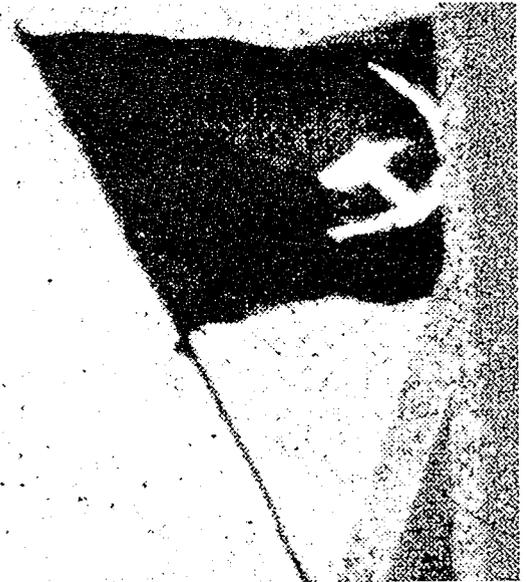


Peru

The Regime Changes The People's War Fights on



The People's War in Peru, which began in 1980, continues today to hold high the red flag of revolution. Despite what Communist Party of Peru (PCP) Chairman Gonzalo called a "bend in the road" following his capture in 1992, it is clearly still holding out. This is reflected in the accompanying list of 90 People's War actions during the most recent five-month period (6 January to 3 June 2001).

These actions indicate: continuing confrontations with the reactionary armed forces, and mass work by the People's Liberation Army, in various forms, in several regions of the country. These areas include: the department of Ayacucho, where the peasant war under the leadership of the Party began, in both highland areas and along the Apurimac River basin leading north into the jungles; the eastern-central departments of Cerro de Pasco and Junín; the Huallaga River valley, long an important stronghold for the People's War; the northern departments of Piura and Lambayeque; and Lima, the capital itself.

The interim government that followed the collapse of the Fujimori regime attached no less importance than its predecessor to trying to wipe out the People's War. *Red Sun* indicates that this government mounted some 50 "anti-terrorist" operations in the first six months of 2001. The hunting down and imprisonment of suspected revolutionaries continues. The PCP, for its part, has given great attention to exposing and opposing the transitional

government and its elections, which were intended to install a successor to Fujimori who was less widely discredited. The Party's work to mobilise the masses through the People's War and build an elections boycott movement peaked at the time of the two election rounds, 8 April and 3 June 2001. According to a Peruvian Armed Forces report published in *Caretas* magazine, during the first week of April the PCP carried out 114 actions, throughout the countryside, calling on the people to boycott the elections.

Alejandro Toledo's "victory" was inevitable, since covering him with the mantle of a "popular mandate" was the only purpose of these elections. (As people in Latin America have long said about elections, there is only one vote that really counts – and it is cast in Washington.) But paradoxically, Toledo sank further and further in the popularity polls even as he edged out the other candidates during the first round in April. According to an early report (most likely understated), in the 3 June 2001 run-off election 18.5 per cent of voters refused to go to the polls at all, even though this is illegal and can have serious consequences in Peru, and a further 13 per cent cast blank or spoiled ballots – totalling almost a third of the people registered to vote. Both Peruvian and North American media outlets treated this as a disastrous beginning for the new government. Unlike previous elections, this time it was also the reactionary forces linked to the former regime that tried to

capitalise on popular discontent by calling for blank ballots, but nonetheless the discontent is undeniable, powerful and dangerous to the ruling classes as a whole.

In the capital, where during much of the last decade death squads have murdered people merely for leafletting, the distribution of PCP leaflets calling for an election boycott was greeted as a significant event. Leafletting was reported, among other places, at San Marcos and La Cantuta universities, the La Victoria factory worker district, schools in popular areas and some of the biggest shanty towns.

The Peruvian media and politicians are debating whether or not there is a "resurgence of activity by Shining Path" (as they refer to the PCP). Some pro-Fujimori forces emphasise the number of recent actions in an effort to hold the new government responsible, whilst others claim that putting an end to the People's War is a "job left pending" by the former regime, which is accused of covering up continuing Maoist actions to achieve the "pacification" by propaganda that it could not achieve in the actual fight against the PCP on the ground. The May bombing of the National Elections Board in Lima had a strong impact on this argument.

The truth is that these recent actions did not appear out of nowhere. For example, it is worth recalling that government offensives against the People's Liberation Army (PLA) were beaten back in several areas in Octo-

ber 1999, following the capture of Comrade Feliciano, who headed the PCP Central Committee after Chairman Gonzalo's arrest. In one ferocious battle in the jungles of Ayacucho, the PLA shot down the helicopter carrying the commander who had been in charge of the operations against Comrade Feliciano. A subsequent government attempt to take over the area was defeated in April 2000, when another helicopter was hit by PLA fire. In February 2001 an armed forces helicopter was downed while supplying a military base in Huanta, Ayacucho, a storm centre of the People's War since very early on. Helicopters have been central to the government's military strategy, and, until these incidents, few had been hit.

The ability of the People's War's to persevere, and its existence as a banner to rally uncompromising revolutionary opposition to the ruling classes, is of enormous importance at a time when the ruling circles are engaged in fierce combat amongst themselves, and when all sources indicate a soaring sense of disillusionment among the middle classes with all of the ruling class representatives. Most importantly, an incontestable rebirth of political activity and struggle is taking place among lower sections of the masses, who have been kept under an iron heel for the last decade. In this situation, it is the government and its imperialist backers that have the most to lose and the Maoist revolution that has the most to gain.

The political crisis, which reached a fever pitch when Fujimori was driven from office, is still far from under control. The contradictions within Peru's ruling classes, which led to the US decision to cut the strings to its puppet and let him come crashing down, are not so easily resolved. They interpenetrate with other contradictions, including the mass, often violent, outpourings of protest in the streets that effectively overturned Fujimori's US-approved re-election last year, and the People's War itself.

In fact, it is not clear yet whether the US will benefit from dropping Fujimori or whether it simply risks even greater political exposure once the "lid" has been taken off the political pot. A *Washington Post* article (11 May 2001) describes a dilapidated Lima prison courtyard crawling with dozens of incarcerated Fujimori-appointed army

and intelligence officials, including 18 generals now facing charges for drug dealing and other crimes. As these lackeys themselves bitterly point out, they were in daily contact with their official US counterparts. The former head of the armed forces joint chiefs of staff, Nicolas Hermoza Rios, was an honours graduate of the notorious US Army School of the Americas torture academy in Fort Benning, Georgia. Vladimiro Montesinos, the key player on Peru's political scene after (or alongside) Fujimori, was a CIA asset for decades and met personally and often with Clinton's White House drug czar General Brian McCaffery, General Wilhelm of the US Southern Command, the US ambassador to Peru and many other US bigshots. They all routinely defended Montesinos to the press. Now CIA and other US officials, past and present, would like to claim ignorance that their favourite Latin American regime was the world's biggest drug cartel. This is worse than ludicrous, and not just because many of the basic facts were often reported in the world press, including in these pages. Montesinos was their man for decades, on the CIA payroll at least since the 1970s, when he was kicked out of the Peruvian army for selling secrets to the US, at which point he openly set up shop as a drug lawyer and organised crime confidant.

For 20 years, whoever held the posts of US ambassador and US "drug czar" never missed an opportunity to publicly express confidence in Fujimori and Montesinos. While all the reasons for their sudden fall from US grace are not clear, they probably include the fact that Fujimori and Montesinos and their methods had left the United States with too narrow a base within the Peruvian ruling classes, and had fueled a mass outrage that could only favour conditions for the People's War. In short, their main and perhaps only crime in the eyes of the US seems to have been that they outlived their usefulness. And just as Fujimori's initial election and subsequent "self-coup", dissolving parliament, the judiciary, etc., were carried out with full US approval, so too his being driven out of office and out of the country and his subsequent replacement by the "made-in-the-USA" Toledo were also fully supported by the US.

The truth is that all along the US knew exactly what was going on be-

cause they were behind it. Fujimori, Montesinos, Hermoza Rios, etc., were handpicked (Fujimori from his career as an obscure academic, Montesinos from the trash bin) to do a job: to serve and protect the prevailing economic and social system in Peru and especially US domination of Peru, and above all to stop the People's War. If they needed drug profits as part of the political glue that held their reactionary war machine together, Washington was comfortable with that, even if those drugs destroyed millions of lives. Their worst crimes were not those for which they were removed from office but the murder, rape and torture that they unleashed upon the masses and the Maoists in their filthy counter-revolutionary war.

Although it seems likely that the US at least allowed and perhaps organised Montesinos' flight abroad, he was forcibly returned to Peru in June when it became apparent that the new regime's inability to put him on trial was a major source of political instability. It seems politically impossible for the new regime to cover up all the crimes of the old regime without weakening itself further. All sorts of crimes against the people have come to light, and outrage has forced some high-level indictments. Two of the most important cases so far concern two notorious death squad massacres committed in the early years of the Fujimori regime: the 1991 execution of a courtyard full of slum dwellers at a fundraising barbecue for the illegal newspaper *El Diario* in the Lima Barrio Alto neighbourhood, and the kidnapping and murder of students and a teacher suspected of pro-People's War graffiti and other activities at La Cantuta University. The memories of these two crimes remain deeply burned in the consciousness of millions of Peruvians. Even in the darkest days of the Fujimori clampdown, relatives of the victims and others risked their lives (sometimes even in the streets) to demand justice. No matter what happens in the courts, this is not a situation that the ruling classes and imperialists can easily resolve to their benefit.

Once again, despite the twists and turns in the People's War in Peru, its persistence and advance still holds the key to the future of Peru, and it is a source of hope and inspiration for the oppressed all over the world. ■