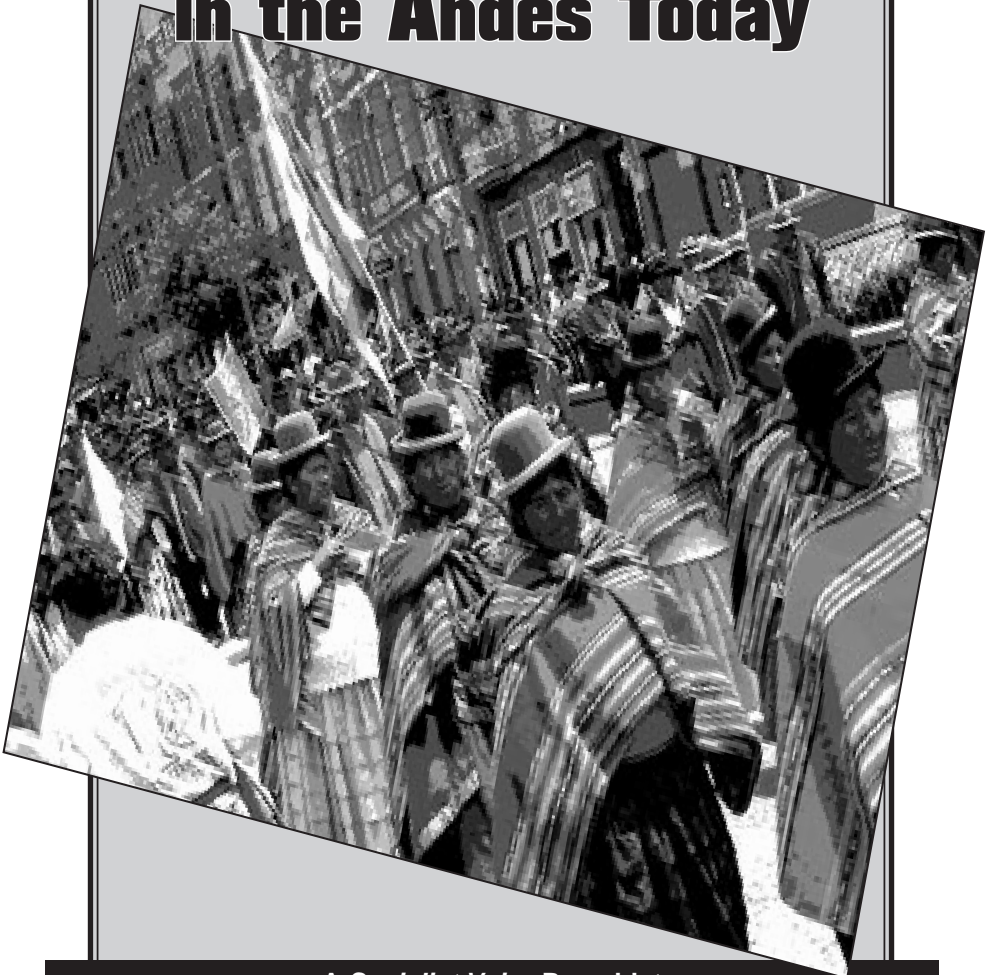


\$2.00

HUGO BLANCO

**The Fight for
Indigenous
Rights
in the Andes Today**



A Socialist Voice Pamphlet

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hugo Blanco, a central leader of the “Land or Death” uprising in Peru in the 1960s, continues the struggle today as director of the newspaper *Lucha Indigena*. See “A Life of Struggle” (page 18) for additional information.

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Socialist Voice

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The 'Indian Problem' in Peru: From Mariátegui to Today

(*Socialist Voice*, March 4, 2007)

I was invited last month by a heroic community to the commemoration of a massacre of campesinos [peasants] who were fighting for land, and who, at the cost of their blood, were able to pass it on to those that work it. The recreation of the massacre was very moving.

I recalled the phrase that was stuck in the mind of Mariátegui: "The problem of the Indian is the problem of land."

That was the terrible truth. Now it no longer is so.

Before the invasion

Before the European invasion, across the entire continent of Abya Yala (America), individual ownership of land did not exist. The people lived on it collectively.

Unlike in Europe, the development of agriculture and cattle grazing in America did not lead to the emergence of slavery; instead primitive collectivism gave way to other forms of collectivism as privileged layers and privileged people arose. Some forms of slavery may have existed for domestic work, but agricultural production was not based on slavery as it was in Greece or Rome. Rather it was based on collective organization, called by different names in the various cultures (*ayllu* in Quechua, *calpulli* in Nahuatl).

Imported latifundio

The European invasion led to the imposition of semi-feudal servitude. The land was stolen from indigenous communities, and the new owners allowed the serfs to use small parcels of land. They had to pay for that concession by working a few days a week on the best land — on the "property" of the latifundista [large landowner], and for his benefit.

This was the central feature of servitude, but more was involved. The indigenous people also had to "pay" with cattle for feeding on the natural grass that "pertained" to the property. The landowner's cattle was looked after by indigenous people — in return, as "payment," they received the right to pasture a few head of cattle of their own. The campesinos were arbitrarily sent to go by foot through rain and wind for days, to haul loads of products from the "hacienda" to the cities and returning with urban products for the hacienda. *Pongueaje* and *semanería* were terms for the forms of domestic service that campesinos had to carry out in the house of the owner.

There were many other obligations, made up according to the imagination of the master. He was the judge, he owned the jails, he arrested whomever he pleased, he physically mistreated someone whenever he felt like it (Bartolomé Paz, a landowner, branded the backside of an indigenous person with

a hot iron.) Murders were committed with impunity, and so on.

In Peru, the revolution for independence broke the chains of direct political domination by Europe, but economic dependence was maintained, to the benefit of foreign interests, firstly European and then later Yankee. The latifundio [large estate] system also continued with the implicit suppression of indigenous peoples and the descendants of African slaves.

That oppressive latifundio system, and all the servility it brought with it, began to collapse with the insurgency of the La Convención movement of the 1960s. The indigenous peoples of this country who lived through those times did not struggle in vain; even today, in spite of the many forms of oppression that they still suffer, they can say, “Now we are free!”

End of the hacienda

The high prices obtained for exportable products from the semi-tropical zone of Cusco gave an incentive to the *gamonalismo serrano* [the ruthless landlord system of the mountain areas] to usurp the land from the communities in the Amazon region. Because the people from the Amazon area refused to be forced into servitude, the landlords moved in campesinos from the mountain areas, who were used to such treatment.

The system of oppression was the same as that in the mountains, but it was exercised in a more forceful manner — in this area the “law,” that provided some slight protection in the mountain areas, did not exist.

The immigrant campesinos suffered due to the climate, illnesses, and unfamiliar food. Large numbers died due to malaria. Work was hard, because they first had to clear the forest before they could start their plantations. Unlike products from the mountain areas, their crops — cocoa, coffee, coca, tea, fruit-bearing trees — could only be harvested once a year.

The greedy landowners demanded ever more workdays per month, while the campesinos, who needed time to cultivate their own products in order to earn any money, sought to reduce the days spent working for the landowners.

In the mountain areas, centuries of exploitation gave the system some protection of custom, but they were challenged on the edge of the jungle areas where this form of exploitation was new. Unions, organized by the Federation of Workers of Cusco, demanded a reduction in the obligations of campesinos to their bosses. They used lawyers to present their claims.

There was some push and shove between landowners and campesinos, some pacts were signed in which the landowners ceded a bit.

But not all the landowners accepted the agreements. The most ferocious would say: “Who came up with this crazy idea that I should discuss with my Indians how they will serve me? I am going to boot out the ringleaders and put them in jail!” And that is what they did, using their close ties with the judicial power, the political power, the police, and the media.

The multiplication of unions strengthened the campesinos. By mobilizing they were able to impede “legal” evictions and get their *compañeros* [com-

rades] out of jail. When there was no discussion on the list of demands, the campesinos initiated strikes demanding an agreement. The strikes consisted of not working for the landowners and working on their own parcel of land instead. In that way the campesinos did not suffer as a result of the strikes, as workers or employees do, but rather enjoyed it.

In 1962, after nine months on strike, we unanimously decided in an assembly of unions from Chaupimayo that, since the owner did not want to discuss with us, we would drop our demand for negotiations. On that day, the strike ended and became an “Agrarian Reform.” We decided we would never return to working for the owners, since they had no right to the land — they had not come carrying the land on their shoulders.

The strikes extended across more than 100 haciendas which, though not as explicitly as in Chaupimayo, but rather in an implicit form, produced an agrarian reform in the valleys of La Convención and Lares, carried out by the campesinos themselves.

The landowners went around armed, threatening the campesinos. When the campesinos complained to the police, they responded: “What do you shameless Indians want? You are robbing land from the owner and he has the right to shoot you like dogs!” So the campesinos had to organize themselves into self-defense groups and they selected me to set them up. Afterwards, the government of the landowners ordered repression against us. They persecuted me. They prohibited the assemblies of the federation.

And they began to carry out acts of aggression against campesinos, including the gunning down of an 11-year old child by a landowner. An assembly of four unions ordered me to lead an armed group to bring the landowner to account. Along the way we could not avoid an armed confrontation with the police, where a police officer fell. Later two more fell in another clash. The police massacred unarmed campesinos. After a few months our group was dispersed and its members captured.

Nevertheless, the armed resistance alarmed those in the military that were in the government. They thought: “If these Indians have resisted the commencement of the repression with arms, this zone will burn when we try to oblige them to return to work for the landowners, which they haven’t done for a number of months. It would be preferable to legally recognize what the Indians have done, and thereby pacify the zone”.

And that is how the Law of Agrarian Reform for La Convención and Lares came into being in 1962.

It is true that this helped bring calm to the area, but it lit up the rest of the country, because the campesinos from other zones said: “Is it because we have not taken up arms that they have not given us land?”

Land occupations were initiated in the mountains, including in the department of Lima. The president of the landowners, Belaúnde, responded with massacres like that of Solterapampa, which I mentioned at the start. Those in the military remained worried that the obsolete semi-feudal haciendas would

provoke an expansion of the movement. Given the experience that they had in La Convención, they decided to take power and expand to the whole country what they did in that zone. In 1968, Velasco Alvarado took power and extended the agrarian reform at a national level. The official lack of respect towards the indigenous community appalled the campesinos, but the latifundio, the feudal landed-estate system imported from Europe, was buried.

Now

That is how the axis of the indigenous problem moved away from being a problem of land. Oppression continued, but in other diverse aspects, which were derived from the land problem.

The indigenous struggle continued and continues combating all forms of oppression and achieving advances:

- Education: In the era of the latifundio the indigenous population did not have a right to education, despite what the law said. In the midst of the struggle against the latifundio, schools with teachers paid collectively by the campesinos of an area who also constructed the schools, began to appear. (The landowner Romainville kidnapped a teacher and took her as a cook. The landowner Marques ordered the destruction of a school whilst students were still inside; the children fled frightened). After the victory over the latifundio came the struggle that won the right to have schools paid for by the state, and secondary education was implemented. Now there exist professionals who are children of indigenous campesinos.
- Healthcare: In this aspect as well, the indigenous campesino sector created sanitary posts with their own resources, and later managed to get the state to maintain them.
- The illiterate did not have the right to vote; now they do.
- Municipalities: In the era of gamonalismo, it was unimaginable that there could be an indigenous campesino mayor. Now there are a number of municipalities governed by them, some more democratic than others.
- There are indigenous people in parliament.
- Public order and justice: in many places there has been a partial substitution of the judicial power and corrupt police by organized campesinos.
- There is a permanent struggle against corrupt authorities.

Probably the most important struggle today is against contamination from mining.

Neoliberalism attacks campesino products through low prices. There is a resurgence of huge landed estates, no longer in a semi-feudal form, but rather capitalist, with paid workers. The struggle encompasses all aspects of indigenous oppression: social organization, language, medicine, music, customs, native foods, coca, etc.

History, seen with the hindsight of decades, shows us that with the break-

down of the system of semi-feudal servitude denounced by Mariátegui, the floodgates were opened for the indigenous struggle across all fields.

The Epic Struggle of Indigenous Andean-Amazonian Culture

(*Socialist Voice*, August 15, 2007)

Over the course of more than 10,000 years, the rich biodiversity of the Andes-Amazon region has created a culture that is closely interlocked with Pachamama (Mother Nature). This culture is marked by deep knowledge of nature and is highly agricultural. Ours is one of the seven zones of the world to have originated agriculture. It has yielded the greatest variety of domesticated species. This has given rise to a cosmic vision different from the Western outlook that views the creator as a superior immaterial spirit who created man in his image and likeness and created nature to serve him. For the indigenous cosmic vision, humanity is a daughter of and part of Mother Earth. We must live in her bosom in harmony with her. Each hill or peak, each river, each vegetable or animal species has a spirit.

Indigenous, collectivist mentality is strong enough to have endured solidly through 500 years of invasion and the dictatorship of individualism.

The Quechua and Aymara name for the campesino community is *ayllu*. It is bound by strong ties, many expressed in work (*ayni*, *mink'a*, *faena*) [1] and in all aspects of life. The community is not restricted to persons. It entails a close communal relationship with cultivated species, with medicinal species, with animals and plants that tell cultivators about seasonal variations,[2] and, more broadly, with all animal and vegetable species, with rain, and with the land.

The development of agriculture and tending of livestock, which in other latitudes led to slavery and feudalism, led in Abya Yala (the Americas) to new forms of collectivism. In the Andes zone it led to a state that extended over the territories of six present-day countries – Tawantinsuyo (called “empire” by the invaders out of the same ignorance that led them to call the llama “big sheep.”)

It's true that the new forms of collectivism gave rise to privileged castes and wars of conquest. But in no part of the continent was production based on slave labor or the feudal system.

- For more than 10,000 years our culture domesticated 182 plant species, including around 3,500 potato varieties.
- Our people know 4,500 medicinal plants.
- Tawantinsuyos planned agriculture based on a system of watersheds and micro watersheds or basins.
- They built long aqueducts, taking care to avoid land erosion.

- Terracing was practiced on the slopes and “*waru-waru*”[3] in the *altiplano* [highlands].[4]
- Special technologies were used from zone to zone.

Across the entire Tawantinsuyo territory they created storage buildings (*qolqa*) to supply food to the population whenever some climatic shift undermined agriculture.

Although there were privileged castes, hunger and misery did not exist. Orphans, persons with disabilities, and the elderly were cared for by the community.

The invasion

The backbone of this social organization, of the agricultural infrastructure and food reserves, was crushed by the invasion.

Europe was then passing from feudalism to capitalism. The invasion was a capitalist action. They came looking for spices, believing they had reached India. They found none, but did find gold and silver.

Mining had existed as a marginal activity, but it now became the center of the economy. To exploit the mines they used a system worse than slavery. The slave owner is concerned about the health of his slave just as he’s interested in the health of his donkey. The mine owner in Peru received annually a certain quantity of indigenous people in order to “indoctrinate” them. Regardless of how many of them died, the next year he would receive the same number. Hence, youth and adults were sent into the mines and never left until they died. Because of this, young indigenous people committed suicide and mothers killed their children to free them from torment. This practice diminished following the Tupac Amaru rebellion.

Agricultural work took place through a feudal system. The Europeans took the best lands from the community and converted them into latifundios (huge estates or latifundia). Community inhabitants became serfs on their own lands. They had to work freely for the feudal lord in exchange for permission to cultivate a small plot for their own needs.

For many reasons a huge decline in agriculture took place:

- Canals, terracing, and *waru-warus* were destroyed because of ignorance and lack of care.
- Until this day no planning in terms of watersheds and micro watersheds has been carried out. Chaos took hold and persists.
- With the importation of foreign domestic animals to the zone, the environment deteriorated. The *auquenidos* (camelid)[5] cut pasture grass with their teeth, but cows, horses, and sheep uproot it.

The invaders vented their superstitions on our crops. Our agricultural mentality didn’t suit their cultured ways. So the “exterminators of idolaters” went after plants like the *papa*, also known as Santa Padre (Holy Father). They renamed it *patata*, the word used in Spain. This passed into English and other languages as “potato.” They also damned *kiwicha* or *amaranto*

(amaranth). The coca plant, which the famous doctor Hipólito Unanue called the “supertonic of the vegetable kingdom,” is to this day the target of superstition and excessively harmful prejudice in “refined” circles.

The invaders pillaged the food stockpiles located across the territory to cope with times of hunger brought on by climatic irregularities.

Taking their behavior as a whole, we find that European imposition of hunger and misery — their cultural contribution — was even more deadly than their massacres and the smallpox they spread among us.

Rebellions and republic

From the beginning, our people rebelled against the invaders. Numerous insurrections took place, beginning with Tupac Amaru II’s rebellion. It spread all the way to Bolivia and lasted even after his cruel torture and assassination.

Later the so-called Independence Revolution took place. It did not signify any noticeable change for the indigenous population.

The generals of “independence” were awarded “haciendas” (the new name for the feudal latifundia), “Indians” and all.

The hacienda system consisted basically of the free labor of the *colono* (serf) for the hacienda. There were other aspects to this serfdom.

The colono had to turn over some of his animals that grazed on natural pastures to the master. He made long treks with pack mules burdened with hacienda produce. They lasted days and he had to sleep out in the open. The owner mistreated him physically and morally. He could jail him and rape the women. The serf’s children did not go to school either because they had to work, or there were no schools, or the master forbade it.

Our land struggle in the 1960s

The hacienda feudal system lasted until the second half of the last century. The spread of capitalism to the countryside weakened it in many ways:

- New large-scale mining absorbed labor from the haciendas.
- New mechanized latifundia expelled the serfs and employed an agricultural proletariat.
- New high-priced crops required more labor time, pressing the hacienda owner to demand more work from his serfs and to expel them in order to take over their plots. The serfs, on the other hand, needed more time for their own labours and resisted the theft of their plots.

We organized ourselves to struggle against the new outrages. Given the intransigence of the landlords, the struggle became a fight for possession of the land. Our defensive action not only set us against the landlords but also against the government which defended the feudal system.

In over 100 haciendas we refused to work for the landlords. But we continued to work our own plots. This was in practice an agrarian reform. The government repressed us with arms and we defended ourselves with arms. The military government of the day crushed the armed self-defense; but it

took note that it would be impossible to re-implant feudal serfdom. It opted to pass an agrarian reform law — only in this zone — legalizing campesino possession of the land. But indigenous campesinos in other zones of the country rebelled and took over haciendas. This was violently repressed, but could not be effectively contained. Hence, a subsequent reformist military government felt obliged to decree an agrarian reform at the national level.

In this way, we took advantage of capitalism's weakening of the feudal system to take over the land. In this same epoch the Brazilian campesino movement was shattered. Capitalism triumphed there. Its victims are now struggling courageously in the "Landless Rural Workers' Movement."

For this reason Peru is, with the likely exception of Cuba, the country of the continent with the greatest proportion of landowners, either of communal or private plots.

Some campesinos from the epoch of struggle for the land feel the qualitative change. "Now we are free," they say. They consider that breaking down feudal servitude also broke them free from the yoke that had gripped them.

Following the rupture they worked for education, building schools and paying men and women teachers. Later they fought to get the state to pay them. They built health centres and fought to get the state to pay for health services.

They got the vote and elected their own mayors. They fought against mining pollution. They struggled to assume in a collective manner police and judicial functions, to replace corrupt cops and judges. They fought against corrupt authorities of any stripe — and for many other things.

They feel that breaking from feudal servitude freed them to spread wings and carry the struggle forward.

Current struggles

Most current struggles of indigenous campesinos are against the killing of Pachamama, Mother Earth; against deprivations by the large companies, mainly mining, but also petroleum and gas. Previous Peruvian governments were servants of feudal lords; today they serve the great multinationals. They act against the Peruvian people and against nature.

Living conditions are another cause of struggle. There is more and more unemployment, and the standard of living is falling. In the countryside this is due to excessively low prices for farm products. This is linked to the struggle against the Free Trade Agreement with the United States that will demolish our agriculture for the benefit of large, subsidized imperial firms.

The indigenous movement, together with the rest of the Peruvian population, is fighting against corruption and to get their own representatives into local governments. People often suffer betrayals because there is no system for authentic democratic control.

The indigenous movement is not alone. Although it is the most vigorous and persevering, it is not unique. The rest of the people are struggling together with us.

Intellectuals called *indigenistas*, whether indigenous or not, merit special mention. Ever since the oppression of the original peoples of our continent began there have been individuals who have struggled against it and to defend our culture.

The work of Father Bartolomé de las Casas is known.

In Peru there were notable political figures like González Prada and Mariátegui. Writers like Clorinda Matto, Ciro Alegría, José María Arguedas. Painters like José Sabogal. Musicians like Alomía Robles, Baltasar Zegarra, Roberto Ojeda, Leandro Alviña, and so on.

The meaning of our struggle

We are defending our culture in its diverse aspects: our cosmic vision, social organization, our rituals and agricultural know-how, medicine, music, language, and many others.

We do not claim that our culture is superior to others. We are struggling to stop it from being considered inferior. We want to be respected as equals.

We have been educated to harmonize equality and diversity. Peru is a mega-diverse country, both geographically and demographically. We have 82% of the world's 103 natural life zones. Our inhabitants speak 45 different languages. The great Inca Sun God celebration was not exclusive. It had a procession of different peoples with diverse gods. The notion of "one God" did not exist. We are for the equality of the diverse; we are against homogenization (*igualitarismo*).

On the one hand we respect diverse individualities and particularities. On the other, we oppose individualism. Ours is a culture of solidarity.

We don't seek a return to the past. We know we must make the best in general of advances in human culture.

That does not contradict our resolve to go back to our own roots. Our past will be vividly present in our future.

We love and care for Pachamama. We fervently yearn to return to basing our economy on our rich biodiversity, through agriculture and natural medicine, along with any modern advances that do no harm.

We don't want our social system to be based on the deep-seated, antisocial individualism that the invaders brought here. We intend to recover and strengthen at all levels the vigorous, collectivist solidarity and fraternity of the ayllu, making use, as well, of universal knowledge that is not harmful.

We dream that the past 500 years of crushing blows are just a passing nightmare in the ten thousand years of building our culture.

Reference Notes

[1]. These terms from a collectivist language are not translatable to an individualist one.

Ayni means the mutual lending of work, as collective activity for the benefit of an individual. *Faena* is collective work for collective benefit. *Mink'a* is asking for a service with profuse and warm urgings.

[2]. There are "signs" that tell indigenous campesinos how climate or weather conditions

may change or how a given crop may fare. Abundant or poor blossoming of a forest plant, the coloration of snakes, the height of bird nests, the greater or lesser brilliance of a constellation, etc.

- [3]. *Waru-waru* is the practice of alternating belts of elevated fields and ditches (or swales); planting is done on the elevated belts. This has the function of avoiding floods in rainy years. In dry years water held in the ditches is used for irrigation. Heat absorbed by ditch water during the day helps to counteract cold nights at frost time.
- [4]. [Translator's Note] A good description of this agricultural technology can be found at <http://carbon.hampshire.edu/~hms/Articles%20for%20Maja/EnvNatAndes.doc>. Here is an excerpt from the essay Environment and Nature in South America: the Central Andes:
- "The local agro-pastoralists constructed raised fields systems or waru-waru and sunken smaller garden patches or qochas to address these problems. Construction of raised, ridged fields, with swales or canals between the ridges, resulted in ridge-top areas above the waterlogged soils in the rainy season, eliminating rot among the tubers. Both the qocha system and the intervening canals among the raised fields trapped rainwater, which was curated through the dry season to provide a continuing water supply. "In addition to managing moisture, these systems also ameliorated temperature extremes. Thus the raised field patterns, and furrows in the qochas, were constructed either parallel to, or perpendicular to, the path of the sun, an orientation which permitted maximum solar energy capture by the water. This water kept the fields slightly warmer at night, and often radiated enough heat to prevent frost damage while the surrounding unmodified grasslands suffered heavy freezes."
- [5]. Auquenidos (camelid) are animals found in the Andes mountains, relatives of the camels. They are also called camelidos in Spanish. In Peru there are four different auquenidos: llamas, alpacas, vicuñas and guanacos. Llamas and guanacos are beasts of burden, while alpacas and vicuñas are used for their wool.

Bolivia: A different revolutionary process

(International Viewpoint, March 2006)

I was in Bolivia when the presidential mandate was transferred to Evo Morales. I was invited by comrade Evo. An atmosphere of revolutionary process floated in the air and imbued the people. It could be seen by the numbers who assembled and by the revolutionary fervour of people on the occasion of the big rallies.

You felt it on the occasion of the fighting speeches of Evo, who referred to Che and to the expression of Sub-commandant Marcos: "command by obeying." Evo spoke clearly against neo-liberalism. This atmosphere is also reflected in the fact that the Ministry of Justice is headed by a woman domestic servant who suffered physical, psychological and sexual abuse, which are a sort of "custom" in our countries.

It can be seen by the fact that the Ministry of Labour, is occupied by a trade unionist, it is expressed by the fact that a large number of generals have been dismissed, etc.

Here, I want to concentrate on only one aspect: the type of revolution.

Obviously, we greatly respect the Cuban Revolution and its principal instrument, the guerrilla army. In the same way we greatly respect the Ven-

ezuelan process. There we had an officer who made a coup d'état against a corrupt government and who subsequently won against the bourgeois parties in the elections, faced with these parties that had disgusted people. We recognize that what they did is good and that it was the right road to follow.

The Bolivian revolutionary process is completely different. It is marked by a rise of progressive and combative popular struggles, without a centralized organization. Part of the combatants decided to organize in order to conduct the struggle on the enemy's terrain: the elections. This fraction built a party: the Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples (IPSP). Since the government set legal traps against this party being registered, this fraction decided to enter an organization which had a legal status: the MAS. That is why today we refer to the MAS-IPSP.

In the Bolivian revolutionary movement, including in the MAS, there is a great diversity of points of view. It is in a completely natural way that people express differences with Evo. But there are no expulsions, as there are in the PT in Brazil. Evo affirms: "I can make mistakes, but I won't betray". He adds: "If I stop, push me!"

Cuba and Venezuela each have their commander. Not Bolivia. Evo systematically speaks of the re-founding of Bolivia. He mentions that during the first founding of Bolivia, the indigenous populations were excluded from it.

In this re-founding, these populations will be present. But not only they will be present, the entire Bolivian people will also be present.

Evo reaffirms that on August 6th 2006 the Constituent Assembly will be set up. This Assembly represents the great and ardent desire of the Bolivian people. Everyone is conscious that what they do not want is a Constituent Assembly made up of the traditional parties, as so many others have been.

They know clearly that it must be a Constituent Assembly which brings together the representatives of the indigenous peoples and of all the popular sectors of Bolivia. There is already discussion on the objectives that this Constituent Assembly will have to adopt. People see in the government of Evo a guarantee that this Assembly will come into being. If we want to make a comparison with the Russian Revolution, it will be, as it were, the Congress of Soviets.

I hope that the absence of the "revolutionary party" is an advantage and not a disadvantage. History will tell us. I don't want to make theories about it. I would simply like to point out that we are in the "Russian February" and that August 6th will be "October." Although, here in February, everyone – the rank and file as well as the leaderships – hopes that in October it won't be necessary to overthrow anyone.

The process that is under way in Peru has analogies with the one in Bolivia – in an embryonic form, certainly. We see appearing there victorious revolts by social movements which are not under the control of any leadership or any party. The Bolivian process will have a great influence on our country. We have an obligation to make it known.

Indigenous Peoples and Our Environment

(Canadian Dimension, March-April, 2007)

In September 2007, indigenous farmers in north-western Peru gave a defiant “No” to an environmentally-destructive mining project.

Minera Majaz, recently acquired by a Chinese conglomerate, hopes to extract 191,000 tons of copper and 2,180 tons of molybdenum a year, starting in 2011. If it proceeds, the Rio Blanco Minera Majaz project would use enormous quantities of water in the area and pollute the Chinchipe and Quiroz rivers, both of which are sources of drinking water and irrigation in the Andean provinces of Piura, a department on Peru’s border with Ecuador.

The central government approved the project, overriding local objections. When three municipalities called for a referendum on the plan, Peru’s president and other authorities from Lima denounced it as “a subversive act.” Minera Minaz promised US\$80 million for local development if the referendum was defeated.

But the people would not be intimidated or bribed. An eyewitness described voting day:

“People from outlying rural areas and villages began arriving in the towns of Ayabaca, Pacaipampa and El Carmen de la Frontera on Saturday night, packing the streets and plazas after walking up to eight hours to cast their ballots in Sunday’s non-binding vote.... People began crowding around the polling centres before dawn, even though they did not begin operating until 8:00 AM. ...

“Of the more than 31,000 registered voters in the three districts, an average of 60 percent took part in the referendum”
(upsidedownworld.org/main/content/view/894/68/)

The question was “Do you agree with the mining activity in your district?” And the response was decisive:

No: 94.54%.

Yes: 1.58%.

This is not the first such struggle or the first victory. Years before, the people of Tambogrande blocked the development of a gold and copper mine on their lands by Manhattan Minerals Corp., a Canadian company that enjoyed the support of Peru’s highest authorities and the country’s mass media. A national and international solidarity campaign, involving ecologists in Canada, finally exposed Manhattan in its own country.

Several indigenous zones are currently fighting the major multinational mining companies and their servants, the “national” authorities. Our brothers and sisters in the Amazon are engaged in a permanent struggle against

the oil and gas companies.

Similar struggles are going on across our continent.

Why we fight

Throughout Abya Yala (the Americas), our culture worships Mother Nature (Pachamama in the Quechua language) with great respect.

Many of our brothers and sisters have now lost their languages, and no longer recognize themselves as indigenous peoples, but our culture survives. As they say, “the Indian in us flashes to the surface” when something sacred is under attack. Never before has Mother Nature been under such ferocious attack. The excavation and perforation of mines and oil and gas deposits are poisoning our waters, destroying our soil, killing the birds, the fish, and everything that is fundamental and essential to our lives. They leave us no other road than rebellion, because they are killing us.

We may be Quechua, Maya, Mapuche, Sioux, Mohawk, but it’s all the same for us – we are all under assault.

Another aspect of our culture that is also under greater attack than ever before: solidarity, the community spirit, which is not limited to human beings.

As Eduardo Galeano has noted, the Americas “discovered capitalism in 1492.” Before the invaders arrived, the entire continent was collectivist — from the so-called “primitive peoples” like the inhabitants of the Pampas to the “advanced cultures” such as the Aztecs or Incas. In Quechua, the language of the Incas, there is no verb “to have” or “to hold.”

Neoliberal ideology has raised individualism and egoism to extremes. We do not exaggerate: those who benefit from the system, the owners of the big multinational companies, know they are destroying the earth, but the more important thing for them is to make as much money as possible in the shortest possible time, to hell with the world. This exaltation of individualism deeply offends our culture.

The force of community

Everywhere, our horizontal communities are resisting and pushing back against verticalist individualism.

In Anta, part of the mountainous Cusco Department in southern Peru, indigenous communities now decide how their money will be used and how it will be handled, not the “mayor” as the law requires. Other communities in Cusco and elsewhere in the country have also established grassroots control over local budgets, although not as firmly as those in Anta.

In some areas, collective judicial bodies called Rondas Campesinas (peasant patrols) are displacing the corrupt courts and police at the lower levels, despite official persecution. In one area, farmers who cultivate the sacred coca leaf have destroyed an airfield used by drug smugglers — a field built by a government agency that was created ostensibly to fight drug trafficking.

Organizing the struggles

No political party is running any of this, nor is any union. At times people from the Confederación Campesina del Perú (Peasant Confederation of Peru) will become involved, or from the Confederation of Communities Affected by Mining, or the National Agricultural Confederation, or members of left parties, will become involved, but the struggles are locally self-organized, with people of the grassroots are taking the initiative.

Struggles take on different forms, such as plebiscites in the Minera Majaz case, or demonstrations and marches. Roadblocks, attacks on installations, and clashes with the police where people have been killed have all taken place recently.

We are also seeing growing international collaboration, including meetings with allies from elsewhere in South America and other parts of the Americas. In October there was a conference of indigenous people in Mexico that included Native youth from Canada, and a global indigenous conference in Bolivia.

Vía Campesina, the worldwide campesino organization, held an alternative conference in Bali during the UN climate talks. The grassroots delegates issued a manifesto in defense of Mother Earth and the right to a healthy environment for all.

What is to be done?

Our greatest weakness is limited communication among those who are fighting back. The mass media, which are in the hands of servants of the system, work only to misrepresent and discredit our struggles. Those who are fighting in one area need to know what is being done in others, not in order to copy them but to take from them what they think is useful.

This is the function of *Lucha Indígena*, an independent monthly newspaper that I edit with a team of collaborators in Cusco and Lima, and with a network of grassroots reporters in the departments and provinces.

The task of *Lucha Indígena* is to promote mutual communication, by sharing news about the country, the continent and the world. There is no party or leadership that “gives the line” – that approach is alien to our culture, which is community based; it is the collectivity that determines our policies.

The brothers and sisters of the Lucha Indígena Solidarity Network in Canada have given us considerable support that will be used to repair and upgrade our aging equipment and increase the frequency of the newspaper. This year we will see if we can maintain the new pace or if, for lack of funds, we must revert to the previous situation.

The indigenous peoples of the world are linked to nature. Poisoning the water and the soil means killing us, and that is why we are the most sensitive to neoliberalism’s assault on the environment.

Fortunately, ever larger sectors of the world’s non-indigenous population are realizing that the deterioration of nature will destroy the entire human

species, including the descendants of Bush, and not only the indigenous peoples.

I hope that ever larger sectors of the non-indigenous will also understand the value of solidarity, the other pillar of our culture, collectivism.

We have reached a situation in which the “private ownership of the means of production” has been turned into the “private ownership of the means of destruction,” which will plunge us into the abyss.

The deterioration will continue inexorably as long as do not have a united humanity managing the means of production and the world for our own benefit and that of Mother Nature.

A Letter from Hugo Blanco to supporters in Canada

October 12, 2007 — Continental Day of 515 years of Indigenous and Black Struggle Against the European Conquest of Abya Yala

Dear sisters and brothers:

Private property in the means of production has been converted into private property in the means of destruction.

No need to mention the atomic bomb!

We see global warming, the hole in the ozone layer, the poisoning of river, lake, and sea waters, contaminated air in more and more cities, and the massacres during wars of invasion, etc. As long as private property in the means of destruction goes on the accelerated depredation of nature will also go on — relentlessly.

They tell us about globalization, but we see anti-globalization walls erected in North America and Palestine, as well as the invisible walls that impede more and more of us inhabitants of poor countries from getting into the rich countries.

The reason for this situation is that the huge multinational enterprises are leading “globalization” to serve their own interests to make more money in the least time possible. To do that, they are assaulting nature and drowning the rest of humanity in misery.

We stand for another kind of globalization, one led by humanity in its own interests, and in the interests of nature.

To that end, we are now globalizing our resistance. We are globalizing hope for a new world.

Native peoples of Abya Yala (the “Americas”) as a whole feel deeply wounded by the egoistic and individualist culture and the assault on nature imposed by the multinational firms – because our culture is rooted in solidarity and love for nature.

That’s why we are in the front line of resistance and struggle against this

culture that is attacking all human kind and nature in general.

The *Lucha Indígena* Solidarity Network exemplifies this globalization of resistance and hope. Our editors are highly aware and moved by your solidarity, both moral and economic.

That solidarity commits us to keep you informed in a regular way with progress made in the work that you are supporting.

We pledge to do that, and we will.

With deep affection,

Hugo Blanco, Cusco, Peru

Appendix

A Life of Struggle

Hugo Blanco wrote this outline account of his life for the information of sponsors and organizers of meetings he spoke at across Canada in the fall of 2007.

I was born in Cusco in 1934. I am 72. I was only a child when I heard that a landowner had branded an indigenous man by applying a red hot iron to his buttocks. When I was 10, I met an indigenous leader who told me of his story and his struggles. The dictator Odria appointed little dictators as principals to state high schools. At the National School of Sciences we went on strike calling for the expulsion of the principal, and we won. My school-teachers were devotees of revolutionary change.

I went to Argentina to study agronomy, and joined a workers' party. I have been an active member of various revolutionary organizations since. In Argentina a pro-imperialist coup against Peron was on the make. I realized that as an agronomist I would have to work for the landowners or become one of them. This realization, and the fact that Argentinian students supported the projected coup, led me to leave the university and become a factory worker. I fought the coup in the midst of Argentinian workers, and when the coup succeeded I became part of the resistance. Upon my return to Peru I worked as a manual labourer in various places, mainly Lima. I was persecuted after our political organization joined others in organizing a demonstration against Vice-President Nixon's presence. I went back to Cusco and organized the union of newspaper peddlers which still exists today. I became their delegate to the Cusco Federation of Labour.

Before the European invasion no one owned the land in our continent. The European colonizers instituted the "latifundios" [great estates]. These became haciendas when Peru became a republic. In these haciendas, peasants would be given a small plot of land to cultivate, and would work for free for the landowner and become his servants in exchange.

My work as a member of the Federation revealed to me that it was the peasantry that headed the movement for change, especially the peasantry of

the semitropical area, unionized and fighting to decrease the duties owed to the landowners or *hacendados*. Some of the hacendados signed collective agreements with the unions, others refused to negotiate and had the leaders sent to jail instead. The Chaupimayo hacendado did the latter. I joined the union of that hacienda. A provincial peasant federation was formed. We used mass action to win the freedom of incarcerated union leaders. Since the Chaupimayo hacendado refused to discuss the union's demands for fewer obligations, the Chaupimayo Union went on strike; the peasants would do no work for the hacendado but would continue to cultivate their own plots of land.

Nine months later, the hacendado continued to refuse to negotiate, so the union ended the strike but instituted an agrarian reform: the land belonged to those who worked it. The measure spread to 100 other haciendas where peasants went on "strike" to claim the land. Deeply troubled, the hacendados began to carry weapons and threaten their peasants. And when the peasants complained to the police, the police would reply that since the peasants had stolen the land, their bosses had the right to kill them like dogs. Faced with this, the provincial peasant federation decided to form armed defense committees, and the assembly gave me the task to organize these committees. This I began to do, and since I was persecuted and unable to leave Chaupimayo, members of other unions would go to Chaupimayo to get trained in armed defense. Then it was the landowners' government that reacted against our agrarian reform. The military government of Perez Godoy unleashed repression and turned the Federation into an illegal organization.

The shooting of an 11-year-old boy by a hacendado who was accompanied by a policeman, led to strong union response. Four unions in assembly decided to send an armed committee to exact an explanation from the hacendado. I was asked to head the committee. On the way we were attacked by police, one of whom died. Then in another confrontation, two police men died. In retaliation, the police killed unarmed peasants. Eventually the police forced us to flee indifferent directions and we were then captured one by one.

Not long after the repression had started, the peasantry had given the government an armed response. It was then clear for the government that an order to go back to work for the hacendados for free would be met with an even more powerful resistance. The government, therefore, largely recognized, in 1962, the peasants' agrarian reform. It became law only for that area. The peasants of other areas seized part of the lands they worked and these takeovers were answered with massacres by the 'democratic' government of President Belaunde. Despite this, the takeovers continued. The military realized that the feudal-type servitude of the hacienda was no longer enforceable and decided to take power to extend what the peasants had won in 1962 in an area of Cusco, to the entire country.

The government installed by the 1968 military coup extended the agrar-

ian reform to the entire country. The sentence asked for me under Belaunde was the death penalty. The government sent word to me to propose that I not attend the hearing, that I should pretend to be ill, and that the government would then deport me to the country of my choice. I refused as I considered that accepting would have constituted a betrayal of my comrades and the Peruvian people. The public hearing conducted by officers of the Civil Guard served to denounce how the servile police force had acted to perpetuate the unjust hacienda system.

At the hearing General Fernandez Hernani, member of the tribunal composed of police officers, asked for the death penalty. I stated that if the social changes that had taken place in the area deserved the death penalty, I agreed with it, but that the one to execute me should be Fernandez Hernani with his own hands. They did not dare give me the death penalty. They sentenced me to 25 years in prison, the maximum sentence after the death penalty. The prosecutor of the supreme military tribunal asked for the death penalty. A wave of national and international solidarity, that included Jean-Paul Sartre, stayed their hand. The tribunal resigned itself to the 25 years.

When Velasco became president he sent me an envoy promising that if I agreed to work in his agrarian reform he would give me freedom. I refused because I could not work for an agrarian reform that gave no say to the peasantry.

When other revolutionaries doing prison time accepted to work for the government and gained their freedom, Velasco freed me as well. Had he left me in jail it would have become clear to people that I continued to be in prison out of refusing to sell out. Velasco freed me and continued to propose through others that I collaborate with the government. I replied that I would if the agrarian reform was done in the way determined by the peasantry of each area.

The government's reply was first to forbid me to travel to the Andean area, and next to deport me to Mexico. From Mexico I went to Argentina, where I was jailed under an agreed-upon international repression. I was then expelled and sent to Chile where I participated in the building of Poder Popular ('Popular Power') and in resisting the coup that was under way.

After Pinochet's coup, no Latin American country would receive me, so I accepted the asylum that Sweden offered me. My main task there was to give talks throughout Sweden and the other countries of Western Europe and Canada to denounce the Chilean coup as part of the movement to strengthen the movement of international solidarity.

Morales Bermudez, after taking power through a military coup, allowed the return of the exiles, so I returned to Peru. I was continuously followed and eventually deported to Sweden. The United States signed an agreement with the Soviet Union. In order to allow Solzenitzen to travel to North America, the United States introduced a clause in the agreement to stipulate the right of an author to visit the country of his publishers. Based on this clause

the American publishers of my book invited me to the U.S. The U.S. had to allow me entry into the U.S. It was the time when Carter boasted of human rights. The topic of my talks in 40 cities of the United States was “Carter and Human Rights in Latin America.” What I said was that the worst human rights violator in Latin America was the American government.

On July 19, 1977, there took place in Peru a powerful general strike against Dictator Morales Bermudez. This strike forced the convocation of a Constituent Assembly. The members of my party ran me as a candidate, so the government had to allow my return to Peru. I used time given to me in the free television broadcasts to which candidates had access, to call on people to support the nation-wide work stoppage called by the Peruvian Workers Federation (CGTP) against a massive rise in prices decreed by the government. A few hours later I was detained, expelled from Peru, and jailed in an Argentinian prison together with other social fighters. After some time I was sent to Sweden. While in Sweden I was elected member of the Constituent Assembly. Morales allowed me back after a tour of Europe where I spoke of the fact that having been elected I was not allowed to return to my country and take office.

I wrote a draft constitution that the Assembly refused to debate. I was elected to Peru’s provincial legislature representing Lima for the period 1980-1985.

Neither the Constituent Assembly nor the Legislature were going to pass bills put forward by their left-wing members who were in the minority and who were silenced by the press. My presence in both served mostly to broadcast popular movements of protest. This is why I was detained when I was a member of the Constituent Assembly and beaten harder than ever by police when I was a deputy, despite the parliamentary immunity. I was supposed to have. I was suspended from the legislature when I pointed out that the Ayacucho military chief was an assassin.

After my time in office I went back to working full time for the Peruvian Peasant Federation as Secretary of Organization. At my request, the Federation sent me to Puno where peasant communities fought against the gigantic and bureaucratized cooperatives (SAIS) created by Velasco and defended by the Alan Garcia government. The fight was against the directives of the SAIS, against the government and its repression, against the agrarian organization left by Velasco, against Shining Path that killed people who led takeovers of land. The peasantry triumphed recovering hundreds of hectares for the communities. Later I travelled to Piura to work with the peasant *rondas* (organizations formed by the peasantry to defend themselves against theft of cattle given the fact that the police and the judiciary was unable to come to their aid).

When the province of Ucayali went on strike, I asked to be sent there. A while after the strike started the regional demands were won but not the national demands. The strike was lifted and the union got permission from

the prefect to hold a meeting. The government of Alan Garcia had the police open fire from two fronts against those in attendance. I saw my comrades fall to my right and to my left. I went to the Federation's headquarters that had been ransacked and was assaulted by police who beat me endlessly, covered my head, and sequestered me. Fortunately, a peasant who saw this happen telephoned the Peruvian Peasant Federation. The Federation called the International Secretariat of Amnesty International and the news traveled the world. A few hours after being detained messages of protest began to arrive from all over the world.

My two youngest children were in Sweden, and in Sweden it was the children who initiated a movement for my freedom. The movement expanded to the teachers, the federations of employees and of workers, Parliament, and the Chancellery. I was taken to Lima where a judge ordered my freedom. Alan Garcia did not agree. He ordered me returned to Pucallpa. I physically resisted being shipped on a passenger plane, so they placed me in a military plane. In front of a judge in Pucallpa I refused to say anything since a Lima judge had already set me free. I went on a hunger strike (for the tenth time in my life), and was freed two hours later.

Thanks to the peasant comrade who saw the kidnapping and to national and international solidarity, I was not one more "disappeared" under the Alan Garcia regime. I immediately traveled to Sweden to express my gratitude for their support, especially that of the children, whom I told that there were children in Ucayali who had been robbed of their parents by Alan Garcia. This produced an interesting exchange of correspondence between Swedish and Ucayali children, plus financial aid for the victims of the repression and the children of Ucayali.

I was then elected senator. I formed part of the environmental commission and visited peasant communities affected by the mining. I confronted the complicity of my commission and of the Senate with the polluters.

After the coup on April 9th I had to leave Peru, as I found out that I had been sentenced to death by the Peruvian Intelligence Police, and by Shining Path. I went to Mexico where I lived with my two younger children and my wife, and was fortunate to be there when the Zapatista rebellion exploded. I attended the international conference called by the Zapatistas, "For Humanity, Against Neoliberalism," a conference that preceded the World Social Forums. I returned to Peru when the internal war had waned. I took part in the movement to expel the dictatorship and in peasant struggles.

I accept invitations of peasant communities, universities and any other institution or organization, from anywhere in the country. I have been invited to meetings and conferences in Europe and Latin America. I was able to return to the United States when I was a senator. I am currently director of the magazine *Lucha Indigena* ("Indigenous Struggle") that used to be published once a month but is now published every two months due to financial limitations.

Support Hugo Blanco's Newspaper

Hugo Blanco's newspaper *Lucha Indígena* (Indigenous Struggle), urgently needs financial support to enable more frequent publication and to expand distribution.

The *Lucha Indígena* Solidarity Network was formed in Canada in October 2007 to raise money and other material support for the newspaper, and to promote communication and collaboration between *Lucha Indígena* and First Nations Activists in the north.

The committee was initiated by: James Cockcroft

(Montreal), Phil Stuart Cournoyer (Managua), Darrel Furlotte (Toronto), Urpi Pine (Toronto), Mike Krebs (Vancouver), Jacqueline Perez (Montreal), John Riddell (Toronto), Wayne Roberts (Toronto), and Nelson Rubio (St. Catharines)

■ Donations to support *Lucha Indígena* newspaper should be mailed to Darrel Furlotte, 136 Clinton St. Toronto, Ont., M6G 2Y3. (Make cheques out to *Lucha Indígena* Solidarity Network)

■ Direct bank deposits may be made to: *Lucha Indígena* Solidarity Network, Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, 641 College Street, Toronto, Ontario. Transit #08902; Institution #010; Account # 1040936. (Please email lucha.indigena@gmail.com to confirm your direct deposit.)

Donations that may seem small by the standards of the Global North can make a huge difference to this important project. Please contribute as generously as you can.

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