

Unions in Peru

In 1985 Alan Garcia was elected president of Peru with strong support amongst the people. However, as economic crisis has deepened and repression has increased, he has lost much of this support. 1988 saw Peru's trade unions take increasingly militant action against the government as JAVIER FARJE reports.*

Late on 9 December last year, labour leader Oscar Delgado Vera was traced to the headquarters of Peru's anti-terrorism agency DIRCOTE. He has not been seen since. It is feared that he is the latest on a long list of trade unionists to be killed during the 1980s, the majority by the armed forces and their death squad allies for being so-called 'terrorists'.

The Peruvian labour movement also operates in an economy with one of the highest inflation rates in South America (1800% last year), and where the division between rich and poor is vast. Some peasant children have only newspapers to eat for supper.

In this situation, the trade unions take a broad political stance. They fight for human rights alongside demanding higher wages. They challenge the government's economic policy, and campaign for Peru's native communities, while also attacking the steady militarisation of the

country and the government's intensifying 'dirty war' against popular organisations.

This wide range of demands formed a platform that the great majority of Peru's trade unionists supported through a series of strikes last year. Two one-day general strikes took place, in January and October, and there was a successful 48-hour general strike in mid-July.

The government outlawed all these strikes. In the January 1988 strike, 1,000 workers were detained and two were killed by the army. In July and October, 700 workers were held and 30 charged as 'terrorists'.

Peasant involvement

Peasants joined in the militancy with a huge four-day strike at the beginning of December, in which over half a million took part. Their platform included a plan for agrarian

* Edited and reprinted from *International Labour Reports*. Javier Farje is a Peruvian journalist living in Britain.

development, price reform, and demands for a new trading system, agrarian social security, credits and the lifting of the State of Emergency.

Individual sector strikes through 1988 involved such workers as teachers, farmworkers and textile, transport, oil and electricity workers.

A wave of actions in November caused the government to abandon a regulation to limit wage increases. When the government then prepared a second austerity package which boosted wages but eliminated food subsidies, the country was paralysed by power cuts, transport strikes and food shortages. Even so, the austerity



package was implemented.

Strikes in the copper mines dramatically affected international copper prices. In both July and October/November, more than two-thirds of miners downed tools. This tremendous pressure on one of Peru's most important sources of export earnings. The government responded by declaring a State of Emergency in the mining industry.

Troops were given powers to enter the mines and the copper bosses were allowed to sack miners at will. Miners' union offices were raided, and 15 of its leaders were arrested.

Political context

The political situation in Peru cannot be understood outside of the context of the armed struggle on the one hand and the death squads acting on behalf of the state on the other. The trade unions are caught in the middle.

The guerrilla group Sendero Luminoso launched its armed insurrection in 1980, seeking to emulate China's

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Miners' leader killed

Saul Cantoral, Secretary General of Peru's 60,000-strong miners' union FNTMMSP, and Consuelo Garcia, a worker with the miners' wives organisation Filomena, were savagely beaten and killed on the streets of the capital Lima on 15 February. The union believes the Rodrigo Franco Command death squad is responsible. 100,000 miners went on strike for the funeral.

Letters of support can be written to:

**FNTMMSP,
Giron Apurimac 463,
Oficina 301, Lima 1, Peru.**

INTERNATIONAL

communist revolution. They mainly operate in the mountains of Ayacucho in the Southeast Andes. Hostile to the trade unions, they attack them for supporting the "rotten bourgeois state".

A second group, the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA), recently re-initiated its military campaign in the jungle and cities, halting the truce they had called when Garcia came to power in 1985. During the period of truce they did build links with the trade union movement.

The state's response has been to suspend many of the basic rights guaranteed by the 1979 constitution. The right to hold street demonstrations and peaceful gatherings, the inviolability of people's homes and the right to choose where you live, have all been

removed. Around a third of Peru is under military control through the State of Emergency.

One group, all belonging to the President's APRA party, has set up a death squad, the Democratic Command Rodrigo Franco (CRF), named after a friend of President Garcia who was murdered by Sendero guerrillas. The CRF has carried out a number of attacks against trade unionists and others with no connections to the armed struggle, as well as murdering a Sendero Luminoso lawyer. They have also threatened priests and journalists, and evidence is emerging of a link with Peru's security police after the gang sent letters with details of priests' private lives.

Meanwhile, the main rightwing



85% of Peru's workforce were on general strikes last year

Photo: ILR

Peru's trade unions

In Peru, almost every factory has a trade union. These come together to form sector federations and every sector has its local federation in each region of Peru. Over two-thirds of all organised workers belong to the CGTP.

- **CGTP:** The General Workers Confederation of Peru is the largest organisation in the Peruvian labour movement, and is affiliated to the communist orientated World Federation of Trade Unions. Founded in 1929, the CGTP suffered for years in the doldrums before re-emerging as a major force in the 1970s. During the last ten years, the CGTP has grown by accepting the affiliation of powerful unions which, in the past, were barred due to disputes between the left parties to which the different leaders belonged. The largest groups of workers in the CGTP are teachers, miners, bank employees and building, textile and print workers.
- **CTP:** The Workers Council of Peru is linked directly to APRA, the party presently in power. Founded in 1944, it has tended to side with rightwing forces in the party, and one view is that its present state of disarray can be traced back to international links with the US union centre, AFL-CIO, and its Free Trade Union Institute. Though its membership is in decline, groups of workers still belonging to the CTP include dockers, textile workers and mini-bus owners. Some of these have participated in general strikes in Peru as members of the CTP's critical tendency, which has emerged as some union members have become disillusioned with the Garcia government.
- **CCP:** Founded in 1947, this is the larger of the two main peasant federations. It has a long history of militant action, including strikes and land invasions, and tends to bring together the most radical elements among peasants and landless agricultural workers. The guerrilla group Sendero Luminoso's leadership includes members of a small faction that split from the CCP in the 1970s.
- **CNA:** This was founded in 1971, following the 1969 land reform. Its members are mainly cooperatives and they have helped lead a number of land strikes. ☆

parties, now organised in the Democratic Front (FREDEMO), are trying to clean up their image, while making much of anti-communist propaganda. The military, for its part, has been exploring Washington's reaction to a possible coup.

People's assembly

The leftwing political parties remain divided by internal disputes, despite the trappings of a united front in the 'United Left' (IU) alliance. However, since late 1987 the extra-parliamentary movement has been well organised. Then the main Peruvian unions, led by the CGTP

confederation, joined up with others to form the People's National Assembly (ANP). The ANP brought together unions, tenants associations, grass-roots organisations, and leftwing political parties. The Assembly is described as the biggest gathering of popular organisations ever in Peru.

The ANP's 'Platform of the Peruvian People', reflects considerable labour movement input, calling for a "new economic policy that, by expropriating the imperialist monopolies, would guarantee the peoples' well-being, national sovereignty and regional development." ☆

Peru's economy in 1988

- Inflation: 1800%
- Workers' Purchasing power : Dropped 70% in the last 4 months of 1988
- Foreign Debt: US\$14,000 million
- Foreign Reserves: US\$60 million

A majority of Peruvians live below subsistence level. A diet of bread, a cup of tea and heavily diluted soup, is typical for many living in Lima, the capital. While they go hungry, in November 50 ships laden with milk and lamb from New Zealand, wheat and soya from the USA and other foods stood anchored off the coast, awaiting payment before delivery.

President Garcia has been unable to

keep his promise to the Peruvian people to limit the drain on the country caused by debt interest repayments to the International Monetary Fund and multinational banks. On coming to power, he promised to limit debt repayments to only 10% of Peru's export earnings, but the figure now stands at 36%. At the present level of foreign reserves, there is only enough to run the country for a month. ☆