the blackened city. This particular act of sabotage was a defiant protest in response to the Pope's caustic condemnation of the revolutionary struggle in Peru led by the Sendero Luminoso, the fighting vanguard of the people. The Pope had severely criticised guerrilla activity in a sermon delivered to 40,000 people in Ayacucho, the heartland of Sendero Luminoso territory and loyalty. His speech made no mention of either military or US financed terrorism in Peru. So, within several hours, the Sendero Luminoso had organised a welcoming party for him on his return to Lima. The



*Campesino women protesting, with the traditional banging of pots and pans, in the streets of Ayacucho recently.*

The Sendero Luminoso are labelled extremist terrorists, skilled and ruthless in the tactics of guerrilla warfare (see, for example, *Time*, 18/2/85:38; 25/2/85:25). It is necessary to distinguish a guerrilla strategy such as sabotage from acts of terrorism which are generally not employed by guerrilla groups because they are ineffective and indiscriminate in their

harsh and misdirected criticism of the Sendero Luminoso is itself an indication of the threat they pose to the US backed ruling class of Peru.

The Sendero Luminoso have been effective in seizing control over parts of the Andean mountains, particularly in the centre near Ayacucho and in the south past Arequipa, through the closure of roads, occupation of

haciendas and control over local transport and communications. Although the relationship between grass roots peasant organisations and the Sendero Luminoso is unclear, its continued survival would be impossible without the widespread support of the peasants. A base in the masses is an indispensable condition of guerrilla warfare. Without it, capture and extermination is highly likely (Che Guevara, 1961:15). Peasant loyalty is invaluable, as they provide food and shelter, constitute the communication links between guerrilla bands, transport goods and arms, and act as guides in unfamiliar territory. It is the political and organisational work of the Campesino women on which the guerrillas rely heavily. Their blousy dresses make the smuggling of arms, explosives and important documents an easier task. Some of these women have been captured and, last year, on 25 July, twelve of them were brutally beaten in Callao prison (*Revolutionary Worker*, 1984:4).

The geography of the Andean mountains lends itself to guerrilla warfare. The mountains provide hiding places, easy escapes and an impenetrability to the repressive forces of the Peruvian military. The blocking of roads and railroads has therefore been crucial to prevent their easy entrance. However, it is difficult to gauge which roads have been blocked by the military to isolate the guerrillas from their "water" and hence flush them out, and which roads are blocked to prevent the entrance of the military. The peasants mostly claim that the Sendero Luminoso have blocked the roads and railroads, while official sources tend to claim it is the doing of the military.

It is not likely that the government will admit a lack of control over guerrilla territory unless it can be used to legitimate repression, as was the case in Ayacucho early

### "Riots over industrial issues are almost a daily sporting event in the cities and villages of Peru ...."

last year. Peasant resistance was met with violent repression. The resulting massacre of 4,000 people, mostly Campesino peasants, preceded the imposition of martial law in March 1984 over almost a third of Peru, including Ayacucho. The shooting of twelve journalists at the time was squarely blamed on the Sendero Luminoso in an attempt to discredit its tactics to world observers. The people knew who were responsible. A year later, two Peruvian military police are being tried for the shootings. Torture, massacres, "disappearances" and the use of death squads similar to those terrorising El Salvador have reportedly increased since the imposition of martial law. In August last year, a well known Sendero Luminoso activist, Professor Laura Zambrano Padillo, affectionately known by the people as Meche, was captured, imprisoned and tortured. Meche is not alone. The jails in Peru are filled with political prisoners.

The Pope's visit to Peru in February this year was an overtly political manoeuvre designed to thwart the popularity of liberation theology and its ensuing

support for class struggle. It is significant that Peru is the birthplace of liberation theology, articulated in the writings of Father Gustavo Gutierrez. In the last two decades, liberation theology has spread throughout



South America. Hence the repression of Catholicism and the spate of killings of Catholic priests in Chile, El Salvador, Guatemala and pre-liberated Nicaragua. In Guatemala, for example, the Catholic church has been banned and replaced by an evangelical US sect (Maxwell, 1985: 19) whose doctrine, preaching submission and acceptance, is far more compatible with the genocide of the indigenous Indian population. The main difference between this and the message of the Pope to the Peruvian people is that he gave recognition to the injustice of racial inequality, claimed that the Campesinos have a right to self-determination, and then told them to surrender their arms and pray, not struggle!

The wearing of ponchos was banned when the Pope visited Ayacucho for fear of concealed weapons (*Time*, 18/2/85: 38). Ponchos have a symbolic association with peasant struggles in Latin America, as it is mostly poncho-wearing Indians who have fought them. They also mark the severe racial inequality in Peru, indeed the entire continent. Indians are grossly over-represented in the peasant class while the descendants of Spanish colonialists fill the ranks of the bourgeoisie (Bollinger, Lund, 1982). Therefore, the wearing of ponchos, precisely because of the struggle it epitomises, is viewed with suspicion and met with denigration and discrimination. It is perhaps telling that, after the 1973 military coup in Chile, the wearing of ponchos was prohibited, along with the use of traditional musical instruments such as the quena (flute) and the charango (guitar) [Marquez, 1983:81].

Trade union activity has been similarly circumscribed by repression and has recently been the focus of escalating violence. Industrial unrest permeates almost every facet of Peruvian production. Transport is the most notable, being subject to frequent and protracted strikes over the price of fuel and the level of wages. In March this year, striking white collar workers demonstrated in the Plaza de Armaz, Lima,

demanding wage increases to match spiralling inflation upwards of 500 percent per annum. Their protest was met in the usual manner by the presence of military tanks in the Plaza emitting tear gas, rubber bullets and firing water cannons, followed by the unleashing of baton-wielding, military-trained and licensed killers.

**"The elections are an attempt to legitimate the military's continued existence thwarting demands for a return to 'democracy' while maintaining a stable economy for predominantly US foreign investment ...."**

Riots over industrial issues are almost a daily sporting event in the cities and villages of Peru, except that the rules are unequal, the stakes are human lives and the game is class warfare. Many active trade unionists have either "disappeared", been jailed, or executed for subversion. The average wage for a semi-skilled worker is US\$6 per sixty or seventy hour working week. This pitiful wage entitles its recipients to a share in slum living conditions and a life plagued with inadequate food, water, clothing and medical treatment. Protests over the living conditions in the slums are frequent, and are met with harsh and violent repression, resulting in either death or jail for some of its participants.

More than a hint of authoritarian control of the peasants is evident to even the most ignorant of gringo observers. Every Peruvian must carry an identification card to be produced for every bureaucratic procedure, such as the purchasing of goods, the receipt of medical or building supplies and the purchasing of bus or rail tickets. Most peasants and workers are prohibited from travelling outside or between towns without prior permission and stating means and purpose of travel. Trains, trucks and buses are constantly checked for the transportation of guerrillas and/or armaments. For example, the road between Lima and Arequipa, the first major town in the southern Andes, spans only 1,000 km, yet boasts at least a dozen military check points. But the Sendero Luminoso continue to evade their repressors and would-be executors.

The people of Peru are struggling against the oppression of a US supported rightwing military government not dissimilar to the regimes in El Salvador, the Philippines, Guatemala, Honduras and Israel .... The point is, these people are fighting a war against imperialist capitalism maintained by an aggressive domestic military apparatus. Revolution in the Americas has been, and will be, successful. However, any naive optimism is ill-founded, given that the people's will to struggle will be met by the billions of dollars and the paid terrorists of international capital.

**Kerri Carrington is a Ph.D. student in sociology at Macquarie University.**

**REFERENCES**

Bamat, I., "Peru's Velasco Regime and Class Domination After 1968" in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 10, No. 2-3, 1983.

Bollinger, W., Lund, M., "Minority Oppression: Towards Analyses That Clarify and Strategies That Liberate" in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1982.

Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, Penguin, England, 1961.

Huizer, G., *Peasant Rebellion in Latin America*, Penguin, England, 1973.

P., "Fighting the Cocaine Wars" in *Time*, February 25, 1985.

Lloyd, P.C., *Classes, Crises and Coups*, Paladin, Great Britain, 1971.

A., "When Ponchos are Subversive" in *Index on Censorship*, Vol. 1, 1983.

Ostling, R., "Si to a Demanding Friend" in *Time*, February 11, 1985.

Ostling, R., "Evil is Never a Road to Good" in *Time*, February 18, 1985.


Phillip, G., "The Military Institution Revisited: Some Notes on Corporatism and Military Rule in Latin America" in *Latin American Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 2, 1980.

Quijano, A., "Imperialism and The Peasantry: The Current Situation in Peru" in *Latin American Perspectives*, Vol. 9, No. 3, 1982.

*Revolutionary Worker* No. 273 (Vol. 6, No. 21), September 21, 1984, "Free Meche".

Russel, G., "Taming the Liberation Theologians" in *Time*, February 4, 1985.

Sobel, I. A., *Latin America 1973*, Facts of File Inc., New York, 1974.



**Journal of Australian Political Economy.**  
A JOURNAL OF THE AUSTRALIAN POLITICAL ECONOMY MOVEMENT

REGIONAL COLLECTIVES

SPECIAL ISSUE APRIL 1985

**MELBOURNE**  
A P E M  
P.O. Box 112  
Parkville, Vic. 3066

**SYDNEY**  
A P E M  
Box 76,  
Wentworth Building,  
University of Sydney  
Sydney 2006

**CANBERRA**  
A P E M  
P.O. Box 1588  
Canberra City, ACT 2601

**ADELAIDE**  
A P E M  
P.O. Box 142,  
Rundle Street  
Adelaide, SA 5000

Subscription Rates:  
2 Yearly: \$18 (incl GST) \$20  
One Yearly: \$12 (incl GST) \$15  
Overseas: \$25

**FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS, POLITICS  
and DEREGULATION**

<p><i>Quiggen &amp; Robinson</i> Financial Deregulation since 1945</p> <p><i>Wright</i> Socialist Politics and Finance</p> <p><i>Ryan</i> Finance and Industry Restructuring</p> <p><i>Manning</i> Labour Process in Banking</p> <p><i>Nippard</i> Housing Finance Regulation: A Review of the Debate</p> <p><i>Conaldina</i> Intervention in Insurance: The Whilliam Experience</p> <p><i>McGill</i> Kieldor's Income Approach as a Response to Monetarism</p> <p><i>Gibson</i> Post-Keynesian Theories of Finance: A Review</p>	<p>Journal of Australian Political Economy aims to encourage the development of theoretical and empirical research on Australian capitalism. While stressing the importance of economic analysis, it is committed to challenge the conservative and narrow approach of mainstream economic theory. The journal seeks to stimulate broader discussions that take into account social and political programmes which will more adequately serve the needs of the labour movement and struggles for a just society.</p>
---	--