



Peru

People's Regime

There are two facts which no-one, friend or foe of the revolution in Peru, can deny: the Fujimori government is in unprecedented trouble, and the People's War, now in its eighteenth year, is continuing to demonstrate its endurance.

A few years ago, after the capture of Communist Party of Peru (PCP) Chairman Gonzalo and especially after the call for peace accords that Fujimori attributed to him, the government and all the reactionary press jubilantly proclaimed the imminent demise of the People's War. Peru's ruling classes seemed to be enjoying stability and unity. Now, to the extent that any of the press is jubilant about anything, it is opposition media that is crowing about the crisis in the Fujimori regime. In contrast, the more serious reactionary organs have adopted a sober tone in describing the People's War.

For instance, two days before the 17 May anniversary of the launching of the People's War, guerrillas attacked the police station in the Lima slum of Ate-Vitarte. After a firefight, they exploded a 40-kilo car-bomb in front of the entrance and left behind leaflets headlined "Long Live the 17th Anniversary of the People's War!" and "Long Live the Street-Vendors' Struggle!" The reactionary Lima news weekly *Caretas* warned that even though this action had taken place after a long period without major attacks in Lima — and even though the

LEFT: On 17 July, 10,000 municipal workers, street vendors and teachers fought with riot police in the square outside the presidential palace.

War Perseveres, in Crisis

number of large-scale actions in general has declined considerably — it would be a fatal error to be blind to the PCP's advances which are less visible. It particularly cited the country's south-east, central and Huallaga regions, and the neighbourhoods and factories along the Carretera Central, the main road leading east of the capital into the mountains, including the shantytowns of Huaycan and Raucana, known as PCP strongholds at the beginning of the decade.

Accompanying this was a reporter's dispatch from Chuschi, the Ayacucho town where the People's War began. Chuschi's symbolic value is so great that Fujimori made a hugely publicized visit there — dropping in by helicopter — to declare the People's War all but over. Since then foreign journalists seeking to spread that idea have made a pilgrimage to "peaceful, happy" Chuschi the centre of their reportage. *Caretas* took a totally different view this time. After implicitly recalling that the authorities had underestimated the PCP at the beginning as well, the reporters quoted interviews with people who cursed continuing oppression and government abuse. The magazine advised the police to look deeper into reports that as villagers driven out by the military return to their homes from the slums of Huamanga and Lima, PCP organization is returning with them.

The Right Opportunist Line that arose within the PCP with the call for

**RIGHT: Woman
fighter in a
guerrilla column,
Sorata,
Ayacucho.**



peace accords claimed that the People's War could not continue, first because of Chairman Gonzalo's capture, and second because Fujimori had succeeded in obtaining political and economic stability. As it turns out, much of the reactionary press itself does not share that opinion.

BATTLE REPORTS

In October 1996, the PCP-led People's Liberation Army fought battles in south-east, central and northern Peru in the face of a major government offensive. Again in the midst of an Armed Forces offensive against revolutionary base areas in May and June 1997, the People's Liberation Army launched a number of counter-attacks against the military and its paramilitary armed bands.

The authorities would later claim that this simultaneous PCP counter-offensive had been foretold in April, when graffiti in favour of the PCP and the People's War suddenly appeared on walls at universities around the country.

On 8 May, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) temporarily took over the town of Campanilla near Juanjui in the Upper Huallaga valley. The forests and hills of the region spanning the departments of San Martin and Huanuco continue to be a bulwark of the People's War. On 6 July, the PLA entered the village of Ramal de Auspuzana, about 140 kilometres north-east of the city of Tingo Maria, and executed two Armed Forces agents sent in to spy on the peasants and the activities of the revolutionaries. An attack on powerline pylons blacked out a large area, including Aucayacu, near Tingo Maria, a town that has been important to both sides in the People's War (see *AWTW* 1996/22).

In May, June and July there were a number of battles in northern Ayacucho, especially in the provinces of Huanta and La Mar (alongside the Apurimac River), as well as near Satipo, to the north, along the Ene River into which the Apurimac flows. The government claims that Comrade Feliciano, the leader of the Party's Central Committee, is somewhere in this vast region, but repeated Armed Forces dry-season offensives have come up empty-handed.

One of the most notable battles was the PLA assault on Tircos, a Huanta village converted into a paramilitary base. Reportedly, guerrillas overran and destroyed the base, and then tried and executed four *rondero* leaders. The *ronderos* are reactionary armed bands set up by the Armed Forces to terrorize the peasants and murder suspected PCP supporters; they have been a particularly favourite government tool in this region. The next day the PLA surprised a *rondero* meeting in a nearby locality. After the paramilitaries surrendered, all but one were freed with a warning. Their head was executed.

In August, a number of PLA actions took place in the countryside and villages around San Martin de Pangoa, between the rivers Ene and Tambo in the department of Junin. On 15 August the PLA seized an oil exploration camp being used for a French company. PLA members gave speeches and talked to the 29 workers for several hours before leaving with captured supplies. This took place as hundreds of government troops carried out operations against them in this jungle area largely populated by the Ashaninka indigenous people.

The Peruvian press reported that the PCP had carried out a raid in the high jungle zone of Upper Huallaga in mid-October, and killed three anti-drugs policemen. It is notable that the head of Columbia's armed forces has recently announced that he has obtained explicit US permission to use so-called anti-drugs funds in operations against guerrillas, revealing yet again that the war on drugs is aimed at anti-US armed struggle. Also in mid-October, a reported 30-strong unit of guerrillas from the PLA occupied the village of San Miguel, deep in the Andes. They remained for several hours.

In October 1997, the government sent some 300 soldiers and police into the Tingo Maria area, detaining about a hundred suspected "subversives" in the city itself. Meanwhile, a wave of PLA actions in the Huallaga that had begun in September continued. There were also reports of an upsurge of revolutionary actions in northern Ayacucho and the Apurimac river valley.

FUJIMORI'S TERRORISM AT THE EMBASSY

President Alberto Fujimori seemed to be at the peak of his powers in April of this year. His troops stormed the Japanese embassy taken over by the MRTA and mercilessly murdered every single one of those involved, not to protect the hostages but to make a political point — to demonstrate Fujimori's power and determination to crush any opposition. The political contrast between the MRTA and the PCP is stark. The MRTA's strategy has always been to use armed means to apply political pressure, rather than to overthrow the government and the system. This is illustrated by the fact that they seized the embassy in order to negotiate the release of their own imprisoned members and supporters and force the regime to accept a "dialogue" with them. The People's War, with its very different military strategy representing a very different political goal, has from the first represented a mass upsurge of Peru's poorest and most despised people against the whole system. Yet Fujimori's bloodbath was aimed as much against the masses and the People's War as against the MRTA itself.

This criminal slaughter by a government that has made such terrorism its hallmark was backed by the US, which helped plan and prepare it and politically supported it once it occurred. In the following days, angry rallies took place at Peruvian embassies and other targets across the Americas and Europe. Visiting Bangladesh, Fujimori was confronted with a militant march denouncing him and imperialism and supporting the People's War.

CRISIS IN THE WAKE OF THE MASSACRE

After his troops retook the embassy, Fujimori was so inflated with bloodthirsty arrogance that he had himself photographed amidst the carnage and made a special point of refusing to allow the victims' families to claim their bodies for burial. Yet in retrospect it seems that beneath the surface his regime was already rent by deepening cracks.

Even at this very moment, the opposition press was interviewing

Leonor La Rosa, a former military intelligence (SIN) agent. One day when she came to work as usual at the Armed Forces headquarters where Fujimori spends much of his time, known as the "Little Pentagon", she was seized, tortured and crippled by her colleagues. They suspected her of leaking information on Fujimori's plans to use the SIN to intimidate and murder opposition figures and journalists. Another woman SIN agent was found hacked to pieces. Her parents told the press that she had formerly lived with an Army major and had been killed to protect his secrets. This officer, they said, was a member of the Colina group, a secret Armed Forces death squad most infamous for the 1992 murder of nine students and a professor of the University of La Cantuta suspected of supporting the PCP. A number of intelligence agents have died recently in violent or mysterious circumstances.

This apparent infighting between rival forces in the military reflects broader behind-the-scenes power struggles. Fujimori is trying to have the constitution changed so that he can run for the presidency a third time in the year 2000. He has changed the constitution at will twice before since he became president in 1990. Yet this time three of his own hand-picked constitutional court judges ruled against him. In a rage, Fujimori had them sacked by the congress his party dominates. Gunmen tried to murder a leading congressman and an editor of the daily *La Republica* who opposed these moves.

But things did not go as they used to for Fujimori. When he stripped the foreign-born owner of a pro-opposition TV channel of his citizenship, so that under Peruvian law he would become ineligible to run his station, Fujimori himself was hit by the expected counterblast. Documents leaked to the Peruvian press seemed to indicate that he himself was not born in Peru, as he had claimed, and therefore is legally ineligible to serve as president.

The obvious contradictions and apparently crude falsifications contained in Fujimori's birth registration and other family documents from half a century ago bring out an intriguing question: why is all this coming out now? No less an imperialistically-informed mouthpiece than the *New York*

Times (NYT) (25 July) speculates that behind this sneak attack are Armed Forces head General Nicolas Hermoza and his boss, the master of the SIN and the "Little Pentagon" himself, Vladimiro Montesinos, a life-long CIA "asset". The *NYT* euphemistically described Montesinos as Fujimori's "national security advisor" who had long served and protected the president, including, according to the *NYT*, by covering up Fujimori's records.

As has been pointed out many times, there is no better proof of Montesinos' ties to US imperialism than the fact that the US has deliberately and consistently overlooked his ties to Peru's drug empire.¹ It certainly seems logical to wonder whether Montesinos' manoeuvres against his chief are being carried out with support from at least some people in US ruling circles, just as his previous service to Fujimori counted on the wholehearted support of US imperialism.

It is difficult to judge who is up to what in this latest political crisis. But it is not hard to see what is at stake. The US loved Fujimori when he seemed to be a winner against the People's War, but he really hasn't been able to deliver. In 1993, after the capture of Chairman Gonzalo, Fujimori boasted that the war would be over by 28 July 1995. Not only is he more than two years behind schedule and falling farther behind every day, but the very goal itself seems increasingly illusory to the reaction. This may be why five of Fujimori's leading ministers jumped ship in July 1997. Of course, whether or not Fujimori's criminal ship sinks depends to some extent on whether the US ruling class believes it has an acceptable replacement.

¹ In what is only the most recent of many Montesinos scandals, the Sao Paulo daily *Jornal do Brasil* referred to a secret Brazilian government report that said he was continuing to protect the head of a Colombian drug gang. (It is a matter of public record that Montesinos was the lawyer who got Raul Porras out of jail in 1978 when he was arrested in Lima with many tonnes of unrefined cocaine paste in his possession.) Yet in response to this latest accusation, General Barry McCaffrey, President Clinton's "drug czar", publicly praised Peru's drug programmes and spoke of meeting personally with Montesinos on several occasions.

AN UNFAVOURABLE POLARIZATION

The discontent among Peru's ruling classes and the imperialists is not unrelated to the discontent of the people. If it can be said that the job of any reactionary president in Peru would be to stand as an opposite pole to the road to liberation represented by the PCP, then it would have to be concluded that there are some factors in how Peru's people are polarized now that are not favourable to the system. The regime's strategy towards the poorest masses who make up the country's vast majority has been to combine gunpoint repression with efforts to demoralize and paralyze them politically and above all to try and isolate them from the PCP. But the continuation of the People's War under difficult circumstances shows that it continues to draw on the protection, support and participation of exactly that sector of the people. At the same time, the regime's efforts to mobilize a part of the somewhat better-off classes in its favour have not fared well, which has given the poorer urban masses more political breathing space and room to act. Throughout the last year there have been daring, combative and large marches, demonstrations and streetfighting in downtown Lima by striking workers and others—a common sight during the 1980s and 1990s but one that Fujimori seemed to have consigned to the past until recently.

For instance, according to the London-based *Latin America Weekly Report*, "The biggest march for years took place on 5 June, culminating in a mass meeting in Plaza Bolivar, outside the congress building. The riot police resorted to clubs and tear gas, and the evening sitting of congress was hastily called off... one of the striking features of the protests was that trade unionists, students and professional bodies marched side by side for the first time in many years. The universities, which have gone through a process of rigorous 'de-politicalization' after becoming hotbeds of subversion in the 1980s, have kept their head down for so long that it was a remarkable sight to see students and teachers together joining in a march..." On 17 July, according to the media, 10,000 munici-

pal workers, street vendors and teachers fought with riot police in the square outside the presidential palace.

POLITICAL PRISONERS

On the international level, one of Fujimori's most important political goals during the embassy takeover was to reverse right and wrong, to beat back the unfavourable public opinion that had built up against his regime because of its imprisonment of thousands of political prisoners at the hands of "faceless judges" who dispatched them to a lifetime in dungeons after a few minutes of secret trial with no evidence or witnesses. Yet the massacre at the embassy brought him no victories here either and instead focused a spotlight on the regime's other crimes as well.

Fujimori cut off Red Cross visits to Peru's prisons on 17 December 1996. His pretext was the embassy takeover but his purpose was to keep the Red Cross from publicly confirming the well-foundedness of the outcry over the conditions for political prisoners. On 19 August 1997 he once again denied the Red Cross's request to visit these prisoners. A number of organizations, including Amnesty International, have referred to the well over 4,000 people jailed under Peru's terrorist "anti-terrorism" laws and called for the release of "the hundreds falsely accused". Actually, all of the prisoners have suffered the same mock trials and inhuman treatment and none can be said to have been convicted through what is sometimes called "due process". All are equally deserving of their freedom. The International Emergency Committee to Defend the Life of Dr. Abimael Guzman (Chairman Gonzalo) intends to continue working with lawyers and others on this front to end the isolation of Chairman Gonzalo (who has not been allowed any outside contact for five years) and fight for all of Peru's political prisoners.

Ironically, Fujimori achieved the opposite of what he sought with the embassy killings. Instead of becoming a symbol of the strength of imperialism and its henchmen, he made himself a symbol of reactionary oppression in general and US-supported crimes in particular. All this, too, is part of the equation that is shifting against him. ■