

THE CORNER OF DEATH IN AYACUCHO

The department of Ayacucho seems a long way away from Lima the capital city of Peru. Lima is a typically Latin American city whereas Ayacucho and the surrounding area is dominantly Indian in culture and language. But it is the conflict which has engulfed that entire region during the last two years that have made it so special and different to Lima and the rest of the country. The situation had become so critical that Peruvian president Belaunde Terry decided to move the military into the area for Christmas of 1982. They came to relieve the beleaguered ^{ER} police in the struggle against a locally organised guerrilla movement which identifies itself by a messianic style name 'Shining Path' (Sendero Luminoso). Complete political and military control of the area was handed over to the military on arriving and not surprising they ^{ER} have stayed. Very soon stories of Army abuse of the local population began to reach Lima and a group of journalists were assigned to the area. Towards the end of January 1983 eight of them were murdered in a remote locality in the region known as Uchuraccay. Since that time ^{ER} even the bravest of journalists tend to keep away from the area. Needless to say all investigations into the Army's role in the massacre of the journalists have now practically been halted as some of the key witnesses in that small village have died from a mysterious stomach complaint. And there is very little news from Ayacucho in Lima itself apart from the fact that the military have reported some 3,000 people dead in the conflict there since they ^{ER} moved in.

We had begun to hear about the situation during the 4th Congress of the Latin American Federation of Families of Disappeared prisoners (FEDEFAM) in Mexico last November. The representatives of some 20 different committees of families of disappeared or assassinated political prisoners decided to send a delegation to visit Peru. It was in late January 1984 that ^{ER} Loyola Guzman bolivian president of FEDEFAM and I as executive secretary arrived in Peru to carry out ^{THE} mission.

^{IN LIMA} He spent a week interviewing different people including the Presidents of the Supreme Court and the General Attorney in order to form some opinion about the situation. The Attorney General was the most interesting. He had caused a virtual earthquake in the Government some months previously when he spoke of the importance of initiating some form of dialogue between the 'Shining Path' movement and the Government. It almost cost him his job even though the ^{ER} Attorney General is supposedly appointed along strict non-partisan lines. However he spent his time with us trying to convince us that we were better advised in not visiting Ayacucho itself. It would be very difficult to get hotel space, the commanding officer of the area, General Huaman was himself now in Lima and people would never speak to two foreigners like ourselves.