

A VISIT TO AYACUCHO(PERU) 'THE CORNER OF DEATH'

(Report on FEDEFAM delegation visit to the area from 23rd to 26th January 1984. The delegation was integrated by Loyola Guzman(Bolivia) President FEDERAM, Fr. Pat Rice Secretary FEDEFAM, Pablo Rojas(Peru) Executive Secretary CONADE, Javier Diez Canseco(Peru) Parliamentarian, Carlos Galinde(Peru), Parliamentarian, Carlos Capelletti(Peru) Parliamentarian and Alvaro Martinez(Peru) Photographer)

In Lima itself Ayachucho seems a long way away. It is not only distant by culture and language but even more so by the conflict which that entire region has now been intensely living over the last two years. It was in Christmas of 1982 that Peruvian President Belaunde Terry decided to move the military into the area in order to combat an apparently well organised guerilla movement which identified itself by the strange name of Sendero Luminoso(tram s. 'Shining way'). Complete control was handed over to the Army and some weeks later in January 1983 eight journalists were murdered in a remote village in the region when they were investigating stories of Army abuses. The incident has yet to be satisfactorily investigated in order to fully determine the role of the military in these murders. The effect of that case was that since that time there has indeed been very little reporting going on from the area. With few exceptions foreign correspondents still concentrate on Central America in their stories of human rights abuses.

During our IV Congress held in November in Mexico City we recieved some direct reports from the area which really shocked us and so the Federation -FEDEFAM decided to organise a visit as soon as possible to Peru. We had spent a few days in Lima meeting with the different authorities to exchange views about the situation finding above all a great deal of indifference to even inquiring into the situation.

The flight from Lima to Ayachucho was very quick - a little over 30 minutes. Shortly we found ourselves descending down through the steep and beautiful Andean Mountains to the airport of Ayacucho itself which is situated on a high plateau w These hills have been completely taken over by the military as the locale for the Cabrites



Army Base - the headquarters of ~~the~~ military operations in the entire region. We had spent the week end agonising over whether to make the trip at all. On Friday the Peruvian Attorney General strongly advised us against going using every possible argument. There would be no hotel space available, people would be afraid to speak with us and we could be assured by his word that human rights abuses were going to end in the area and things would get better. However a lawyer friend had travelled to the city in order to prepare the trip and he said there was great expectations about our trip ~~and~~ particularly among the few human rights workers in the Area and the sadly now numerous families who have a loved one either disappeared or assassinated. We had decided to come and see things for ourselves.

We had been surprised in Lima that there were so little security checks on boarding the flight. Would it be that the whole situation has been exaggerated, I thought. However as the airport came into sight I began to really realise that we were going into a real battle zone. There were some 4 new bright red helicopters on the tarmac and one could ~~xxxxxx~~ see very clear the numerous machine gun nests around the airport distinguishable by the black plastic bagging that they were using against the rain.

Expectantly We moved towards the exit doors and down the boarding stairs. Loyola and I the only two foreigners in the group anxious to keep close to the parliamentarians. Suddenly we found ourselves walking between two rows of bayoneted automatic rifles held by very tense looking soldiers with ~~xxxxxxx~~ armed civilians commanding the situation from further back. A sense of shock came over all the passengers as we were unceremoniously searched and ushered into the airport building itself. Loyola and I were of course questioned and then we were pushed over against a special counter together with the other passengers to await the rest of the luggage. Finally we were able to leave the terminal building but found ourselves once again surrounded by the military until we got to a nearby road where there was a final checkpoint. The public were allowed no further near the airport than the road. Deputy Galindo parliamentary representative from Ayacucho itself was really angry and quickly piled us all into the nearest taxi we could get. It was so old that it had to be pushed to get started.

We had scarcely got underway when we were flagged down by the lookers-on. The Lady Mayoress and her ~~entourage~~ entourage had just arrived to welcome us. We climbed out of the car to be greeted by a young ~~woman~~ bespectacled woman Leonor Zamora who had been recently elected as Mayoress to probably one of the most conflictive cities of all Latin America. Clouded in dust from the cars she warmly greeted us inviting us to immediately go to the town hall where there would be a special session of the city council to welcome us. We were indeed overwhelmed after the hostility of our arrival in the airport.

The city of Ayacucho ~~translates~~ a Quechua word which means 'corner of death' is one of the most historical places in all of South America. There are some caves nearby where prehistoric remains of human existence has been discovered. The area was at the heart of the INCA empire and was also an important centre after the Spanish Conquest. It is a small city of some 40,000 people but boasts of some ~~40~~ 33 churches and still preserves totally its colonial architecture in a way which is unique not only in Peru but in other parts of Latin America. With the independence movement it marked the place where the southern armies under General San Martin and the northern ones under Simon Bolivar met. Under the leadership of that extraordinary man Mariscal Sucre the Spanish were indeed finally defeated in the Battle of Ayacucho and all South America became independent. The city from that time received the name of 'The Cradle of Freedom' and there is a magnificent statue of Sucre dominating the Central plaza.

However even though Ayacucho has played a foremost role in the political history of the entire continent, economically it has been increasingly depressed and exploited. The level of misery and poverty is among the worse in any country. The indian peasant farmers who dominate the countryside scarcely survive while in the city many dedicate themselves to folk crafts ~~xxxxxxx~~ selling their products to the numerous tourists who visit the area.

With the surrounding misery the one hope for people came to be the university of Huamanga which is also situated in the central plaza. It is a very old University and most peasants try to send their children there in the hope that with a career behind them they could finally get work. However that has not happened and there has been a growing



frustration among graduate students over the years. It was over 10 years ago when the situation in the entire area began to slowly explode and the 'troubles' started.

A young ayacuchanan profesor of philosophy called Abimael Guzman who had done his doctoral thesis on the unlikely subject of Kant began to lecture at the University. Of indian stock himself he began lecturing on Marxism and particularly on Mao-tse-tung and quickly gathered adepts to his cause. He decided to found the Sendero Luminoso Communist Party of Peruan event which largely went unnoticed among the countless other Communist Parties of Peru. By 1980 however he had infiltrated a good deal of the rural education programme in the entire region and his movement had built solid roots among the Indian peoples who are the vast majority in the area. He then decided to launch a war of Guerillas on the Governments. That war has been characterised by the extensive use of dynamite by 'senderistas' and a deliberately terrorist strategy. By the time the Army were called in last year they had already come to control a large area of the region. However the group have been very silent about themselves. They issue no statements, are not interested apparently in the so-called international revolutionary scene and they concentrate on the quechua culture. Some have described the movement as having attained a messianic dimension ~~within~~<sup>for</sup> the Andean Indians. Due to long centuries of margination and misery they have indeed chosen a fertile area in which to work. Their ruthlessness which is shocking to most revolutionary movements in Latin America, may in the opinion of some observers be the first clear signs of what future armed ~~group~~ revolutionary groups in South America be tempted to do in the aftermath of so much repression by the military. The 'senderistas' commonly take over a village, then hold an assembly of the people where the local shopkeepers and particularly anyone suspected of working with the government are publically convicted and then executed. All property is then collectivised. And then the group moves on to another mountain village. Imprisoned 'senderistas' in the past refused to have anything to do with doctors, human rights workers with some in fact dying from lack of attention. They are absolutely convinced of the justice of their struggle and in many cases practically have come to control their own prison. For example a large red flag regularly flies over the island prison of



'El Monton' which is very near Lima.

Arriving in Ayacucho itself one has the sensation of coming to just another Andean town several thousands of feet above sea level. The women wear shawls with dark hats and their children neatly bundled in ponchos which they carry on their backs. Because of the cold and also perhaps for cultural reasons the women wear many petticoats so they all seem stocky. The men wear dark heavy shawls or ponchos and sandal type shoes. The air is clear, trees are scarce and one has the clear sensation that some 100 years ago the situation was not very much different. However Ayacucho is no ordinary Andean Town there are armed guards on every street corner and armed carriers transporting soldiers from one place to another continuously.

We arrived at the Hostel where we would be staying. We were allotted some rooms on one side of the inside patio. On the other side the head of the political police and other security chiefs were staying. It was to be indeed ironic. I had just left my luggage in the room and was preparing to go to the city-hall when I was asked to go down to the patio. There were already some twenty people gathered there ~~including~~ largely women in indian dress and children. There were one or two journalists with them, one who had himself escaped from several ~~death~~ <sup>assassination</sup> attempts. The group immediately descended on me. "Father my husband has been taken away by the police, can you please bring him back to me". One pleaded with me and then the others each began pleading for someone else in their family. Some spoke only in Quechua and that was translated to me. We began to move out on the street down towards the City hall and the procession began to get bigger and bigger. At that stage many were distraught with tears and I myself began to feel so helpless as I saw them gather with their children victims of ~~such a~~ a situation which they could not understand. Finally we got into the City Hall where the special meeting was just beginning ~~getting on~~. The Lady Mayoress spoke briefly and to the point. She was determined to bring justice and peace to the area and one of the major problems was that so many people had been disappeared by the security forces. She was very thankful to our coming to help deal with that problem. Then the representatives of the town spoke including many lawyers, parliamentarians and it suddenly began to hit me that the problem was indeed a most dramatic



one. Hundreds of families were affected and people were been disappeared every day with total impunity by the security forces on suspicion alone. The hall itself had now nearly ~~two~~ two hundred people attending the meeting the vast majority women and children families of the disappeared. Later we discovered that some had travelled many hours to come and had been waiting since 7am in the morning. Finally one woman spoke and as she explained the situation of a young son who had been disappeared a wave of anguish overcame the entire hall and all except the few 'planted' security guards finished in tears. For those of us who have lived that situation in other countries one finds oneself getting very bitter and agry at seeing new families going through the same anguish as thousands of others had lived. It reminded me of the families I had seen some months previously in Bogota, Honduras and above all Argentina. As the time had gone by very quickly the meeting ended and people were told to come back the following day when we would attend each one individually. The city hall was to be the meeting place.

It was still an hour or two before curfew time(8pm - 5 am) so we decided to visit a priest in a nearby church whom we had been referred to by the attorney general. We eventually found him and with a lot of fear explained to us some of the realities of the area. It has been over a year now since the priests began attending outlying missions and they scarcely left the city. They were themselves offering some food to the people fleeing from the areas. He had recently been witness to the 'finding' of some six bodies that were dumped in a place near the city. He was shocked by what he saw and was prepared to help in what he could once he could be assured that no political mileage would be got out of his initiatives. I tried best to explain to him that in these situations the most important thing is to save peoples lives and we have our conscience to answer for. While we are working on totally humanitarian level there is no doubt that that is oftentimes construed as been politically motivated. He can be well assured that there is no 'senderista' supporter even the most remote one among us. We got back to a local lawyers office where we met a University professor from the nearby town of Huanta whose brother had been assassinated and another brother disappeared in the previous month. He said it would be very important that we pay a surprised visit



to Huanta and try and get into the local football stadium which was been used as a secret detention center for prisoners. I suggested that Loyola should go with a Peruvian parliamentarian as she could get by less conspicuously. However I was ruled down as it was decided that a priest should be in the delegation and the military commander might have more trust in such a delegation. We then spent a long time sorting out numerous papers and files telling us of all the barbarities which had been committed in the area over the last months.

By the time we got back to the Hostal around 8.30 there was not a soul to be found in the streets and the city had gone into a deadly type of silence. That immediately struck me as normally in Latin American cities one at night hears dogs barking, cocks crowing and people moving around. Here even the dogs seemed to be silent. I had never thought of it before but maybe animals can also become terrified to silence. We prepared two types of forms for receiving case information <sup>the next day</sup> one for general data and the other with specific antropometric information in order to help in body identification. By the time we got to the town hall <sup>in the morning</sup> there was already a queue of people waiting and we decided to start with those who had travelled farthest.

There were three of us receiving the information but by mid morning we had scarcely made any headway and there were over a hundred people waiting the. We decided then to hand out the forms so that they could be filled in by other people and later handed. Several times I had to go to a shop nearby which had a photocopy machine to reprint the forms. The situation got even more chaotic as more and more people arrived. I found that I had become so nervous by the entire situation and the fact that people really seemed to have the impression that we would magically get their loved ones back by the following day. The military are really massacring hundreds of people as if they were animals and no one in the world not even in Peru seems to be interested. Our constant message to the families was to get themselves organised and fight this terror with the only tools they got that is public denouncement and ethical appeal. The last we thought of was a lunch break and in very little time the car had arrived for me to take some of us to Huanta. Deputy Galindo and Aurelio our cameraman and myself soon found ourselves leaving the town through a very strict road block and out into the open mountainside. Someone joked what would we do if we were held up by the 'senderistas'. "They certain-



ly can be no worse than the military " someone answered . Some miles along the road we came on some houses which had once served as a police station and had been blown up . An other remarked how really stupid it was to station police in such an unprotected area. The road eventually began to wind down into a very green valley and soon we found ourselves pulling up in the central square of the town. It was about 3,30 in the afternoon but seemed almost a ghost town. There were one or two journalists waiting and we decided to go right on ahead to visit the football stadium. It was situated on the edge of the town and overlooking it but the wall surrounding it had been visibly reinforced with sentries on the different corners. As I drove up to the gate with the sign Estadio Municipal de Huanta and another sign which read tickets here I could not be reflect back on the scene from Chsta Gavras film 'missing' when Mr. Horman enters the football stadium of Santiago Chile to search for his son. Here we are over 10 years late going to another stadium on exactly the same errand.

The two guards on the gate looked at us nerviously . They called in on field telephone to their commander and we were told to wait. Meantime a jeep loaded with soldiers came out. They were obviously going out on patrol and looked at us nerviously. Aurelio began filming them and then he was order by the soldiers to stop. This was a security place and so could not be photographed.

Finally the 'commander' arrived. A well built man with a military clothes, dark sun glasses and a base ball cap. The gate was opened and he presented himself as Commander 'LinX' . We briefly explained our mission and our desire to speak with him. He said yes we could speak there at the gate. Finally we convinced him to invite us to a more comfortable place in order to speak.

He lead us in through the football stadium. There were open cement stands on both sides of the wide pitch and we were escorted in through the central door on the nearby stands and brought to a small room which served as office-cum-bedroom for the commander. When we were seated he offered us cigarettes and excused himself that he could not identify himself - it was orders in the area but he was the political commander of the entire region around Huanta and had been in the post some 30 days. He ordered no photographs to be taken nor recordings to be made. Shortly



he began to explain his role in the area which he defined as as a 'repressive' one as they were involved in a total war against terrorism. He agreed with us that what was really needed in the area were economic and social solutions but he had his job to do. 'Terrorism here is not just a question of hungry peasants trying to get a better deal. It is a ideological question' He illustrated that point explaining that he had just captured a young boy of some 12 years of age who had attacked a army patrol with a timber gun. He had the model gun hanging from just over his bed. That youngster had been recruited by the terrorists and later apparently confessed that he had been responsible for 2 ~~xxxxxx~~ deaths. 'His father could not believe it until the son confessed to him' affirmed the commander. 'I myself have two kids just a year or two under and they are just interested in swimming and sport. One can see how the terrorists are spreading their poison among the kids'. He then admitted that in the countryside there are no men or boys left. They have all fled or been forced into the guerrilla. "The problem with so called abuses by us here is that they are really committed by the senderistas who dress up as soldiers and then murder and disappear the population. For example I can show you know some 6 bodies nearby which have been killed by the senderistas " The commander was now warming quite a lot in the conversation and I could scarcely believe what I was hearing. We began to question him rather timidly. {Did he not feel that the law should be respected by the security forces in their task of ~~xxx~~ counterinsurgency ? ' Commander 'Linx' answered that he had his own conscience and was a devout catholic having in fact a brother who is a priest. "The Law is alright but one needs a strong hand to deal with terrorism. Foreexample if I approach a house at night and no one answers I have to break in because it can only mean that there is no one at home or if there is they don't want to open it for some reason . I then have to bring the prisoners here hooded so as to avoid possible identification of informers or would be informers. " There had been numerous testimonies about people been disappeared and assassinated by the military in this region and we were dumbfounded at hearing the commander practically admitting it. 'I had 30 prisoners here up to yesterday when I freed them all except one who has been sent to Ayacucho'. Some one picked up enough courage to ask him if we could inspect the place . 'No, sir, this is a top secret place and you can not go around'. However he did admit that in his region he had four other detention centres ~~xxxxxx~~ similar to this one.



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abhor. That gives them a sense of power and authority which is so sinister and dangerous. As we neared Ayacucho again we had come to one firm conclusion. The relatives were indeed telling us the truth and the situation seemed only like getting worse.

Our colleagues were still in the city hall taking cases and we joined them to continue the work. They had a major problem with one suspicious character who began gathering papers from the people as if he were working with us and then refused to hand over the material to us. One of our group had to snatch the material out of his hand. We began then to be more careful and to realize that the security forces were watching us more than closely. I began attending some cases. It was a family of which the mother had been knocked over by a bus and was paralysed but the company would not even pay hospital expenses. I tried to explain as best I could that really we were dealing with the question of disappeared persons so there was nothing really we could do. When one had been hearing so many incidents of people been disappeared, tortured or assassinated my immediate thoughts were at least that woman has not been disappeared. On reflection one realizes how unjust that situation also is.

That Night we worked on the information received. We had now some 80 cases or more. The following day we would work all the time on cases. We had scarcely begun to work the following day Wednesday when some people came to tell us about a case which happened the previous night. Some two blocks away there was a wake going on for a young child. At about 2 AM a group of hooded police broke in and took away the father and another son. Added to the problem was the fact that the father had all the papers for the burial in his pocket so the child could not be buried without those papers. The Peruvian parliamentarians began to immediately search around the police stations but to no result. I began to settle down to some interviews. I was asked to take the testimony from a woman who had traveled over a hundred miles. She was a tall well built woman whom I thought at first to be in her fifties only to discover that she was in her late thirties and had 7 children. She had two of them with her. The youngest some two years old was noising a lot and so she began to breast feed the child but she continued after a while. It



He then explained how he was trying to keep discipline among his own troops. He had just order two soldiers to be sent to a military tribunal recently because they had both shot and killed a woman and a child. It seemed to him to have been a very daring initiative and was not at all perturbed that he could have under his command troops who readily shoot woman and children. Someone began explaining how on the way up we had seen a plain clothes patrol car with many woman in the car and plenty of beer. He immediately called for another officer who then dispatched a patrol with orders to bring to the base the commanding officer of those agents. I am afraid I was not terribly impressed by this rather stilted campaign on corruption. We thanked him for his hospitality and the Peruvians exhorted him to recovering the lost prestige of the Peruvian military and hopefully he would guarantee that abuses be not committed. It was later explained to me that this officer was indeed quite a decent individual. As we were leaving the stadium he began to express his sympathy with the university professor whose brother had been assassinated and another disappeared. 'I am really saddened by what has happened but of course cannot judge if it was justified or not'. That remark of Commander 'Linux' has stayed with me as quite clearly it shows his concrete attitude - there can indeed be a justification for the method of assassination or disappearance if the victim is 'involved' in terrorism. When we got back to the central plaza in Huanta we had an impromptu press conference, and there were some relatives who wished to lodge some cases with us. Just a few days ago I received a report that one of those journalists with us that day was himself 'disappeared' recently.

The journey back gave us an opportunity to evaluate the meeting and the events of the evening. We never thought that we would get so far as to speak with the commander himself. In fact that area under his command is one of the worse in the region because the soldiers are all from the navy and know no quechua and despise the Andean people a lot. The car slowed as some children were driving their ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ goats home. That military officer was really living in another world surprised that children here were not interested in swimming or in sport. One conclusion I drew from the meeting was that it really is impossible for a civilian to have a dialogue with a military officer. There is no common language. They are either trained to or used to kill something which most civilians



was obvious the mother had no milk. The two kids were blond haired due to the malnutrition and as the conversation went on I began to realise that the kids were in fact dying from hunger. As the mother could not speak Spanish I got the help of a very attentive translator and she explained how several months previously her husband a peasant farmer was arrested by the police and then disappeared. She then recounted her search through different police stations. How in one she had to pay some 15\$ to get information. She knew her children were dying but what could she do. She wanted her husband back. I then asked her if she had other relatives in the area. She ~~broke~~<sup>down</sup> and then said no. She was on her own, and had not got the fare to go to her mother's place which was some distance away. It was quite clear also that she had been 'nourishing' herself with coco leaves which is common only used in the area to stave off hunger. It usually leaves a person's teeth in a very bad way and can sometimes produce a local paralysis. I told her to go around to a local church for some help, slipped her some money and tried to give her some words of encouragement. If I had met this case before seeing commander 'Linx' I certainly would not have been as polite.

Earlier on in the morning some employees from the town council had escorted in two men saying that they had come a long distance and wanted to speak with us. They had been sitting very quietly for over an hour and then I got around to attending them. They looked indeed very frightened and I immediately thought that it would be to denounce some massacre of their families. They began to explain that they were farmers and have had always a good relationship with the police in their area regularly giving them some animals or selling ~~them~~ to them when they needed meat. However over the last few weeks the police have begun to openly harass and have begun shooting their cattle. One had already five sheep killed and the other one cow leaving him with one good cow and a heifer with which to support his family. The previous day the police were on patrol and shot that cow together with the calf and a sheep. He had with him the heads of both animals. They both opened a poncho they were carrying there they had the two heads of the animals. One could quite clearly see the bullet wounds around the mouth of the cow. Foreseeing perhaps that perhaps the next shots could well be against him, or realising the now



precarious situation in which his family was due to their dependence for survival for the cow, he broke down completely. It was then I began to realise that indeed for a peasant of that area an animal such as a cow or a goat or sheep are almost part of the family itself. He had already made the official complaint but it is doubtful if he will ever get compensation. I offered them both a cigarette but they refused saying they were evangelicals. At that stage each one of the delegation receiving cases were going through the same shocking experiences as I was. It was indeed a baptism by fire for all of us. One family in fact had brought as evidence the very clothes the victim was wearing when he was arrested and then assassinated by the police. They had found his body but could not move it so they took some of the clothes with them. The body had since been devoured by animals and could not be moved as the judge did not go to ~~make~~ carry out that task. About mid morning a group arrived at the hall in an obviously perturbed situation. They were accompanying a young girl of some 9 years of age who had just arrived from her home some 35 miles away. The children together with an aunt began to explain the situation. <sup>Her</sup> ~~their~~ father

had been disappeared some months previously and on Saturday her mother left the home to go a nearby village to the market. She as the eldest daughter was left in control of her younger brothers and sisters. However her mother had not returned and yesterday she got the word from a neighbour that her mother had been arrested some 2 days previously in that village.

She immediately decided to go to Ayacucho to tell her aunt and had left the house around 4 AM ~~xx~~. The child was now anxious to return to her family to see how her younger brothers and sisters were doing. The situation was indeed a tragic one. I found myself been numbed into silence realising that in that area the children had to take on not only the work of adults but also their immense problems. Because of the effects on children it has now been proven that the problems which the disappearances provoke in the family and the community increase rather than decrease with time.

We tried to mobilise some people on the case but everything seemed so hopeless. In that another young girl approached me saying that her brother had been arrested that morning and was in such a place. If some adult went he would be released. I decided to go during the lunch break. After been severely questioned we were allowed into the court area and she immediately brought me to an office. "He is in there seated behind the door". I went



in and there was no child to be found. The attendant informed me that the boy's uncle had come to take him away. The young girl went off not totally convinced that her brother had been released. She could scarcely blame her.

We stayed on working late that evening and got an opportunity to speak with many of the town hall employees. All had some personal experience of repression. In fact one youth who helped me in the translations came to me asking me for some forms as he wished to submit information on two near relatives who were disappeared. He did not know about ~~the situation and our mission~~ our mission until he began to translate for us.

By that evening we had some two hundred cases so we decided to make a resume of all those cases and present them in a letter the following day to the political military authorities of the area. We worked practically all night on the cases we found ourselves with some 172 cases with 19 more in the month of January which we considered of particular urgency. Apart from that figure which is indeed a frightening one we had many other cases of assassinations and some also of imprisonment. Some families had denounced the execution of one of their relatives by the 'senderistas' and they were really in the same situation of abandonment as the others. From that fact we began to draw the conclusion that the political military command is more orientated towards an extermination practically of the quechua indian people rather than a selective approach against terrorism.

Up to that morning we had practically no chance to get to know the town. Aurelio our photographer wanted to get some shots of the city and the neighbourhoods so we decided that the best moment would be early in the morning just after curfew. I accompanied him on his tour.

Just after leaving the hostel as we were approaching a street corner we were both totally surprised to find a masked policeman standing guard on a corner. At first I felt like returning to the hostel but Aurelio was already filming it so we decided to carry on. We quickly saluted him. He had a black woolen mask just with eye-slits



pulled down over his face. As we were passing him we suddenly found ourselves passing an armored car where there were about 6 masked police sitting armed to the teeth. Some had dozed off to sleep. What shocked me was the masks and they were wearing them as perfectly normally. As we continued up the road my friend began to film some of the police as they very roughly began searching some women who were passing down. We were immediately called back and escorted into a nearby building where we were briefly interrogated and had to produce all our ~~xxxxxx~~ passports etc. For a moment I thought we were in serious trouble as we began to wrangle with the police and their arrogance. Particularly Aurelio was sick of all he was seeing. We were left to go eventually and continued our tour.

There were many reports that one of the major expressions of the 'senderista' group was that during the night they hoisted red flags on different locations. Some news reports gave the impression that every morning the city was decorated with red flags. In fact we only saw one in quite an out of the way place. They were many slogans painted on the walls including one 'Long live Mao-tse-tung and the Peking four'- rather out of place it seemed. The majority were appeals to the police to stop the repression.

Interestingly we were told later that that very day the city had been decorated by dozens of red flags. We could venture only for one. Among many people there is the conviction that the military in the area forever exaggerate the threat ~~text~~ of the terrorists and that in fact the military themselves haul up some red flags as well.

We were retruning back for breakfast when a woman called us over. She was standing in the doorway of a corner house. We then recognised her as the mother of two boys who were ~~his~~ arrested and disappeared out of her house just before Christmas. She showed us how the door had been ~~xxxxxxxixixix~~ forced open that night. When they took her two sons one aged 14 the other 18 she was herself locked in by the police. 'If I could have got out I would have followed even if they 'd tried to kill me' Standing in the doorway one seemed to be almost a witness to the entire action. The Armored car was parked nearby. The police got out pulled down their masks. Broke in the door, pulled out the youngsters and brought them off in the armed car to some barracks which serves as a secret detention centre.



There the prisoners are beaten and brutally tortured and many later are assassinated. We did receive one very moving testimony of conditions in those centre in Ayacucho. She was a primary school teacher and one night the police raided her house and began dragging her brother out of his bedroom. She woke and went to the door and then found herself dragged out with him. She was held over a week in secret detention centre where she was brutally tortured and was witness to the torments her brother suffered. They had refused to give him even water so after some five days she heard her brother pleading with his torturers to have pity on him and shoot him. The following day she saw a body been removed from a nearby cell and someone informed her that it was her brother but she had no certainty.

We asked the woman the name of the neighbourhood 'Libertad' she said which literally translated means freedom. Indeed there was little more we could say to her.

It is amazing how the human being can survive out of the most difficult of situations and people begin to organise their resistance in the most terrific of situations. A mother explained to us what had happened her son. He was arrested disappeared and the police decided to execute him. They hooded him and took him out on a lonely mountainside. There were four police officers and each one had to fire a shot to kill him. Apparently they were at this stage drunk. One shot glazed his neck. The next two failed to fire and the last shot hit him high on the shoulders knocking him over and the police went leaving him for dead. He managed to get up and reach a neighbour's house and his mother got him to hospital. Now her worry was that on discharge from hospital he would surely be killed. We could offer little more consolation to that mother than the extraordinary luck her son had.

During our short stay in the city some local groups decided to come together to form a human rights committee. It has some 7 or 8 member organizations and its president is the dean of the local lawyers guild. They decided to offer a press conference in the town hall to launch the new committee with us in attendance. Like most human rights press conferences where the victims of the violations participate the conference extended to



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become a a three hour meeting. We all said a few words . I tried to make present the church there . It was no easy task. I had spoken with the Archbishop and he had a lot of problems understanding what was happening in the area. He was helping in giving some food to the victims and those fleeing but it was not much. He was concerned that they had to close many churches because some robberies were happening and they had very valuable works of art in the Churches. I did try to assure the many families present in the hall that even though they were rejected and persecuted in God's eyes they were indeed very precious. God was party to their struggle for justice and peace and they were a noble people in His Eyes. ~~Infalt~~ They are not many times when one feels totally contented that one is making a useful contribution to other people as a missionary priest. On that occasion in a very haphazard kind of way I felt that people were benefitting by my presensece.

Finally a woman asked to speak - she came with her six children and began to speak in quechua. She was dressed in black and afterwards her words were translated. Her husband was a street seller and was arrested and disappeared with her eldest son who was ~~withher~~ later released. She began her search and was informed that her husband was more than likely ~~assassinated~~. She had found the body of her husband in one place but the police standing guard told her to return the next day. When she did it was gone. She continued searching so much that the other relatives know her affectionately as the 'Bodysearcher' She then manage to discover him again together with others in another place. There the police opened fire on her and she managed to escape. She ended her testimony pleading that she had nothing in this life neither a house, nor land, nor possessions that at least she could get her husband's body back and her children would get a chance. The meeting ended and as we were to leave the following day we began to say our goodbyes. We had an impromptu meeting with the families. They planned some ~~activities~~ future activities and we promised to work with them as best we could. One could see already that a new spirit was coming over them as they saw a perspective to their struggle and that they could do something concretely. We spoke about similar experiences in other countries and that it is only when all the families begin to stand up and say no that this terror they are living can begin to be stopped.



The following day we had to leave fairly early. We had requested an audience with General Huaman Military Political Commander of the Antire Region. His secretary rang early to say that he could meet with one of the group. That person said it had to be with all and there the ~~xxxxx~~ matter rested. We decided to hand him over the letter with the cases. We got the letter registered but instead of handing it in personally as is normal practice the public notary sent it by post to the General's office some 8 blocks away. He was taking no risks. Later on in the morning we met a military liaison officer in the town hall inquiring as to the names of those presiding the different organisations which had taken place in the meeting the day before. The names of course were not given however someone suggested in the future that one should give him a list of nicknames as they the military normally do.

We spent the last hour in Ayacucho trying to explore the possibility of some legal assistance and humanitarian aid for the families and as we were piling our luggage into a waiting pick up truck to go to the airport, we were called to a meeting with a group of people who had come from a nearby village. They were the survivors of a massacre which had taken place November 13th 1983 in their village which is named Soccos. The police had raided a marriage celebration and taken away many of the people murdering them over thirty in all. Among the survivors who came to see us was a grandmother who had been witness to the massacre itself. All were dressed in black including the children and there was terror in their eyes which was frightening. I have never witnessed a massacre of people but been with those people is almost witnessing it. Television particularly conveys very little of the real drama involved as it gives just a snapshot of any situations. It's not just the gruesome details of a massacre but what precedes and follows it. Some people can possibly never sleep again for many years. It was one of the final images we brought with us as we left Ayacucho. The survivors of Soccos many of whom with little doubt will themselves become ~~victimxxxxx~~ future victims as they are the witnesses for ~~xxxxxx~~ possible investigations, and prosecutions of the police involved.

Returning to Lima was like arriving in another country.