

Alan García brings case against the IMF to Rome

by Robyn Quijano

Peruvian President Alan García brought the case against the International Monetary Fund to Rome on Nov. 10, and came under an international spotlight, with the Pope's blessing, as the foremost leader of the developing sector in the fight against hunger. Speaking on Nov. 11 before the agriculture ministers of 156 nations at the celebrations marking the 40th anniversary of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO), President García blasted "institutions like the International Monetary Fund, whose terms and conditions and stabilization policies have worsened the problems of our countries, with dramatic and terrible effects."

"It is not the duty of our governments to repay the external debt, nor to accept adjustment policies to this end," he said. "It is the Christian duty of our governments to lead the fight against hunger and to obtain justice. Everything can be sacrificed, except the basic right to life. At this time, when hundreds of millions of people in Africa, Asia, and Latin America are waiting in vain for food, the banks can very well wait—the poor have waited long enough!"

With a historic determination to act as a moral force, in a world in which usury has reigned supreme over human life, President García told the ministers, "We have one absolute objective: to achieve a just new international economic order. . . . We are not going to beg for this, we are going to demand a just new economic system."

García, who has openly criticized the leadership of the developing sector for too much talk, and too little action to save the lives of their impoverished populations, and create sovereign, independent nation-states capable of develop-

ment, described the actions he has taken since his inauguration on July 28. "We have decided to drastically reduce the resources earmarked for repayment of the external debt. We consider this debt unjust. . . . We reject the idea of increasing our indebtedness only to repay our formal debts, and confirm our decision to pay no more than 10% of our export earnings for debt servicing. . . . Peru's decision is the answer of a poor country, and it is a decision which will not be reversed!"

"We are not going to sacrifice our historical development to the appetite of the international banks. The prices of our agricultural exports have been falling day by day, as a result of the protectionist policies of the industrialized states. . . . We are required to pay the banks punctually and without mercy. How are we supposed to do that? The first thing is to defend our national wealth. We are not going to pay, like the Merchant of Venice, with the last pound of flesh! We're going to keep the resources we need which are being sent abroad."

García offered Peru's solidarity "with the Non-Aligned movement, and with the African nations struck by drought and hunger." Departing from his text, García told the assembled ministers, "Among the many things you will take away with you from this conference, will be Peru's determination. Tell your countries that Peru is in solidarity with you. We demand the right to life!" He went on, "Our government's objective is to establish the right to live. Hunger is not a sentence imposed on man—God created the world with sufficient resources for life, but the selfishness of the strong has

caused these resources to be distributed badly.”

Defining Peru's new historic mission and the principles of the new alliance of moral forces in the world, for life, the Peruvian President said: “Thus, as a nation we have an all-important role to play in the world—that of obtaining the solidarity and justice of a New Economic Order and attaining the objectives of the World Food Conference, which resolved to abolish hunger over a decade ago. This must be done, not by pleading for charity or a crust of bread in alms, but by calling for a fairer system in which the value of the work of poor nations and their equal sovereignty are recognized. The world needs a new basis for trade and the distribution of wealth. A new monetary system is needed, in which the dollar is not the sole universal currency.”

Meeting with Pope focused on debt

García's visit to Rome also included a private meeting with Pope John Paul II. Two of the Pope's representatives met the Peruvian leader upon his arrival at the Rome airport, underlining the importance attributed to García's anti-usury, pro-development crusade by the leadership of the Catholic Church.

The Peruvian daily *Hoy* noted, “It is obvious that Pope John Paul II is very aware of the question of hunger and poverty. He is also deeply worried by the question of the Latin American debt.” *Hoy* pointed out that García's emphasis on his Christian vocation—in his speech to the FAO and elsewhere—“seems designed to stimulate actions of support, but also mediation, by the head of the Catholic Church, who is listened to by the U.S. President.”

According to a statement issued by the Vatican following the 30-minute meeting, the Pope's discussion with President García focused primarily on the Third World's debt problem and the crisis in North-South relations. The Pope presented García with a facsimile of a 15th-century manuscript of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

The issue of food security as the basis for democracy was a critical focus of the speech. García detailed his government's efforts to channel the resources saved from debt repayment into cheap credit and improved technology for increased agricultural production. “We have established a fund for supporting agricultural prices and . . . we have reduced by 80% the interest rate on agricultural credit in depressed zones . . . from 108% to 19%.”

Peru's plan to develop its fishing industry was presented as a crucial way of “directing resources towards national food needs instead of producing fish meal for exportation. . . . Peru is one of the principal fishing countries in terms of the wealth and the volume of its catch. However, at the same time, it is one of the countries with the lowest consumption per capita. . . . In the last 30 years, for each catch of 100 tons, only one ton is consumed in Peru, and the rest is destined for fishmeal production. In the last three months, we

have begun efforts to direct fish preserves for consumption by local sectors, and to establish a national fishing fleet.

“After decades of Peruvian waters being exploited for feeding European livestock fish meal . . . the Peruvian people joins me in offering part of our great fish resources and the production capacity of our processing plants for feeding the world's poor. Peruvian waters will not fall into the hands of imperialist predators. The wealth they contain must serve to feed those who are hungry. We are a poor country, but we are prepared to help those who are poorer than ourselves.”

He concluded, “We believe in God, and our daily bread; like the prophet Isaiah, we will not lose hope that our swords will be turned into ploughshares, and that no people will rise against each other. . . . We will no longer be united by our hunger, but only in our hunger for God.”

‘Neither Kissinger nor Castro’

According to the Peruvian daily *El Comercio*, “A curious note was given by a group of Italians, apparently belonging to the Schiller Foundation [sic], who had placed posters all along the route which García would follow to the FAO, with the text, ‘Ní Kissinger, Ní Castro, Viva Alan García!’” Another Peruvian newspaper, *La Crónica*, commented that the Schiller Institute slogan—which means “Neither Kissinger Nor Castro!”—“has become rather well known in Rome since García's arrival.”

La Crónica also reported on the 100-person demonstration held by the Schiller Institute outside the FAO headquarters, devoting nearly a page of photographs to the rally, with its field of posters defending García and attacking the IMF and the drug trade.

At a press conference in Rome Nov. 12, García rejected the contention of one journalist, that his policy is somehow directed “against the United States.” “That's a wrong idea,” responded García. “We don't want to move against the United States. That's what the U.S. administration thinks, that because Peru is ‘not with us, they're against us.’ We cannot be against a people, nor against a society that is technologically, industrially, and culturally demonstrative of what humanity is capable of. We are facing an imperialist model, not the United States; we're faced with the immense power of transnational corporations, banks, and the International Monetary Fund. Only integration can give us the full answer.”

Asked by a reporter if the recent moves against Armand Hammer's Occidental Petroleum and other foreign oil companies meant that Peru was becoming a communist country, García said: “I am not a communist and never will be a communist. I am only an anti-imperialist statesman who wants the emancipation of his people and the solution of the problems of social inequality that exist within it. I am not a communist, because I do believe that there must be a break with an imperialist domination; I don't believe that it must be done to become a subordinate of another superpower.”