

Assignment in Peru

by PETER PATSAKOS

THE telephone rang. Peru calling. Could the Henry George School send someone to teach economics in Spanish at a university in Arequipa? That's how it began.

Staff members at New York headquarters were a bit incredulous, and at times, even after the first visit of Nicholas Reynoso, director of PACE, the Peruvian American Cultural Exchange, there were strong doubts as to whether this teaching assignment would actually be carried out.

However, on the 20th of June I arrived in Arequipa, the second largest city in the country, to teach at Santa Maria, a Catholic university. I was permitted to stay with a native family who made me feel welcome and treated me as one of their own. The director of the university greeted me with sincerity and warmth. It was arranged that I should teach five days a week, from late June until the first week of December, to a little more than 100 of the second year students.

Despite my brief acquaintance with the language and the country, the course was well received. At first students hesitated to join in the discussions, as the Socratic question and answer approach was new to them. After a while, however, some of them said they preferred this to the lecture method which had become the accustomed pattern. Especially gratifying was the fact that students appreciated a philosophy that could effectively counter the Marxist concepts dominating the curriculum at Arequipa's only other university. Among the students at least 15 were exceptional, and a few announced their intention of majoring in economics as a result of their exposure to the Henry George philosophy.

Santa Maria is only two years old. It is supported by tuition fees comparable with those in other private universities, and by contributions from business firms and foundations. Father Robert Morris, the director, and those assisting him, plan to make it a model Peruvian university. There are about 400 students, mostly from what would be considered the middle class. The enrollment is about equally divided between boys and girls.

The national universities in Peru have "co-government" which gives the student body a large amount of influence in determining school policy. This system in some instances resulted in strikes and violent political demonstrations which had no relation to the academic program. Therefore the authorities at Santa Maria have rejected co-government.

Some Peruvians criticize the American aid program claiming that most of the money goes to those who "have" and very little to those who "have not." The Alliance for Progress and the Peace Corps are accepted with mixed feelings. The latter was looked upon at first with skepticism, but since its members accept the same living conditions as the lowest native social-economic groups, it has helped to establish good will. Alliance for Progress funds for housing projects and other works are made available by low-interest loans through the semi-private Board of Industrial Development.

Peru has a small but powerful landed class which controls most of the nation's industry and commerce. President Belaude is trying to improve social and economic conditions and to decentralize the country by allowing the cities to elect their mayors and other officials, instead of having them

appointed from Lima. His projected agrarian reform program of purchasing and redistributing land, does not deal with the problem in a fundamental manner, but it is hoped that it will prove effective in avoiding an explosion. This would be paid for with bonds, and will apply only to unused or poorly used lands. Peasants are continuing to invade the large landholdings, and if a palliative is not offered the nation may fall into the hands of extremists.

An encouraging sign is that the Christian Democrat party has introduced a bill to increase the taxes on unused or underused sites in the cities. While this is not as desirable as land value taxation, it seems to indicate awareness of the part a tax reform could play in improving the economy.

All such subjects were discussed with enthusiasm in my classes. Our textbooks were *Progress and Poverty*, *Protection or Free Trade* and *The Science of Political Economy* by Henry George. In addition I used *Agrarian Reform in America* by C. P. Carranza, an Argentine Georgist. All these books were in Spanish. Since this economics class was mandatory for all second year students, there were a number who attended as a matter of course;

however, all were required to take an examination each week.

Peru is an interesting country to visit. The scenery around Arequipa is beautiful, with lofty snow-capped El Misti in the distance and fertile valleys within easy reach. The natives will often go out of their way to help a stranger. Tourists find the food delicious, fresh and inviting, without preservatives of any kind.

Latin America may be the next "emerging area"—and let me emphasize that one should not generalize about these countries. While they have much in common with each other, there are also great differences, for instance, between Argentina and Bolivia, and between Ecuador and Costa Rica.

The urgency most often expressed is the same as that found elsewhere in the world — improvement of the living standard. Those of us who understand Henry George's philosophy of freedom know the answer, and should do all we can to expound it to the many who must "have right thought before right action can follow." I hope I left a few seeds in Arequipa that will grow and multiply.

Peter Patsakos is now assistant director at the Henry George School succeeding Laurence Kobak who left to take a commercial position.



In Spanish it's *Progreso y Miseria*

The new Spanish language *Progress and Poverty* has just been published by Fomenta de Cultura, Valencia, Spain, in cooperation with the Robert Schalkenbach Foundation of New York. This complete and unabridged 590-page edition was translated by the Spanish Georgist leader, Baldomero Argente, and is in large, clear type. It includes a preface by Mr. Argente and a useful index. Cloth bound copies are \$3.50 and paperbacks, planned especially for student use, are \$2, both available from the Henry George School, 50 East 69th Street, New York 21, N.Y.