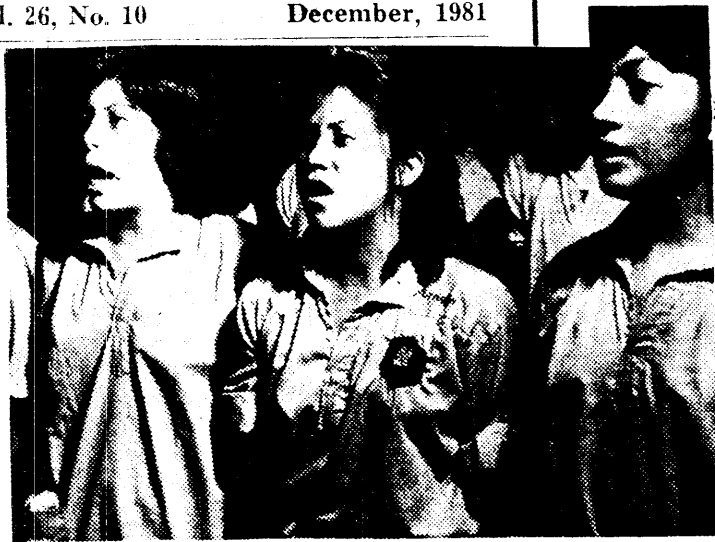




The four horsemen of the Apocalypse



Women in the Nicaraguan revolution

Barricada photo

In-person report on Nicaragua, Peru, Mexico

Latin America's revolutionary spirit

by Anne Molly Jackson [Anne Jackson]

From Nicaragua, which is trying to deepen its revolution in spite of economic strangulation by the U.S.; to Peru, where the government's new repressive measures only highlight the contrasts between the law and the continuous mass revolts; to Mexico, where liberal foreign policy cannot mask either the exploitation or resistance of everyone from peasants to intellectuals—Latin America sizzles with revolutionary activity and thought.

Everywhere there are new and growing organizations of industrial workers and domestic workers, neighborhood organizations and peasant groups, women's and youth organizations. And everywhere they are discussing such questions as: What is the relationship between international capitalism and our conditions of life? What is the relationship between revolution and women's liberation movements? Can we not only overthrow the old governments and kick out U. S. imperialism, but also build a new society based on human needs and creativity?

'EVERYTHING IS DIFFERENT NOW — THE CHILDREN ARE HAPPY'

It is not possible to know a country in a few days spent in and around the capital city, but in Nicaragua the people are so full of revolutionary spirit and purpose that even Managua is beautiful. "Even Managua" because at first the city shocks: the downtown area destroyed by the earthquake of 1972 has not been rebuilt, and many housing accommodations are flimsy shacks or the rubble of destroyed buildings. People are very poor but full of hope and concern for one another. Without seeing the agricultural areas where perhaps the most change has occurred, it is still clear from talking with workers, teachers and housewives that the revolution is very much alive.

Most impressive are the grass-roots organizations of women, workers and youth who are trying to deepen that revolution by working out new economic and social relationships. The Pre-Cooperativa Nueva Nicaragua, for

example, began just six months ago when five neighborhood women with sewing machines, organized by the Sandinista women's organization AMNLAE, began to plan, buy, make and sell clothing collectively. In an interview (see p. 9) they discussed not only their increased income, but what they have learned about work, their participation in civic affairs, the changes in their home lives, their library and plans for a child care center. As one woman said, "Everything is different now—the children are happy."

Such forceful women are the backbone of the current health campaigns, which have already eliminated three major diseases. In the November malaria campaign, which tried to get every person in the country to take anti-malaria pills on the same three days so that the cycle of the disease could be broken, one saw what mass participation means. While many pills were dispensed at jobs and schools, at least one person per block had to volunteer to take the census and keep visiting the homes to make the campaign work. Women did this with enthusiasm.

Last year's literacy campaign, which lowered illiteracy from 50 percent to 13 percent, laid the basis for continued mass mobilizations. Under the slogan "literacy is liberation," 100,000 volunteers were given a pair of boots, a mosquito net, blanket and Coleman lamp, anti-malaria and water purification pills, and were sent out in the countryside. They taught in people's native languages, including English and Indian tongues on the Atlantic Coast, and in Braille. The feeling of living history pervades the small museum which houses posters and charts, letters of appreciation from those who learned to read and write, and personal effects of brigadistas who died from accidents or diseases.

AMNLAE organizes women in groups as small as two to five in factories and plantations, rural and urban communities, centers of study, state and private institutions, markets and hospitals. It backs a union of domestic workers which has succeeded in changing the law to limit their hours of work to ten per day and raised their pay and benefits. There is also an active organization of youth, including young children. Now all children go to school but as there are not enough facilities, many are

MEXICO: OIL RESERVES, POVERTY, STRIKES

The political climate in Mexico is not very different from Peru, in spite of the Mexican government's liberal veneer in foreign policy, such as its backing the guerrillas in El Salvador. While that is important to the Central American revolutions, and while the Mexicans are understandably nationalistic after so many years of domination by their neighbor to the north, neither foreign policy, nor the oil reserves, are changing the lives of the millions of poor, hungry and unemployed. The economy is in the same grip of international capital as Nicaragua's and Peru's; in fact Mexico, Brazil and Venezuela together owe 30 percent of the total debt service of the Third World.

Like Peru, there are strikes everywhere, and the government's response is repression. Even the intellectuals are not safe. The professors of the Universidad Autonoma Metropolitana were on strike in November, after the government passed a new anti-labor law which invalidated 102 clauses of their union contract. The law, which contravenes constitutional guarantees of workers' rights, takes away such protections of the professors' autonomy as their having an independent group to decide on admissions of students and promotions of professors. When the professors refused to accept the changes and struck, two were jailed and more were threatened. Other unions and students in all the universities were holding meetings, demonstrations and raising money in support.

At the same time, 12,800 Volkswagen of Mexico factory workers were on strike in various parts of the country, in opposition to the lay-off of 800 workers and in support of a change in union leadership. In a union election at the end of October they had voted out the president of the union for compromising with the bosses, but he was trying to retain control of the union. A demonstration in support of the striking workers on Nov. 10 in Mexico City turned out 10,000 unionists, Leftists and others.

In a country without enough food for its people, the conditions of the peasants and small farmers are getting worse. A new law "to increase production" resulted in the further erosion of small farm holdings, and increased concentration and capitalization of the land for export production. When peasant protests broke out the government suspended the law, at least until after next year's elections.

Peasants are organizing cooperatives and land takeovers, but it is still common for private capitalist armies to murder peasants for trying to organize and even for refusing to sell their land or demanding a decent price. One of the poorest states, Oaxaca, has had a strong peasant movement, including land takeovers, for the past two years, and many have been killed.

The women's liberation groups have creative approaches to Mexico's problems. One group, the Collective of Solidarity Action with Domestic Workers, is helping to organize women whom unions and Left alike have ignored. There are one-half million domestic workers in Mexico City alone, and women's groups in other cities are working in this area as well. They are trying to enforce the minimum wage as well as to encourage skills and dignity in these forgotten women. Other women's liberation organizations are fighting to legalize abortion, protesting violence against women on Nov. 25, the international day set by the first Latin American women's conference in July, and doing theoretical work.

Discussions in all three countries found feminists, intellectuals and ordinary people concerned with the relationship between men and women at home and in the workplace; about the effects of imperialism and the limitations of nationalism; about the question of world revolution. Everywhere there was hunger for news of the "other U.S." which opposes Reagan, and an interest in Marxist-Humanist philosophy. The dialogue between North and South American revolutionaries is more necessary than ever.

on double shifts. There are a few child care centers, which take infants as young as one-and-a-half months, and in many families there is increased participation in family responsibilities by men and boys.

The terrible poverty makes one wonder whether the present policy of walking a tightrope between private capitalism and any kind of socialism can succeed. One yearns to see the full release of the human creativity that made that revolution. At present, the threat of U. S. intervention and the dire state of the economy have everyone worried. Since the government assumed Somoza's national debt in order to be able to get credit from international banks, and since the U. S. cut off promised economic aid, the U. S. can manipulate the economy as it did in Chile and as it does daily in Latin America, especially in Peru.

PERU: A LAND OF CONTRADICTIONS

Peru is a country of glaring contradictions, where international capital's economic domination hits you wherever you go. It seems as if every corporation in the world, from Aji-no-moto to Swiss chemical companies to even the smallest U. S. companies, have set up shops in and around Lima. Modern industry has left the Peruvians with a debt to the international banking system of 12 billion dollars, a drop in real wages of 40 percent since 1973, vast unemployment and underemployment, and much actual starvation. In the last 10 years the currency has been devalued 400 percent; the vast shantytowns around Lima have not improved in 15 years, and new construction is seen only in the city.

At the same time, the revolt against these conditions is every bit as evident. There is not a wall in Lima,



News & Letters photo

Fundo Marquez shanty town, Lima, Peru

whether factory, shop or home, which is not covered with political slogans, and there seem to be almost as many new revolutionary groups to match them. There is labor organizing everywhere, a multiplicity of women's liberation groups, new Left and student organizations, and peasant uprisings. It is impossible to walk down the street in Lima without passing some place on strike, including, in one week in October, two government ministries and the customs workers, this in spite of the fact that public employees may not legally have unions!

Everyone has been on strike lately, from miners to doctors to bank employees. The government's response is to increase repressive measures, especially against workers and peasants outside Lima, who are shot in cold blood or tortured and imprisoned. In a recent general strike in Cuzco, the police killed a student by shooting into a demonstration.

The police and army use the excuse that they are looking for "terrorists" to terrorize the population, harassing and imprisoning intellectuals as well as murdering the poor. But the repression seems only to have increased the revolt. In addition to the continuous strikes

in traditional industries, new layers of the population are organizing, from university professors to nurses to domestic workers to other "women's industries"—candy, textiles and electronics—where labor disputes have led to factory occupations.

A visit to the Lucy factory found a handful of women who have been occupying the small premises for 16 months! A woman told how the owner had tried illegally to close their unionized shop by sending a truck to take away the machinery.

"It was May 9, 1980, Mother's Day. The owners had the idea to take apart the factory and leave us completely in the street. So we told the truck driver, 'You get out of here immediately or we'll burn your truck. We are defending our social rights.' For the next two days we worked all day and at night we stood guard out in the street, without sleeping, just sitting on newspapers."

Then the employer closed down, taking away the materials and machines, and the women began their occupation and their trips to the Ministry of Labor, trying to reopen the factory or at least to get severance pay.

Lima's growing women's liberation movement is involved with the struggles of working and poor women. Feminists such as ALIMUPER have supported the factory occupations with publicity, fund raising and street demonstrations against the government, which responded by turning the fire hoses on the women. Groups, including one named for Flora Tristan, are teaching classes to women in the slums and in the domestics' union, and offering legal assistance to battered and abandoned wives. The feminists recently restated their demand for legalized abortion by pointing to the latest case in which two peasant women were raped by soldiers engaged in repression, resulting in a pregnancy. At the same time, the feminists are trying to work out what they mean by "socialist feminism" and are engaged in theoretic work. They gave an enthusiastic welcome to a visiting Marxist-Humanist from the U. S.

Other new forms of revolt have involved the 200,000 street peddlers in Lima, who successfully resisted the government's attempt to clear them out and take away their only means of eking out a meager living.

Even in the shantytowns on the distant outskirts of Lima—without water, electricity, farmland or employment, they look like towns dropped onto the moon—people are organizing their own forms of working and learning, and are fighting the government daily. A group of professionals called Peru Mujer teaches classes in civics to women in some of these towns. A visit to a class, which begins with "Every person has a right to be called by his or her name, and not to be assaulted," found the women eager to learn and full of ideas of their own. Like Lima, the feeling of revolt is very close to the surface.

PERU INFORMATION

Readers who wish to keep informed of political and economic conditions in Peru should send a contribution to Peru Solidarity in return for its newsletter. The group is trying to educate people to the problems of hunger and repression which are killing people just as surely, though less dramatically, than the bullets elsewhere in Latin America. Write to Peru Solidarity at

Nicaraguan women's cooperative: 'Beyond the four walls'

Editor's Note: The following interview with women of the Pre-Cooperative Nueva Nicaragua was obtained by Anne Molly Jackson on her recent trip to Latin America.

Managua, Nicaragua — We started this cooperative six months ago. We were organized in AMNIAE (Asociacion de Mujeres Nicaraguenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza, the Sandinista women's organization) and we decided to do something. First we thought of a child care center, but for help the priority goes to the poorest neighborhoods. So we thought of a sewing cooperative. It is AMNIAE's first one.

We had no money so we raised a little by cooking the typical Nicaraguan dish and forming committees to sell it. After we collected 4,000 cordobas we started to buy material and thread. Each woman sewed at home on her own machine and often gave the cloth, all without earning any money.

When we had a certain amount of clothes we were able to get this building, only at the time it had no windows — it had been sacked in the war. So we had to bring the clothes here in the morning and take them home again at night. But we were well received in the neighborhood and started to sell our clothes, and with the first money we made we bought windows.

A COOPERATIVE DECISION

We began with five women, now we are 12. Everything is done cooperatively. We meet together and decide, for example, the style we're going to make this week. Two women do the buying, others do the designing, one is in charge of bookkeeping, one is in charge of production, one is secretary, one watches the quality control of the clothes. In a cooperative a decision is not made by one person, but by all. It's a way of having work for the companions with decent pay; it's something very big.

We decided to work eight hours a day, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. This allows us to organize our households in the morning, to make breakfast and leave the house somewhat in order. We don't have to spend time or money on transportation. We have time in the evenings — right now we are in the anti-malaria campaign. Every two weeks we have a meeting to discuss the future of the country.

We try to sell the clothes directly to people so the working woman can buy them at low prices. We have gotten some advice from the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Small Industry. In the beginning we got some work making uniforms. Workers in some of the ministries have formed food co-ops to buy more cheaply, and we have been allowed to sell clothing there. We

refuse to sell to retailers in the commercial centers who would triple the price they paid us. In December we are going to participate in a fair called La Pina of small industries and artisans' crafts.

BEYOND THE FOUR WALLS

The problem used to be getting the woman out of the house. The customs we have in these countries are that the man keeps the woman in the home, the woman sees nothing beyond the four walls of her house, always washing, ironing, caring for children. With the revolution we have achieved great things. The participation of the women is enormous now.

We still have problems with some of the husbands, yes. We have to educate them. Other women have no problems because their husbands are also organized and are working for the revolution, so they understand. The men have changed a lot, but many remain to be changed. We see one of the tasks in our organization is to change men and the education of our children. When children are small it used to be the "mujercita" (little woman) that helped the mother clean and care for the other children, not the father or boys. Now we know it has to be done in a cooperative form, that the husband cooperates as well, and the boys equally with the girls.

We are fighting to get out of the marginal area in

which women used to live. Before a woman could only be a secretary or garment worker or nurse, something like that. If there was not enough money in the home to educate all the children, the boys were favored over the girls. The male studied while you prepared for nothing but housework.

We plan some day to have a child care center; there are a number of them here in Managua. It's only two years since the revolution; we are going to have to sacrifice so our children can benefit. We would like to start a child care center and a dining hall. The idea is that the woman can leave the home in peace and participate in production and in all the tasks of the revolution.

Before the revolution we had no interest in politics or getting involved in such things, but we reached a moment in which the people saw the need to organize themselves to fight against the dictatorship. The participation of women was massive. Here, it is the women and the young who made the revolution.

Before, many of the women could not read a newspaper. Now they have educated themselves and read the papers every day, because we have to be up on what is happening here and in the world. Most went through primary school but are just going to secondary school now, at night. That's what the revolution wants too, that the woman raise her cultural level.

We are making a library right here in the shop. We've been collecting books from home and from what people give us. It's for ourselves and for the neighborhood. We are going to take a free day and visit all the embassies, asking them to give us books. Because the companions are also interested in the struggles of other countries as well.



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