

# The New Peru

By JOSE CARLOS MARIATEGUI

THE Inca empire, cautiously estimated, contained a population of about ten million. The Spanish conquest, which was above all a butchery, made something of a dent in this number. Given the small number of Spaniards, they could in no other way than by terrorism have subjugated the natives; their cannons and horses became supernatural and fearful beings. In the colonial period the brutal extermination of the conquest was continued. The new political and economic organization established unlimited exploitation as the norm. Under the Spaniards the Inca mines, which had been worked in a modest and leisurely fashion, partly because the natives used gold and silver for ornamentation only, partly because they had no iron, became the scene of forced free labor, under conditions which greatly reduced the number of the conquered. It was not serfdom, as might have been the case had the Spaniards maintained the agricultural character of the nation; it was nearer slavery.

Because a few humane and civilizing voices were raised in protest before the King of Spain, the "Laws of Indies" were decreed, avowedly to protect the Indians. They were not to be parceled out as heretofore, and their old organization into "communities" was recognized. But as a matter of fact the Indians remained at the mercy of a greedy feudalism, which destroyed the Inca society and economy, without replacing it with another which might serve as vehicle to a progressive organization of production. The viceroys attacked the problem by importing Negro slaves, who were found suited to the climate and labor in the valleys and the hot plains of the coast, but ill-placed in the cold sierra region of the mines. The Negro slave reinforced Spanish domination, however, for in spite of the decreased number of natives the Spaniards were outnumbered and might well have felt uncertain among the Indians, who, though conquered, were still evidently hostile. The Negro became the domestic servant and took part in small industries; white and Negro mixed, giving rise to the peculiar coast type, friendly to the Spaniard and aloof toward the Indian.

Revolution and independence from Spain was not, it is generally realized, a native impulse. It was a movement participated in by, and for the benefit of, Creoles and even recently immigrated Spaniards; but it utilized the support of the native masses. Some Indians, such as Pumacahua, played important roles in it. The program of a revolution which postulated democracy should logically have included justice to the Indian. And, it is true, some of the first laws and decrees of the republic favored the interests of the natives. Distribution of lands was ordered, abolition of free labor, and other similar measures. But as the people at the head of the new government were the same ruling class as heretofore these decrees operated only on paper.

The landowning aristocracy retained intact its feudal grip on the soil and, therefore, on the Indian. All subsequent attempts to date have not lessened in the slightest the

power of this class, nor changed its definitely feudal character.

The viceroys seem less to blame than the republic. To Spain is due the original fall and misery of the Indians. But, in those inquisitorial days, there was a great Christian, Fray Bartolomé de las Casas, to defend the natives eloquently and effectively; no one during the republic has been so truly their friend. The colony was a medieval and foreign system, but the republic is formally a Peruvian and liberal government. It has duties and responsibilities which the colony had not. The republic should have bettered the condition of the Indian; instead, it has increased his poverty, aggravated his subjection, and deepened his misery.

The republic has meant the intrenchment of a ruling class which has gradually and systematically absorbed and possessed itself of the land. To a people whose tradition, whose very soul, is the land, this dispossession has meant material and moral bankruptcy. The land has always been the joy of the Indian; he feels that "life comes from the soil, and goes back to it"; he can maintain indifference to everything, except the loss of the land which his hands and his spirit occupy and make fertile. Peruvian feudalism has been greedier and harsher than Spanish. The Spanish overlord had, generally, some of the outlook and manners of a nobleman. The Creole landowner has all the defects of the plebeian and none of the virtues of an *hidalgo*.

The republic is, furthermore, traitor to its people, because under it the revindication of the Indian, its avowed cause, became the demagogical ammunition of certain chieftains. Nevertheless justice was decreed and guaranteed, and the Indian had theoretically no cause for protest. His desperate attempts to force the issue have always been given a military answer. All his rebellions, all his protests, have been muffled in blood. The highland silence guards the tragic secret of these answers.

In the sierra, chief home of the Indians, they live under a system of barbarous and omnipotent feudalism, of a form hardly less medieval because it exists in the twentieth century. Ownership of the land places in the hands of the landowners the fate of the Indians, who live in utter misery and ignorance. Agriculture is carried on in a primitive fashion. The other economic activity of the sierra, mining, is almost entirely in the hands of two large American companies. Here the Indians are paid salaries; but these salaries are the very minimum, the laborer has no guaranties to his life or health, and the labor laws covering accidents are disregarded. The *enganche* or draft system, which promises, in return for the laborer's contract, advantages which are not given, places the laborer absolutely at the mercy



of his employers. Yet so great is the misery of working on the land under the existing conditions that even the mines seem preferable.

Socialist ideas have strengthened a new and powerful movement for the revindication of the Indian. The new Peruvians know that progress in Peru is false, or is at least not Peruvian, so long as it does not include the Indian, and does not mean the well-being of the Peruvian masses, which are four-fifths Indian and peasant. This movement is expressed in the new Peruvian art and literature. There is a revaluation of native themes and forms, heretofore disdained by the official mind, which was colonial Spanish. The "Indianist" literature seems destined to play much the same role as the "mujik" literature of pre-Soviet Russia.

The Indians themselves begin to show a new consciousness. It is to be seen in the gradually developing articulation and inter-communication of Indian nuclei, separated until now by enormous geographical distances. This renewing bond dates from the Indian congresses held under the patronage of the government, but as these conferences

soon had revolutionary tendencies they were denatured and much of the representation made apochryphal. Nevertheless the Indians begin to urge official action. For the first time the government has been forced to recognize their point of view, and it has decreed palliative measures which do not adversely affect the interests of the landowners, and are, therefore, ineffectual.

For the first time, too, the Indian question, begged so frequently in the oratory of the ruling classes, has been faced and stated in economic and social terms, and identified above all with the agrarian problem. It is more and more evident that this problem is not an affair of humanitarians. It cannot be solved by philanthropy or charity. It must be a social issue. It must be worked out by the Indians themselves. For this reason the Indian congresses are significant. Indian efforts have always been regional. That is why they have been so easily defeated. Four million people, while they are disunited, cannot take a decisive course; but a nation of four million, conscious of itself and its number, has no need to doubt its future.

## Mexican Masses

By MARIANO AZUELA

*Eight years after the end of her turmoil Mexico has evolved a stirring national style. It took 400 years of misery and ten of death and chaos to make the new Mexico, the Mexico of monumental painters and muscular symphonic music. Now comes the literature, for the first time Mexican in body and soul; vividly in one novel which is the dramatic story of a bona fide guerrilla.*

*"Los de Abajo"\* is not, however, merely a story. It is a cross-section of the mass in revolution, marching, singing, drinking, looting, catapulting through canyons and tearing through fort walls with no articulate cause or purpose, but with a resistless urge; in rhythm and genesis, volcanic. The story is the story of all Mexican guerrillas: they fight, they win, they keep on fighting, they die. The theme, "Without knowing why, and why I don't know," is a refrain hummed endlessly between the teeth of the most important figure in the book, Demetrio Macías, a guerrilla of many ballads, in whose troop the author rode. Each scene and person are symbols of reality that was multiplied a hundred and a thousand times. And the whole is utterly Mexican.*

FROM PART I, CHAPTER 2

IT was still dark when Demetrio Macías began to climb down to the bottom of the canyon. The ridge of debris between the cliff, and the drop down thousands of meters in a single slice, was his trail. Climbing agilely and quickly, Demetrio was thinking: "Now the Federals will get on our track and they'll come on us like dogs. By luck they don't know the trails, passes, or escapes. Unless someone from Moyahua guides them, because in Limón, Santa Rosa, and the other little ranches of the sierra they're all our friends and would never give us up. . . . In Moyahua there's that cacique who chases me over these hills, and great joy he'd have seeing me strung from a telegraph post, with a tongue that long hanging." And he reached the

bottom of the canyon with the dawn. He threw himself among the rocks and slept.

The river swirled along singing, in tiny cascades; the little birds chirped in the giant cacti, the monorhythmic cicadas filled the mountain solitude with mystery. Demetrio awoke alarmed, waded the river, and started up the opposite face of the canyon. Like a driver ant he swarmed to the crown, his hands clawed to the rocks and brush, his feet wrapped on the gnarls of the trail. He scaled the crest as the sun poured on the mesa a golden lake. Toward the river stood great slabs of rock; knobs tufted like fantastic Negro heads; cacti, stiff-jointed fingers of a colossus; trees bowed to the bottom of the abyss. From the bare peaks and arid scrub, fresh St. John's roses glowed like white offerings to the orb which brushed its golden strands from rock to rock.

Demetrio stopped on the crest; he drew his left arm backwards, pulled at the horn on his shoulder, put it to his thick lips, three times swelled, his cheeks blowing. Three whistles answered the signal from beyond the front rank of peaks. In the distance came men, many men in disordered squads, out of a conical mound of cane and rotted straw, with naked breasts and legs, dark and polished as old bronze.

"They burned my house!" said he to their querying eyes. Anathema, threats, curses. Demetrio let them work it off; then he pulled a bottle from under his shirt, drank, wiped the neck of it with his hand, passed it to his neighbor. From mouth to mouth the bottle was emptied.

"God willing," said Demetrio, "tomorrow or maybe tonight we'll have a look at the faces of those Federals. What do you say, boys, shall we teach them these trails?"

The half-nude men jumped, howled loudly and full of glee. Then they resumed the abuse and the curses.

"We don't know how many of them there are," said Demetrio, searching their faces.

\*"Los de Abajo," By Mariano Azuela. Madrid: Espasa Calpe.

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