

The difficult transition to democracy in the country of Incas

Peru, the remains of the sun

The night of Fujimori dictatorship, which lasted ten years, is finally over. But the dawn is still opaque, and Peruvian people are tired and discouraged. Yet this could be one of the best South American countries, without regretting the empire of the sun lost legacy. Hopes and illusions of a nation in electoral challenge between Alejandro Toledo and Alan Garcia

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"Peru is a beggar sitting on a treasure". The metaphor, very famous here, is attributed to an Italian scientist, Antonio Raimondi, who visited the Andean country in nineteenth century. Perhaps he was also puzzled by the irresistible charm of this country that a century later, continues to question its mysterious destiny, as tied to a spell that prevents it from enjoying its wealth.

Natural wealth, landscaping, material resources, wealth of history, culture, traditions, a paradise of anthropologists and naturalists, archaeologists and historians. Nothing to do. There seems to be a "Peruvian curse" that keeps the nation incredibly below its possibilities. As if the betrayal of Pizarro to the detriment of Atahualpa, Inca (emperor) of the extraordinary "Empire of the Sun," which stretched from Colombia to southern Chile, still shouted revenge.

Peru is perhaps the emblem of all Latin America, land of adventure and adventurers: here the mythical "El Dorado" is sought, here the illusion of wealth to plunder was printed in the DNA of the earth, starting with the name misunderstanding. Peru, a strange word that evokes fantasies of treasures, would seem to derive from "pirua", an Inca term indicating, simply, the fern. Because the treasure of Incas was the food, kept in underground silos closed with ferns, and the the empire of the sun children never understood what strange lust the conquistadors had, dazzled by the gold and silver, by goods unfit to eat.

Between conquerors and conquered the wound never healed completely, neither here nor throughout Latin America, even though Peru has long been the country of *mestizos*, a creative mixture of races and different cultures, far away from the apartheid regime that exists in Guatemala or in the south of the "modern" Mexico.

In a country that has an incredible geographic variety, where you pass in a few hundred kilometers from the snowy peaks of Andes to the tropical coast of the Pacific Ocean, where the explosion of green and humidity of Amazon forest is combined with southern semi-desert areas, perhaps the real human break is what separates Lima from the rest of the country.

First, it is a statistic (obviously not official fact, because the continuing exodus toward the capital city anticipates any census): in Lima live nearly half of Peruvians, some 12 million people over 25 of the entire population.

Lima was the great capital of South America dominated by Spaniards, the most populous and important city of the continent (in the top of the world) still in the early nineteenth century. Until then, he could look down on cities like New York, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo. The industrial revolution finally condemned it to decay, and Spanish empire was erased from the history books. Today Lima maintains a charm that many other capitals lost or never had, but it continues to grow wildly north and south, climbing the hills and mountains that make up the crown. Almost lunar landscapes, sometimes, where extreme poverty finds a place among people who were Indian and now are only "*cholos*" (derogatory or family term- depending on who uses it and how - to indicate Amerindians), who spoke Quechua and now speak a little Spanish popularized by television (as painful as in almost all Latin American countries).

Patient and gentle humanity, poorly educated, who eats little or eat badly (there are many obese people), despite the popular Peruvian cuisine is excellent. Humanity historically grown between the brash populism of too many (military or civil) *caudillos*, and the contempt disguised as indifference of *pitucos*, the rich who are of European origin in the tourist district of Miraflores (along with the

middle class) or have villas on hills completely privatized and controlled by police with machine guns in hand.

The first is the electoral base of Alejandro Toledo (less than previously thought), the second ones mostly voted for Lourdes Flores, in the first round. But everyone, rich, poor and middle class have been attracted by past promises of an obscure agricultural engineer, who introduced himself in 1990 as the man of change (his "party" was named *Cambio 90*, ie Change 90), with the motto "hard work, honesty, technology": Alberto Fujimori, known as "*El Chino*".

The political parable of Fujimori and his henchman, the ineffable Vladimiro Montesinos, accurately reflects all the chronic ills of modern Peruvian society, which is very far from resolve them, even if today everybody seems to have been bitter opponents of the strange neoliberal dictator. The truth, without detracting from the courageous candidature of Toledo last year, is that Fujimori's regime has just committed suicide, it was not driven by popular vote, or by the strength of institutions, or, less than ever, the opposition of the international community, which indeed had already "resigned" to his third term (as it is admitted in Italian diplomatic circles in Lima).

The monstrous machine of corruption and blackmail patiently built by Montesinos, a man of the intelligence, considered the grey eminence of Fujimori system, eventually exploded, splattering mud everywhere (the notorious "*vladivideos*", filmed recordings documenting bribery and other acts of baseness of politicians, judges, senior military ranks). The two (Fujimori and Montesinos) fled abroad, one in Japan (and Peruvians have learned that their president had always been a Japanese citizen by satellite television), the other in some Latin American country. Inglorious end for a regime that almost destroyed Peruvian society.

The total lack of enthusiasm for new presidential elections shows a disappointment of many (too many) people, which sometimes takes it on with acrimony, just to redeem a mistake, sometimes with the embarrassment of guilt. And it is not so hard to find even those who somehow misses "*El Chino*", the usual trivial people who say "it was better when it was worse".

In their trivialized view of Fujimori, however, they offer a key to the reading: "He defeated terrorism, he tamed inflation, he brought foreign investment and he built much". To understand the "Resistible Rise" of Fujimori and the decade (1990-2000) of neoliberal dictatorship (the term may sound contradictory, but actually it is not at all), you have to reread the previous decade and to clarify immediately that the eighties were the only years of (however imperfect) democracy of the entire Peruvian history.

Independence (1821), obtained by gunfire from Spain, opened the mythology of the leader who fights for his people, namely, a military approach to "democracy". The same very celebrated Simon Bolivar, the great Liberator of South America, was a man blinded by his ambitions, progenitor of all the little Napoleons in uniform who in the name of people despised liberal institutions, the rule of law that seemed to give a formal legitimacy to the economic and social inequality (that is why many Latin American military dictatorships are strangely considered "left").

"The negative tradition of caudillo meant that the same sycophancy surrounding the king, in the modern age, accompanies the president", said the constitutionalist Enrique Bernales. Each coup, perhaps disguised as revolution, makes a new constitution. Any attempt to reform comes from the top, and it is imposed by force of weapons. This happens because to defend the institutions of liberal democracy there is never an enlightened bourgeoisie, who works to extend the true citizenship to an increasingly larger share of the population, but only an elite cared to defend its income, its privileges. No coincidence that in Peru the coup General Velasco (1968 - 1975) makes land reform, nationalizes industries, increases, for better or for worse, the weight of the state. Always the army.

On the other hand, the historical irreducible opposition of Peruvian left-wing APRA (*Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*), banned by the army from 1931 to 1956, and its legendary founder, Dr Victor Raul Haya De la Torre. It is just the old APRA leader, after half a century of struggle, to chair the Constituent Assembly, which in 1979 marks the return of power to civil society. But in the following presidential elections another longtime leader of Peru wins, Christian Democrat Fernando Belaunde Terry, former president "protected" by soldiers from 1963 to 1968,

who began to dismantle the state control inherited from Velasco.

The birth of democracy coincides exactly with that of Peruvian guerrilla movement that afflicts it like a monstrous nightmare: Sendero Luminoso. "The mentality of Sendero Luminoso is closer to religion than to philosophy and politics", writes Mario Vargas Llosa in "*Desafios a la libertad*". "Its radical Maoism is a string of acts of faith, emotional control, messianic delirium, tautological reasoning and hyperbolic proclamations that disconcert for the crudeness, the banality and confusion". Sendero Luminoso was born just as the parable of Latin American guerrilla movements began their falling phase. Its first actions suggest a tiny group of fanatics who blindly obey their "leader, ideologist, strategist and guru", Abimael Guzman, known as "Comrade Gonzalo", isolated in remote areas of deep Peru.

The government of Belaunde make the tragic mistake of underestimating the strength of Sendero Luminoso, he argues that the alleged "terrorism" in Peru is just "firecrackers", allowing Guzman and Co. to acquire strength and to root in the region. A war of bombings in the cities and ruthless control in the country starts, a war that will have a budget of around 30 thousand deaths and cause economic losses to 20 thousand million dollars.

Frenzied violence of Sendero Luminoso added, again in the eighties, the most targeted and traditional one of *Movimiento Revolucionario Tupac Amaru* (MRTA).

The reply of the state becomes harder, crossing the border of illegality: the complaints of Amnesty International and human rights organizations involve the government of Belaunde first and that of Alan Garcia next, the first leftist government of Peruvian history.

Alan Garcia is the young successor of the legendary Haya de la Torre. At the presidential elections in 1985 he leads APRA to a historic victory, after 55 years of opposition. He is an ambitious leader, great speaker (called "*lengua de plata*," silver tongue), decided air and a handsome look (many women are crazy about him). He seems to follow the wave of European Socialists, all determination and ruthlessness (Mitterrand, Gonzalez, Craxi). Just 35, he leads the country in a delicate moment, but despite good intentions, his government will have catastrophic results. His two main objectives, rebuild the economy and put an end to terrorism, are doomed to fail miserably.

Alan Garcia wants the state to direct and to control the economy: he begins a policy of nationalization, which mainly affects banks, insurance companies, the financial sector. He places APRA executives everywhere, increasing bureaucracy. But most of all, he rebels against the "dictatorship" of the International Monetary Fund and World Bank, and attempts to oppose the incipient globalization limiting imports and protecting domestic production.

Result: Three-digit inflation, unemployment remains high, corruption continues as before, and in recent years even the food rationing, long queues for milk and rice, while terrorism keeps the country in a pall of fear.

To make matters worse, Alan Garcia becomes involved in a story of bribes for the construction, entrusted to an Italian company, of fast train from south Lima to Callao, where are the international airport and the seaport. To date, the unfinished work stands on the poor houses of Villa Maria, with an empty train running sometimes (for maintenance, they say).

In short, the APRA leader appears to fatal 1990 presidential elections with a completely negative budget (although probably international finance tried to ditch him). The favorite, at this point, would seem just the writer Mario Vargas Llosa, liberal and free-market advocate, a great admirer of Margaret Thatcher, who has coalesced the *pitucos* (the financial bourgeoisie) and the Christian Democrats. But the Anglo-Saxon almost Calvinist spirit, that Vargas Llosa would like to introduce in Peru is still very alien to the descendants of Incas. They want a man who can promise, they want to dream Peruvian miracles brought like magic by one man. And rather than voting for the moderate right, even disappointed APRA supporters choose the ambiguous demagoguery of "Chino" Fujimori. The new for the new, they jump in an unknown field and see what happens.

And since a good day starts with the morning, first terrifying setback comes: fighting inflation, away all subsidies on consumption, away price controls, food products increased by 600 percent, 3,000 percent gasoline. A matter of general strike, mass uprising: but absolutely nothing happens.

Something like "We voted him, now we keep him". Fujimori starts to enjoy it, and in 150 days, with Decrees, he privatizes everything: banks, industries, mines, shipping lines, airlines, railways (even the famous train from Cuzco to Machu Picchu is contracted out to a Chilean company of which Fujimori is said to be a shareholder, and the political price reaches 50 dollars). Then comes the turn of telecommunications, postal service, and finally the last bastions collapse, education and healthcare.

Here is that foreign investment comes, the external debt begins to increase, as well as imports, and Lima became a construction site, roads, skyscrapers, shopping centers. A rich showcase to hide a country that continues to be impoverished in a brutal way (except the usual privileged classes).

This is the neo-liberal dictatorship, which is completed in 1992 with the so-called autogolpe: to get rid of the last few scraps of a Parliament that, although Fujimori majority, does not "leave him work", the "Chino" suspends the Constitution of 1979, dissolves Parliament declared a state of emergency and convenes the Constituent Assembly.

He has the compact army behind him, thanks to the work of untiring Montesinos: troops surround the Parliament, the main trade union and political leaders are placed under house arrest as a "temporary measure", Lima is armored. But there is no need to fire a single shot: Fujimori still enjoys a huge consensus, his dynamism still deceives so many people. Terrorism begins to retreat, and when Abimael Guzman is captured (a mortal blow to Sendero Luminoso), who is exhibited in a cage like an animal for several days, neo-liberal dictatorship reaches the apotheosis. Fujimori is triumphantly re-elected in 1995 against the former UN Secretary Perez de Cuellar. His reputation as a "tough" increases even after the raid ending the seizure of the Japanese embassy staff by a commando of MRTA (December 1996 - April 1997). Peruvian president has deceived the leader of the commando in a very long negotiation, Nestor Cerpa Cartolini, using the mediation of archbishop Cipriani: the fact that almost all the guerrillas may have been killed after surrendering does not seem to be of interest to anyone.

Meanwhile, the poor get poorer, small and medium-sized businesses closed, choked by the usurious interest of banks (many of which are controlled by Fujimori) and deleted by foreign competition. The agricultural production falls, the desperate farmers leave the countryside and come to make do and mend in the city. The social gap, already great, it is monstrous. But Fujimori has the country in his hands, he is able to pass, by force, his candidacy for a third term. Now he does not trust anybody, his wife (who said to have a great influence on him) leaves him, he is increasingly alone: "A person far away from reality (the result of years of isolation), surrounded by sycophants, mediocre people and opportunists. He works in an absolute and obsessive way, all day. He has the hallucination of leading a crusade for this country he feels to have done so much".

So "*Caretas*" describes him, one of the few remaining independent media in the nineties.

Fujimori wants to win the presidency at all costs for the third time.

The surprise nomination of Alejandro Toledo breaks the stagnation prevailing in Peru. Toledo, 55, is a "*cholo*" (as he likes to be called) of a large and poor family, born in Ancash, remote location inland the country. He was an hawker and a shoeshine boy, but his exceptional academic skills have allowed him to obtain a scholarship in the United States, where he graduated in economics at the University of San Francisco, with subsequent specialization in Stanford. After working for the World Bank and the IMF, he marries Eliane Karp, a Belgian anthropologist who knows Peru (the joke circulates that she speaks Quechua better than him).

In other words, he has a soul divided in two: on the one hand, the origins of which he is proud, and which were largely used as an election recall (he is called Cachapotec, one of the last Incas who rebelled against Spaniards); on the other, elite training, which largely links him to the *pitucos* who can still snubbed him, but certainly they are not afraid of him.

He succeeded in a short time to unite the opposition against Fujimori, showing that "Chino" could be beaten. Only the shameful electoral fraud, denounced by European and South American observers, has allowed Fujimori to move ahead in the second round and then win in the absence of the opponent (Toledo had retired for not legitimizing the false elections). So, after the scandal videos of Montesinos and Fujimori flee, Toledo found himself ahead of all the polls, protagonist of

the dictatorship end.

But the elections of last April gave more than a surprise. The election campaign was conducted with blows below the belt, with continuing scandalous revelations about the candidates. The two main rivals seemed to be precisely Toledo and Lourdes Flores, a "single" from the Christian Democrat party, lawyer, representing mainly the financial elite, but she also garnered many votes in the middle class. Between the two contenders, which did not seem so distant in terms of political content (even if Lourdes got charges of "continuity" in her party for having accepted many members of the former Fujimori regime), was added in an incredible way the "old" Alan Garcia, who returned from his voluntary exile in Colombia a few months before the first vote. With a deft and meticulous campaign, Alan Garcia was able to break left, passing Lourdes Flores. The elections, transparent and completely right (remarkable for a system manipulated until last year) saw the advantage of Toledo (36 percent) of Alan Garcia (26 percent) and Lourdes Flores (23 percent).

The runoff between Alan Garcia and Alejandro Toledo seems to be exciting (and perhaps eventually they talk about programs). Toledo is the new, but despite being the hero of the fall of Fujimori, he has never taken explicitly distance from the economic policy of "Chino". He failed to respond well to a couple of scandals that have involved him (a natural daughter that he does not recognize, a party based on women and cocaine at Melody Hotel). His speeches are frankly painful, repetitive and full of slogans and full of emotional effect, in front of masses of people who hardly listen to him and merely acclaim him. People definitely come from the lower level of the population, people who, in many cases, are the same that hailed Fujimori.

On the other hand, Alan Garcia "silver tongue", hated by Peruvians who remember the years of his government and consider him dishonest, beloved especially by young people, feared like the plague by the rich classes. Garcia seems to have learned his lesson and he is more moderate, but always focusing on social justice and criticizing very clearly the shame of Fujimori's hyper-liberalism. Whoever wins, one is without an absolute majority in Congress, on July 28. And with a constitution which draws an authoritarian and perverse presidential system, having annulled the best things of the Charter in 1979 (especially regarding social rights). But the two factors can also be combined positively: they need, however, a government of national unity, and perhaps the majority of coalition will also be able to redesign democratic Peru of the Third Millennium. The rest is all a long way to do: creating a true citizenship and inclusive society. Or continuing to be "a beggar sitting on a treasure."

Cesare Sangalli