



Peru: Pope Fails to Halt Revolutionary Tide

Pope John Paul II made his three days of appearances in Peru the culmination of his recent 12-day South American tour. Letting the vestments of purely spiritual concern drop, he shamelessly exposed his political aims. His work was not widely judged a success.

In fact it turned out that the highlight of his tour was the total blackout of the capital city of Lima on February 4th that greeted his arrival. The dynamite blasts knocking out an electric power plant 45

kilometres north of Lima set the scene for the sky to be lit up by a giant flaming hammer and sickle on the Cerro San Cristobal which dominates the Lima skyline. The press labeled this an obscene gesture directed at the Pope, but really it was a gesture directed at the people of Peru and the world, a sign of hope that there is an alternative to all that the Pope's sordid and bloodthirsty crusade represented.

The day before, in what can only be considered to have been a provocation, the Pope had made his

first Peruvian appearance in the city of Ayacucho, capital of the department where the armed struggle under the leadership of the Communist Party of Peru (PCP) first began in 1980 and still a kind of capital of the revolution against which his speech was directed.

"I want to urgently address those men who have put their faith in the armed struggle," the Pope said, "those who have let themselves be fooled by false ideologies so much that they think that terror and aggressiveness, by exacerbating

already lamentable social tensions and forcing a supreme confrontation, can lead to a better world." Then, his voice trembling and his finger waving up and down, he continued, "To you I want to say that good can never come from evil. You cannot continue destroying the lives of your brothers. You cannot continue sowing panic among mothers, wives and daughters. You cannot continue intimidating old people...In the name of God, change roads," he brayed to the workers and peasants (including many mothers, wives and daughters) who've taken up arms, calling on them to "take the road of reconciliation and peace". At the same time he offered his appreciation to "the authorities and those responsible for public order" whose work "becomes supremely delicate in the present circumstances and is even thankless and not understood."

The military preparations for this Papal visit matched the calibre of his declarations themselves and made it clear where *his* faith lay. The authorities spared no measure of intimidation and terror, from mass "preventative" roundups of thousands of people—on top of their routine mass murder—to banning the wearing of traditional Indian hats and cloaks, which they claimed could be used to hide weapons. The Pope never left the tarmac of the Ayacucho airport, located on a high plateau, where he spoke from behind rows of barbed wire and sandbag barricades, 4000 military personnel and tanks, with an umbrella of helicopters overhead. Even so, he cut his scheduled hour-long visit short by twenty minutes; the main point was that he had come at all, and had put his prestige and that of his God on the line against the revolution, and for that a few words were sufficient.

One of the favorite charges reactionaries level at the PCP is that it is "messianic" or "fanatical." Now they send a true religious fanatic, a man who calls himself a personal representative of the Messiah on earth, to demand that the oppressed rest content with this world for the sake of some other, and lay down their arms and cease striving to bring about material changes by material

means. This is the man they send to preach not just faith in general, but specifically faith in Peru's generals and colonels and death-squad detectives and torturers and the whole imperialist world order of which they are personal representatives and servants.

It is the Pope and certainly not the revolutionaries who has tried to make religion a basic dividing line between those who may be allowed to live and those who must be exterminated. The fact that many devout Catholics support the revolutionary armed struggle is part of the reason why the Pope was sent in the first place. The many names of teenage members of the Catholic Youth organisation on a recently published list of government death-squad victims also testify to this. It is interesting to note that many estimates put the number of people who were rounded up for the Pope's counter-revolutionary political rally in Ayacucho at less than the 30,000 who took part there in the 1982 revolutionary funeral of PCP member Edith Lagos, just before armed forces occupation made such public manifestations impossible. Until then, this city was most known for its 35 churches and its piety. Now it has become the headquarters of the armed forces "Political-Military Command" that runs the so-called "Emergency Zone," and it is a political bastion of the revolutionary war to liberate Peru from imperialism, feudalism and all the obscurantism and superstition that rest upon and perpetuate this suffering that so many in Ayacucho have risen up against.

A Sign is Given in Lima

The 45-minute blackout of Lima came minutes after the Pope touched down, just as his caravan of limousines and armoured vehicles was leaving the Lima airport for the Nunciature (Vatican embassy) where he was due to speak. According to news reports, the whole cortege was seized by panic and set their sirens to wailing as the hill above them was lit up by the enormous hammer and sickle made up of rows of hundreds of flammable-filled milk containers. Considering that 50,000 police and armed forces had

been deployed in the capital that day to insure that nothing like this happened, and that this particular hill on the city's edge has repeatedly been the scene of such blazing, defiant emblems, the success of this spectacular action may well have seemed to the Pope to be an unwelcome miracle.

The next morning, the Pope took the offensive again, visiting Villa El Salvador, a shantytown with 300,000 inhabitants on the southern outskirts of Lima which the Spanish daily *El País* describes as "very dominated by the Shining Path guerrillas." During the night the Army had taken over the Villa El Salvador and another shantytown, San Martín de Porres, also known as a revolutionary stronghold, carrying out house-to-house searches and making arrests. Villa El Salvador is just like dozens of others of what the authorities cynically call "pueblos jóvenes" ("young towns") that surround the capital, as if time could be expected to cure their problems.

Villa El Salvador is not young. It arose 25 years ago when peasants sick of starvation and oppression in the mountains began pouring into the city, where they seized state lands and began putting up shacks which have come to have an air of permanence. One indication of how much conditions have worsened in the last few years in Peru is that for many in the shantytowns their traditional potatoes have been replaced by meals of "nicovita"—bird feed. As the saying goes, only foreigners can afford Peruvian food anymore.

In a slightly more conciliatory speech than the fire and brimstone he'd breathed in Ayacucho, the Pope urged the people of Villa El Salvador to "never cease denouncing injustice," while warning against "seductive ideologies and alternatives which promise violent solutions." Informed sources commented that the intended target of this Papal warning was not so much those already active in the cause of the armed struggle—of whom there are plenty in Villa El Salvador—but the numerous Christian "grass-roots community activists" in the shantytown who are not enlisting as government agents sufficiently to suit the Pope.

During his Peruvian visit the Pope issued an ultimatum to local "liberation theologists" he accused of "meddling in politics instead of revealing Christ to the world." The leading representative of this current, Gustavo Gutierrez, had said that while he condemned violent revolution as unacceptable, it had to be recognised that Peru's Indians live in "subhuman conditions." Apparently the Pope found even this timid statement completely unacceptable in light of the stakes in today's world.

The Pope's political message in Peru and especially his speech in Ayacucho was so explicitly in favour of the authorities and the status quo and so devoid of even the slightest pretense of even-handedness or the rhetoric about social justice that has marked many of his other appearances that even a number of foreign journalists present were surprised.

Among others, a reporter for the Spanish state television network TVE remarked that she found it strange that the Pope had only condemned the violence he attributed to the guerrillas without mentioning those killed by the police and armed forces. This reporter's on-the-air comment itself became a major incident when the Peruvian government lodged an official diplomatic protest against it. The Spanish government responded by offering Peru's offended President Belaunde TV time to give his own version of the Pope's visit. The reporter herself was denounced in the Spanish parliament by a deputy who declared that once her remarks had been made, nothing "could patch up the harm already done."

Amnesty International Report

The January 1985 Amnesty International report on Peru gives a clear picture of what the Pope blessed. For the Pope, any form or quantity of intimidation, torture, rape, aerial bombardment of villages or mass indiscriminate executions are just fine as long as it is the rulers of the West bloc and their stooges in the countries they dominate that are carrying them out, while the masses of people are forbidden to take up arms or "consider violent solutions."

The Amnesty International Report lists, by name, age and occupation, 1005 people who "disappeared" after being taken into custody by the police, armed forces and government-directed paramilitary forces in the 13 provinces under military rule from December 1982 to October 1984. (The report does not discuss anything that happened anywhere else in the country, including the three provinces around Tingo Maria—in the mountain fringes of the jungle to the north—which were also declared an emergency zone and placed under military rule in mid-1984.) The biggest single group are those listed as "students," which includes teenagers 14 years old and up, reflecting who have been among the most revolutionary elements. Most of the rest are described as "farmers" or "labourers," as well as a great many teachers. Generally they were all taken away at night, after curfew when only military patrols are allowed to be about.

Because of Amnesty International's efforts to stick to "respectable" evidence, it lists only those whose disappearance has been formally reported either to the government or to AI, either directly or through a Catholic Church commission. Since many people ended up on Amnesty International's list of "disappeared" after they themselves dared to complain or inquire to the authorities about the fate of others, it's easy to see why this list is incomplete. The PCP puts the number of people "disappeared" this way in the central emergency zone at closer to 5000. This report also does not take up the approximately 1000 cases of people "legally" imprisoned.

Nevertheless, the report cites conclusive evidence that these government-organised "disappearances" are the source of the 14 buried heaps of mangled bodies discovered during the last year which the government has tried to attribute to mass killings by the guerrillas.

The government does not actually intend to keep the atrocities committed by the armed forces a secret; after all, the purpose of these actions is to sow terror and that requires that those who are the object of this ter-

ror, the masses of people, especially in the countryside, know what the government is doing. What the government's false reports are intended to do is to sow confusion as well, especially abroad, and in this they have had the full cooperation of the international imperialist press whose vague criticisms of the armed forces are "balanced" with similar accusations against the revolutionary forces.

The Amnesty International report, despite its shortcomings, concludes that this "balanced" picture is false. "In the majority of the cases of political homicide occurring in the Emergency Zone, presumably perpetrated by government forces," the report states, "the bodies of the victims were found naked, with marks of torture, and with a single bullet wound in the head. In many cases the bodies of the victims were found blindfolded and hands tied behind their back. It was impossible to identify many of the victims; their clothing had been destroyed, their faces mutilated and the bodies thrown far from where they had been arrested." The report states Amnesty International has received no reports of such actions committed by the guerrillas. Then the report goes on to discuss the revolutionary execution of local despots and their notorious henchmen. Even Amnesty International, despite entrenched bourgeois prejudices which lead it to call for the punishment of such violations of Peru's Constitution, notes that this revolutionary justice is almost always public, "frequently before the members of the community who have met especially to witness it, and the victims were people well known to the rest of the community." As the PCP points out, without removing the weight of local feudal authorities and government representatives (usually one and the same persons), those they oppress cannot be free to exercise their own political power. Most such notorious reactionaries and bullies flee the countryside when the revolution gains too much force in their villages.

The report examines case after case in which massacres reported by the authorities as having been committed by the guerrillas turned out to

have been committed by the government. It cites evidence that in addition to those who have been made to "disappear," a great many of those reported by the government as guerrillas killed in combat were also simply murdered. In short, the report leads to the inescapable conclusion that the terrorist murders committed by the authorities, aimed at separating the masses of people from the active guerrillas by a river of blood, account for the overwhelming majority of deaths which the authorities attribute to what they've come to call a "dirty war." Even the Amnesty International report reflects to a large degree the fact that what is going on in Peru is not a "dirty war," an affair in which everything is lamentable; it is a dirty counterrevolutionary war on the part of the government and its backers against a just revolutionary war carried out by the poorest and most oppressed under the leadership of a genuine communist party whose goal is to advance the liberation of all mankind.

Just two weeks before the Pope's visit another mass grave with 29 bodies—naked, tied and riddled with machinegun bullets—was discovered by workers near the village of Paraje Maynay, near the town of Huanta, where the Marines are headquartered. It is not far from where another mass grave with parts of 50 to 90 bodies was uncovered in 1984, a case detailed in the AI report. Nevertheless the visit of the UN Human Rights Commission to investigate "the situation generated by the violence in the country" which had been scheduled to take place on the eve of the Pope's visit was suddenly cancelled at the last minute without explanation.

Blessings and Guns

Also on the eve of the Pope's visit the U.S. State Department announced that the Reagan administration intended to double U.S. military aid to the Peruvian government—despite the fact that Peru, six months behind in interest payments on its \$13 billion debt, is closer to financial collapse than any other major country in Latin America. The amount involved in open military aid—\$4 million in

1983, \$9 million in 1984 and now jumping to \$20 million in 1985—would make Peru the biggest recipient of open "legal" U.S. military aid in South America, but the real amount going to the Peruvian government is already far greater. (For instance, the U.S. gave Peru an additional \$30 million for "drug eradication" programs involving training and arming police—who are well known to be the kingpins of the narcotics trade.) There has also been lots of armaments, advisors and so on from the other senior members of the U.S. bloc such as France, not to mention recycled U.S. military aid coming in through Israel, Argentina, etc., as well as that provided by the USSR, which continues to be the Peruvian government's main source of heavy weapons. The 1985 Peruvian armed forces budget contains \$40 million for improvements in armaments alone—half of which is to be in aid from Argentina.

In other words, in addition to beefing up U.S.-directed counterinsurgency against what American press magnate William Randolph Hearst, Jr. has called "potentially the most explosive situation in all the Western Hemisphere," there is a political purpose to this State Department announcement. While not quite a declaration of war, it is part of creating the political climate for even more U.S. intervention on behalf of the Peruvian government and the stability of its empire.

However there is a limit to what these mass murderers can do—a limit imposed not by any constitution or Christian code but by the mass armed revolutionary struggle itself. Today the People's Guerrilla Army has reached the organised level of companies and battalions—mid-sized military units. This is an impressive accomplishment considering that when the armed struggle was launched five years ago many of the units were simply unarmed detachments, that is, small groups of men and women who underwent training as military units before they could seize and use weapons based on that training. The PCP's own estimate of the situation has been confirmed by the enemy, as reflected in a significant article in the

magazine *Equis X* linked to "leftists" in the armed forces. It reports that during two years of direct confrontation between the guerrilla forces and the regular armed forces, after initial setbacks the guerrillas have grown much more numerous, skilled and well armed due to the political and military conditions created by the armed struggle itself.

News reports from Peru from December through February indicate continuing waves of guerrilla actions which have been especially strong in the department of Puno, in the south, previously not known as a PCP stronghold; in the department of Cerro de Pasco, in the centre, where the police fort at Minas Canarias was overrun on 24 December by guerrillas who captured large amounts of arms and ammunition, and then attacked again in a major assault on January 7th; in the department of Ayacucho, especially the northern region bordering the department of Cuzco, which is a key zone for both sides because of the large numbers of peasants as well as its strategic location in terms of controlling access to other important areas; and in Tingo Maria where on February 7th the police outpost at Aucayaca was overrun and burned to the ground. As the magazine *Equis X* notes with alarm, the success of the revolutionary offensives launched in the departments of Ancash, Huanuco and Pasco mean that Lima is becoming surrounded by areas where government control is being strongly contested, with successful guerrilla political and military activities spreading through mountain towns in the department of Lima itself as well as the shantytowns of the capital city, while at the same time new offensives are also continuing in the northern mountain regions.

While the revolutionary forces are still very much on the strategic defensive in their confrontation with the government, the PCP, under the leadership of Chairman Gonzalo, is making real progress, fighting to go over to the phase of strategic stalemate between the revolution and the counterrevolution as the next and last step before it is the revolution which takes the strategic offensive against the government. ■