

# Big Strides in Peruvian Revolution Flames Leap to Puno

Reports from Peru indicate that the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) has made good its immediate stated aim of establishing a series of guerrilla fronts extending the length of the country along its mountain spine from Cajamarca in the North to Puno in the South, as well as in the cities of the coastal plains in the West and in the jungle highlands to the East.

In the guerrilla fronts in the countryside, armed revolutionary actions during 1985 began to involve more and more guerrilla ambushes of army units, including of army vehicles. For the first few years of the war launched in 1980 they had centred on attacks on police outposts and clashes with police units. On 4 March, for example, a mounted military patrol in Ayamonte, in the department of Ayacucho, was "surprised," according to government reports, and the officers killed. The ability of the guerrillas to take such offensive actions directly against the armed forces shows some qualitative increase in their military strength, even within this period when the revolution is still on the strategic defense vis-a-vis the enemy and still faces an arduous process of building up strength through protracted people's war.

The PCP had announced, in mid-1984, the beginning of a campaign called "Begin the Great Leap," to "seize power piece by piece" in the countryside along the main axes of the guerrilla struggle and develop revolutionary bases areas. In these areas the PCP leads the peasants and organises them into various revolutionary mass organisations, above all the revolutionary armed forces, to smash the old feudal landlord and governmental political power and

replace it with revolutionary People's Committees made up of representatives of the masses themselves. Based on the strength of the revolutionary armed forces, these People's Committees are embryonic forms of a new revolutionary state power which is to defend the land the peasants have seized from the landlords and state authorities. As the main, mobile forces of the People's Guerrilla Army move from village to village, mobilising the peasants to attack semi-feudal ownership of the land and overthrow the old political power, Party units among its ranks also carry out agitation, propaganda and organisational work and bring new peasants into the PGA. They leave behind Party units whose task is to help establish and consolidate the new People's Committees; organise revolutionary mass organisations of women, youth, peasants and workers whose elected representatives (along with representatives of the small merchants and other rural petit bourgeoisie) choose the members of the People's Committees; form village militias and locally-based units of the PGA; and recruit and train the most advanced as Party members. In this way, by relying on the masses of peasants themselves, by arousing, organising and training them, guerrilla zones where the enemy has political power but guerrillas can launch frequent attacks, are transformed into base areas, where the revolutionary classes hold power.

Although these revolutionary base areas are apparently not even relatively consolidated at this point, they are emerging in wide areas of the country. The PCP calls such base areas "the essence of people's

war."

Various forms of revolutionary political power have emerged: the People's Committees themselves in areas where the reaction has been overthrown and driven out; people's power reorganising committees in areas where the government had been able to come in and overthrow the People's Committees but where the guerrillas are now reestablishing revolutionary power; clandestine People's Committees in areas where the reaction has set up authorities who in reality cannot rule for the reaction; and people's power organising committees in areas where the old political and feudal authorities have been chased out but where the enemy armed forces still operate. These various forms reflect the twists and turns the development of the revolutionary base areas has taken.

In addition to the guerrilla fronts in the central mountains, others have begun to develop in the southwestern coastal region of Arequipa and in the eastern jungle highlands —the "eyebrows of the jungle" — along the Huallaga river. In these jungle highland areas where coca leaves are a main crop, the peasants find themselves fighting against landlords who steal their land and drug dealers who steal their crops, on the one hand, and on the other against the UMOPAR, the U.S. "drug police" who often cooperate with drug dealers but always work to terrorise the peasants.

There have also been reports that indicate that the PCP has strengthened its ties with the miners, who form an important part of Peru's industrial working class. The Minister of Mines and Energy claim-

ed that the PCP had led workers in armed clashes during a strike of 17,000 workers at the state-owned Centromin mines in the department of Pasco in March. Three thousand strikers along with their wives and children set off on a five-day "sacrifice march" across the mountains to dramatise and win support for their demands for higher salaries.

"Sendero Luminoso made a strategic mistake," Peru's President Alan García declared in February, going on to affirm that the PCP had become entrenched in five central and northern mountain departments. "If they had expanded into the 'Andean Trapeze'" — the departments in the south-central and southern Andes — "we would have had much bigger and more serious problems. Perhaps the subversion would have won overwhelming victory.... Now it's too late."

García gave this gratuitous advice at a time when the PCP was carrying out major attacks across Peru. Apparently they were not confined to the central mountain region. In fact, even as he spoke a bomb blew up a nearby bank, disrupting García's attempts to address an outdoor celebration of his party's founding in Trujillo, a coastal city in northern Peru long considered his party's main stronghold. Two other party offices and six embassies were hit in Lima at the same time. A state of emergency García had been forced to call and then extend in Lima had obligated his party to hold the rally in Trujillo in the first place. Tanks enforced a 1 A.M. to 5 A.M. curfew in the capital after a series of attacks on government buildings. During the three months following the imposition of this curfew in February, the military detained 38,111 people and shot four of them dead in the course of their night-time patrols.

A few days after García's boast, a mass peasant uprising under PCP leadership began exactly where García had declared it impossible — in the southern department of Puno. This Belgium-sized department high in the Andes (3,600 meters) borders Lake Titicacq, Bolivia and Chile. It has an important history of peasant struggles, especially in the 1960s. The self-styled "revolutionary"

military regime which seized power in the 1960s instituted a "land reform" which consisted of turning over some of the biggest feudal estates and their extensive herds of cattle to state-run "cooperatives" owned by a handful of rich peasants and often administered by the same feudal authorities as before — or their children — while the vast majority of peasants remained completely or virtually landless. These "co-ops" have been an important social base for the various reformist and revisionist parties which have dominated political life in the area until recently.

There are press reports of seven major guerrilla-led attacks on Puno co-ops in February and March. The PCP reportedly pledged to "turn Puno into another Ayacucho," referring to the department that has been the revolution's main stronghold until now. Puno's peasants are taking up arms and seizing land on a grand scale. In one case poor peasants spontaneously attacked and burned down the administration buildings of a big "co-op" and took the land. In another case, after PGA guerrillas attacked and burned down an estate and then marched on, when the sun rose the next morning they found peasants from a neighboring village waiting for them atop a mountain pass to ask the guerrillas to come to their village too. If the guerrillas don't come to a village, peasants anxiously ask, "Where are the comrades?"

After a district governor was shot in February, other local officials began resigning. Along with big merchants they began leaving the department altogether, not only in the countryside but even in Azangaro, the biggest town in the central region of the department, where the PCP reportedly posted a list of 15 top officials and merchants who were warned to leave town immediately under threat of death. Press reports quote police officials complaining that their forces are small and scattered in 40 police outposts across the department. So far the Army has not been sent into Puno, although the matter is currently being considered, because among other reasons such a move would make it more difficult for the

military to concentrate its forces as it has so far in the central mountain regions and, above all, in Ayacucho. The entry of the military into Puno would also aggravate a host of political contradictions.

This scene in Puno — devastating attacks on the landlords and police, the driving out of old authority, the arousal of the peasants on a mass scale and their organisation into the revolutionary armed forces — is how revolutionary political power first began to emerge in Ayacucho, six years ago. While the 1982 entry of the regular armed forces into the fray and the subsequent jump in the reaction's quantity and quality of firepower was able to inflict some losses on the revolution, these recent events show that the revolution has been able to take deep hold in other parts of the country even while retaking important areas previously retaken by the government.

Peru is currently undergoing a mass upsurge on many fronts, including many different rural areas and sections of the peasantry, coastal farmworkers in the large-scale sugar cane plantations who recently seized the country's main coastal North-South highway, and urban workers and some professional sectors who've waged a number of major strikes and marches. This is the situation in which the PCP is striving to strengthen the "three magic weapons" of the revolution: the party, the revolutionary army, and the new revolutionary forms of the joint political power of the revolutionary classes.

The "Andean trapeze" is a key to Peru's future because of the millions of peasants who live there. García's government has given it a great deal of importance in speeches, in plans to allocate funds for clinics, dams and other sugar-coated bullets to win over or neutralise some strata of the peasants there, and in promises to carry out a real agrarian reform this time. So far, his government hasn't given out an inch of land while the peasants have been seizing it themselves, taking over estates thousands of hectares in extension and establishing revolutionary political power. □