

PCP Document:

On the Shining Path of Mariátegui



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Following are excerpts from the pamphlet Retomemos a Mariátegui y Reconstruyamos Su Partido (Reclaim Mariátegui and Rebuild His Party), published in 1975 by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP). José Carlos Mariátegui founded the PCP in 1928. He died in 1930, at age 35, following years of crippling illness. Shortly before his death he led the party in affiliating with the Third International of Lenin and Stalin. During the decades that followed, Mariátegui's teachings, which had formed the basis of the party's programme, were set aside, as was the revolutionary struggle itself to an increasing degree.

But starting in the mid-1960s, with the influence of Mao Tsetung, the polemics he led with the Soviet revisionists and the Cultural Revolution in China, as well as the revolutionary upsurges sweeping Peru and the world, the revolutionary communists in the PCP at that time took up the study of Mariátegui and the goal of reconstructing the party along revolutionary lines. This meant settling the question of the political and ideological line of the party, the basic line for the revolution in Peru, its targets and goals, and on that basis the appraisal of the present political situation in Peru and the tasks of revolutionaries.

In 1968 Peru came under the rule of a self-proclaimed "revolutionary" military junta hailed by the USSR, Cuba and most of the Peruvian Left as a progressive force. The PCP condemned the regime as an attempt to continue imperialist and feudal domination in Peru in a new form, labelling it "social-corporatist" (socialist in words, fascist in its attempts to form mass organisations of all the various sectors of the people under the hegemony and in the interests of the ruling classes, as well as in its outright attacks on real mass struggles). Mariátegui's reputation as a writer and political leader, acknowledged even by the bourgeoisie which had hounded him during his lifetime, had given his name tremendous prestige in Peru. The question of the validity and content of his line concentrated many of the most burning questions facing the revolutionary movement at that juncture. Some former revolutionaries and others justified their collaboration with the military regime by claiming that Mariátegui's analysis was brilliant but outmoded; others, who claimed to be followers of Mariátegui, tried to hide and revise the Marxist content of his work—and tried to justify their own attacks on Marxism as being in the tradition of Mariátegui.

For the revolutionary communists, reclaiming Mariátegui meant reclaiming his analysis and programme as a specific application of Marxism to Peru, made in the light of Mariátegui's study of (and active participation in) the international communist movement of his time.

Rebuilding the PCP took 15 years, beginning with the overthrow of the revisionist head of the PCP in 1964 and continuing through subsequent line struggles, divisions and reorganisation under the leadership of Comrade Gonzalo. The completion of this process was marked by a 1979 Central Committee meeting that approved the launching of the armed struggle, which began a year later and continues to advance.

This pamphlet played an important role in clarifying the political and ideological line and winning over forces. We are reprinting these selections principally to give an understanding of the PCP's programme for the Peruvian revolution, as well as to provide an introduction to Mariátegui's writings, which form an important part of the theoretical basis for the people's war now lighting up the sky above Peru. Mariátegui's best-known work, Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality, was published in Spanish, English, French and other languages; most of the rest of his extensive writings have not been translated from the Spanish and are not readily available outside of Peru. The themes taken up in these writings are very germane to the discussion in the international movement today about the character of the countries dominated by imperialism and the nature and tasks of the revolution in these countries.

The other chapters in this pamphlet discuss Mariátegui's work in the context of Marxism-Leninism and its further development by Mao Tsetung, as well as other specific questions such as Mariátegui's line on the united front, the central importance of the communist party in revolution, military line, mass line and so on.

What does it mean to say that Mariátegui established the general line for the Peruvian revolution—specifically, that he formulated the general laws of the class struggle in Peru and that he established the road that revolution must follow in our country? It means that these things are still valid, that we must return to Mariátegui's road in order to carry out the revolutionary transformation of our society under the leadership of the working class, through its organised vanguard, because the working class is the only one that can fulfill that leading role.

Let's analyse this question which is as weighty as it is contested, in open and disguised ways; the destiny of our country depends on the position we take on this question.

The Character of Peruvian Society

Let's start with the words of the founder of the Communist Party himself:

“Capitalism is developing in a semi-feudal country like ours after the stage of monopolies and imperialism has already been reached, when all the liberal ideology corresponding to the stage of free enterprise has lost its validity. Imperialism will not allow any of these semi-colonial peoples it exploits as markets for its capital and commodities and as sources of raw materials to take up an economic programme of nationalisation and industrialisation; it forces them

to specialise, restricts them to monoculture (in Peru, oil, copper and sugar), so that they suffer a permanent crisis in terms of manufactured articles, a crisis which arises from this rigid determination of national production by the capitalist world market.’’

These sentences from Point Three of the party’s programme establish the semi-feudal and semi-colonial nature of our society. The first of these, semi-feudalism, Mariátegui established, “cannot be correctly sought in the persistence of feudal political or juridical institutions or forms. Formally, Peru is a republic, a bourgeois-democratic state. Feudalism or semi-feudalism survives in the structure of our agrarian economy.’’ Today, despite the years gone by, that structure is still where one must look, in the old and newly developing feudal-rooted forms of unpaid labour, of family obligations and deferred wages, personal loans, the maintenance and fusion of the old landed estates and the predominance of *gamonalismo* [the authority of the landlord—*AWTW*], only now these things are covered up in new conditions and high-flown words. This appraisal of semi-feudalism which was under such strong attack in years past has now become an accepted and obvious truth, because the class struggle itself, the peasant explosions we’ve seen so often since the 1960s, along with the agrarian measures and counterrevolutionary actions, show the semi-feudal basis of Peruvian society.

As for semi-colonialism, Mariátegui held that a country can be politically independent while its economy continues to be controlled by imperialism. Furthermore, he correctly maintained that the countries of South America, including ours, “are politically independent but economically colonies.’’ This is still the situation as it continues to develop; both directly and indirectly our economy is undergoing increasing and diversified penetration by imperialism and [Soviet—*AWTW*] social-imperialism. This appraisal of semi-colonialism was challenged not long ago, with the unsubstantiated assertion that Peru has become a colony; that’s what is meant when the country is classified as a “neocolony.’’ This assertion even goes so far as to argue that Peru is a “neocolony with a bourgeois reformist government.’’

The above paragraph cited from Mariátegui puts forward that capitalism is developing in Peru, but that it is a subjugated capitalism, controlled mainly by U.S. imperialism; not a capitalism which would allow a national economy and independent industrialisation, but on the contrary a capitalism which functions for the sake of the imperialist metropole which does not permit a real national economy which would serve our nation, nor an independent industrialisation, so that to develop these things means first shattering imperialist domination. Thus Mariátegui does not deny capitalist development in our country. He specifies exactly what kind of capitalism we have, the capitalism of a semi-feudal nation in the era of monopolies and political reaction, a capitalism whose very development strengthens our semi-colonial subjugation, a capitalism which gives rise to a comprador bourgeoisie tied to U.S. imperialism. In short, what Mao Tsetung called bureaucrat capitalism.

This is Mariátegui’s understanding of Peruvian society, an understanding which is still valid and applicable. Subsequent studies and investigations have only confirmed and more clearly defined our founder’s correct theses.

The Two Stages of the Peruvian Revolution

On the basis of the country’s semi-feudal and semi-colonial conditions,



The bourgeoisie tells the artist to flatter and praise its own bad taste with his art.

— José Carlos Mariátegui

Mariátegui analysed the forces for revolution, establishing that there are two basic classes, the proletariat and the peasantry. While the latter, since it is the majority and suffers the weight of semi-feudalism, is the main force, the former, the working class, is the leading class. Furthermore, he underlined that it is only with the appearance of the proletariat that the peasants could fulfill their role: “Only the doctrine of socialism can give a modern and constructive content to the cause of the Indian, which viewed in its correct social and economic context and raised to the plane of a creative and realistic political line, can succeed because it enjoys the support and discipline of a class just being born in our historic process, the proletariat.”

Joined together with the peasantry and the proletariat there is the petit bourgeoisie, which although “it has always played a secondary and confused role in Peru,” under the weight of foreign domination “seems destined to take up a revolutionary nationalist attitude to the degree that it is successfully organised and guided.” These are the motive forces which under certain circumstances and conditions are joined by the national bourgeoisie that Mariátegui named “the bourgeois left.” These four classes are united against the targets of the revolution: semi-feudalism and imperialist domination.

These two well-known paragraphs from the programme of the Communist Party, edited by its founder himself, define the two stages of the Peruvian revolution and specify their character:

“The country’s economy can only be emancipated through the actions of the proletarian masses, in solidarity with the worldwide anti-imperialist struggle. Only proletarian action can promote and later carry through the tasks of the bourgeois democratic revolution which the bourgeois regime is incapable of carrying out and completing.”

“With the completion of its bourgeois-democratic stage, the revolution becomes proletarian revolution, in terms of its objectives and doctrine. The proletariat’s party, trained for the struggle to exercise political power and carry out its own programme, in this stage carries out the tasks of organising and defending the socialist order.”

This, masterfully condensed, is the problem of the Peruvian revolution: the national-democratic or bourgeois-democratic revolution of a new type, as Mao Tsetung said, and the proletarian revolution. Two stages, the first of which we have been undergoing since 1928 but which still hasn’t been completed or crowned with victory, and the future, proletarian revolution; two uninterrupted stages of a single revolutionary process whose character and content as distinct stages cannot be confused. Through wide debates and struggles this great thesis by Mariátegui has become a fundamental truth in the Marxist understanding of the laws of our revolution.

But if this is fundamental, even more so is that the working class and only the working class, through its party, is capable of leading the national-democratic revolution and furthermore, that only through its preparation and organisation in the first stage is the proletariat capable of carrying out the second, the proletarian revolution. Therefore if the working class does not lead the national-democratic revolution, then in no way can it achieve nor much less build socialism. This is the substantive question today, because the counterrevolution and social-corporativism deny this great truth and claim that in our country the Armed Forces are carrying out the first stage of the revolution and even

claim that they are laying the basis for socialism. This key question is a dividing line between revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries. The former, along with Marxism and Mariátegui, hold that the proletariat and only the proletariat "can promote and later carry through the tasks of the bourgeois-democratic revolution which the bourgeois regime is incapable of carrying out and completing." This is our position, and upholding it we should fight against the counterrevolutionary theses, pointing the spearhead against social-corporatist revisionism, which negates Mariátegui and which, as a detachment of social-imperialism in our country, serves only to further social-imperialism's collusion and contention with the Yankee superpower for world domination.

The Anti-feudal Struggle

The programme for the land is the most basic; in short, it is the question of feudalism with its two elements, feudal estate and serfdom. Thus, as Mariátegui said, Peru's agrarian question is the destruction of feudalism whose relations stain all of our society from top to bottom, from the base to the superstructure. The motor of the peasant struggles has been and continues to be the question of the land, and the fact that the three agrarian laws of the 1960s have not destroyed feudalism's foundations is clearly seen in the peasant struggles of today.

Analysing the land question, the party's founder underlined the struggle between the community [traditional Indian landholding in common—*AWTW*] and the feudal estate, emphasising that for hundreds of years these communities had enabled the peasant masses to resist the usurping assaults of the feudal landlords, and that they contain within them living seeds which will serve future socialist development. Likewise, reviewing the system of agrarian labour, he underlined the existence of feudal relations of exploitation behind the apparent capitalist modes. These are not questions of the past, but of the present, which we should scrutinise to uncover the semi-feudal essence which is hidden behind the seeming and much-touted "destruction of feudalism" through the so-called agrarian reform.

Regarding the struggles of the Peruvian peasantry and the Latin American peasantry as well, Mariátegui showed that their banner is "land to the tiller, expropriation without payment," and that to mobilise for this means "arming the workers and peasants to win and defend their demands." Thus, feudalism must be destroyed by confiscating the land and only the armed workers and peasants can do it; there is no other way to smash feudalism, to destroy the landed estates and abolish serfdom. It must be kept in mind that Peru has had laws governing agrarian relations and abolishing serfdom for more than 150 years, and their result has been to maintain the underlying feudalism.

Thus the anti-feudal struggle is the motor of the class struggle in the countryside and the very basis of our democratic-national revolution.

The Anti-imperialist Struggle

Like the other nations of Latin America, ours is a nation in formation. "It is being built upon the layers of dead Indians deposited by Western civilisation." This being the case, "the Indian question is the question of four million Peruvians. It is the question of three-quarters of Peru's population. It is a question of the majority. It is the question of our nationality," Mariátegui analysed. And he added, "There can be no really national policy which disregards the Indian; it can't ignore the Indian. The Indian is the cement of our emerging nationality. Oppression makes the Indian the enemy of civility. In practice, it completely denies that the Indian can be a progressive element. Those who im-

poverish and degrade the Indian impoverish and degrade the nation... Without the Indian there is no such thing as a Peruvian nationality. This truth should be grasped, above all, by those whose ideology is merely bourgeois-democratic liberalism and nationalism.”

Thus the Indian question is the question of the vast majority of the people who have been disregarded by the Peruvian state, especially the Republic, for over 150 years. It is the question of acting against the interests of four-fifths of the population, as our founder said, a question of acting in the interests of the imperialist metropolises which have dominated us one after another. Going deeply into this question, Mariátegui established that the problem of the Indian is the problem of the land; thus, since the national question is based on the land question these two can't be separated from each other. This opinion is strictly in accord with the principles of Marxism and has been proved by the practice of the class struggle of our own masses; it is clearly shown by the character of our revolution.

On this basis the founder of our Communist Party analysed the classes and the anti-imperialist struggle in our country and in Latin America in general. His starting point was that the Latin American bourgeoisies “feel sufficiently entrenched in power that they don't have to worry about national sovereignty,” and are bound and linked to imperialist interests, adding, “As long as imperialist policy... doesn't find itself forced to resort to armed intervention, to military occupation, it can count without question on the collaboration of the bourgeoisies.” Thus he clarified the relationship between the Peruvian “mercantile bourgeoisie” and imperialism. Dealing with the question of the united front in our country, Mariátegui put forward the possibility of uniting “with the bourgeois liberal left willing to really struggle against feudalism's remains and against imperialist penetration,” defining the position of what today we call the national bourgeoisie; furthermore he specified, as we've seen, that with increasing foreign domination the petit bourgeoisie would develop “a revolutionary nationalist attitude.”

But on the other hand he attacked those who, like the *apristas* [the social-democratic American Popular Revolutionary Alliance Party which in Mariátegui's time claimed to be anti-imperialist as well as anti-communist; today it is a major pro-U.S. bourgeois political party in Peru—*AWTTW*] who elevated anti-imperialism “to the level of a programme, a political stand, a movement sufficient unto itself which somehow would lead spontaneously, on what basis nobody knows, to socialism, to social revolution.” He unmasked the aprista thesis that “we are leftists (or socialists) because we are anti-imperialists.” Taking into account the fact that only the proletariat, united with the peasantry, can lead a consistent anti-imperialism, he pointed out, “For us, anti-imperialism can't and doesn't constitute in and of itself a political programme, a mass movement fit to take power,” and, finishing off the argument, he concluded, “We are anti-imperialists because we are socialists, because we are revolutionaries, because we oppose capitalism with socialism, two antagonistic systems one of which is destined to succeed the other, because in the struggle against foreign imperialisms we are fulfilling our duty of solidarity with the revolutionary masses” of the world. ■