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# APRISMO

## THE RISE OF HAYA DE LA TORRE

*By Carleton Beals*

THE most striking, picturesque and exuberant personality in all Latin America is Victor Raul Haya de la Torre, of Peru, leader of the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance, commonly known as APRA. It is an international movement, with branches in most Latin American countries, but its principal stronghold is Peru. There, after the overthrow of the dictator Augusto Leguía in August 1930, *Aprismo* just missed being swept into power. It is undoubtedly the strongest popular force in that country today. Haya de la Torre has fired the imagination not only of his own people but of an entire continent and a half. He represents a political tendency which under one name or another is gathering headway in all the southern countries, which has found considerable expression in Mexico, and which is represented to some extent by the A.B.C. secret organization in Cuba, a group under the leadership of Martínez Saenz that effectively participated in the overthrow of Machado. To understand the Apra movement and its leadership is to understand the probable evolution of Latin America in the years ahead. The impending political crises there will profoundly affect our own political and economic relations, our five billion dollars of investments, our trade, and our security in case of a new world war.

Haya de la Torre stands out as a brilliant leader with the knack of appealing to large masses of men. He has swayed thought nearly everywhere in the New World by his copious writings. He has won a picturesque halo of martyrdom because of long exile and imprisonment, and he has built up a powerful well-knit organization with an eclectic program of broad social significance, of great political opportunism and with international implications. It is a unique movement, though it has been labelled variously as communistic, socialistic, liberal, petty bourgeois, fascist — Latin Americans are not devoid of the average man's habit in other countries of judging political events by emotions and prejudices, by conventional tags, rather than by clear concepts. None of our familiar clichés by which we attempt to pigeon-hole contemporary tendencies in Western Europe are en-

tirely satisfactory for semi-colonial Latin America; economic and political facts there, the course of recent developments, the new movements that have developed, the type of national planning in vogue, require a fresh terminology. For a long time I have been puzzled to find some adequate designation which would roughly characterize a continental tendency miraculously compounded of Wilsonian democracy, Marxian communism and Fascism. Perhaps the term *Aprismo* is itself sufficient. Haya de la Torre is the outstanding exponent of the new doctrines.

## II

I knew Haya de la Torre intimately during his exile in Mexico in 1923-4; I dealt with him again there three or four years later; and on various occasions during my recent visit to Peru, I visited with him in Lima. He is at present about forty years of age, in the full flush of his intellectual development, energy and enthusiasm. As the head of the first truly popular movement in Peru's entire history, he is now the *bête noire* of old-style politicians, the militarists and the feudal elements. His earlier period in Mexico was formative; he was then forging the ideas, the plans of political organization, and the contacts which have since made him a continental figure.

Those years of 1923-4 were a dramatic time in Mexican and world affairs. The Mexican revolution, antedating that of Russia, had stumbled through civil war into a hit-or-miss program of land-distribution, anti-clericalism, bitter opposition to oil imperialism, and was actively promoting popular education and labor reforms. The World War had demonstrated the economic and moral bankruptcy of Western Europe and the instability of the Versailles peace. Mussolini had seized power in Italy; Primo de Rivera had provided an opera bouffe imitation in Spain; Horthy had taken charge of Hungary; the Social Democrats in Germany were battling with the Communists. The Russian revolution was wavering between Lenin's NEP policy and Trotsky's formula of world revolution. China was in an uproar. Gandhi was getting gaunter and more menacing in India. Morocco was still in revolt.

In Mexico in 1923-4 was another notable leader, the exiled Cuban student Julio Antonio Mella, whom I knew well and later saw die in the Red Cross emergency hospital, after being shot in the back by the minions of Machado. Both Mella and Haya were

striking personalities, both remarkable orators, both keen minds, both already outstanding figures in Latin America. Soon they came into sharp conflict. Mella threw in his lot with the Communist Party. Haya was seeking a formula for more realistic immediate political action. The result was the founding of the Apra movement, which brought down on Haya's head the undying enmity of the Third International and a furibund attack from Mella (he circulated a vitriolic pamphlet against the Peruvian).

After studying at Oxford, observing at Geneva, and traveling through Germany, the Soviet Union and other parts of Europe, Haya toured Mexico and Central America, lecturing and everywhere organizing Apra cells. Despite frequent persecutions, exilings, and financial difficulties, he was rapidly building up an international following. One could scarcely pick up a newspaper or magazine in any country in South America without finding his keen comments on world affairs.

When in August 1930 the little sergeant of Arequipa, Sánchez Cerro, overthrew the eleven year dictatorship of Leguía, Haya hurried back to Peru. He was greeted by a monster paid-admission mass-meeting in the Lima Hippodrome — a total, including those swarming around the gates, of at least twenty thousand people. The Apra movement swept over the country like a tidal wave. Sánchez Cerro temporarily deposited power in a Commission of Notables, headed by a Catholic dignitary, Monseñor Holguín, and Haya became the opposition presidential candidate. He toured the country kindling enthusiasm everywhere. Numerous followers did likewise. The message of Apra was carried from Lima and the coast into the highest corners of the Andes, to Cajamarca, where centuries ago Conquistador Pizarro captured Inca Emperor Atahualpa, to historic Cuzco, seat of one of the largest empires in history, to the far jungles of Madre de Diós and the Amazon region of Iquitos and Loreto. The word "APRA" was daubed on walls everywhere; it was carved in stone on the high cliffs of the Andes, it was spelled out in sand plants along the desert roads. On Argentine Beach I saw a lean dog branded with the letters — propaganda enthusiasm can go no further.

Special appeals were then made, and are still, to the indigenous population. The Indian elements, numerically the largest in Peru, had been political non-participants for over four centuries. The Apra made Indian liberation part of its cause. Apra cells were named after Inca emperors. Quechua battle-cries were included in

Apra songs and cheers. "Indian regeneration and freedom are synonymous with Aprismo" is one of the stock phrases.

Even before he had left Peru eight years previously, Haya had come into the limelight as one of the courageous leaders in the student movement of the University of Trujillo, his birthplace. Official wrath had fallen on his head, during the rule of the much-hated Leguía, when in May 1923 he led an enormous student-labor demonstration against the President's attempt to dedicate the country officially to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. The University of San Marcos was temporarily converted into a revolutionary barricade. Street-fighting resulted in several deaths, the wounding of many more, wholesale arrests and the driving of Haya and other leaders into exile. Many students, after a prolonged hunger strike, were shipped off to hard toil in the jungles where many perished. Since then, Haya's propaganda, in a hundred different ways, had been filtering steadily into Peru.

As a result of the seeds sown during those years, Apra merely needed the opportunity to become a strong organized movement. It captured the entire countryside. Undoubtedly Haya was elected president, for despite official harassment and the wholesale robbing of votes, he polled even in the official count almost as many as Sánchez Cerro.

Sánchez Cerro was thoroughly frightened. Official persecutions of Apra came fast and furious. Twenty some Apra deputies were thrown out of the national congress and have never been reinstated. Apristas were jailed, exiled, assassinated. Shortly, Haya himself was thrown into prison and was held for nearly a year and a half, mostly incommunicado. At various times he was reported to have been murdered in his cell, and probably would have been had it not been for protests from prominent scholars and public figures all over the world.

While he was in prison, these persecutions produced the spontaneous Trujillo revolt. The Apristas stormed into desperate action, and the flame spread to the serfs of the adjacent sugar estates and to the Indians of lofty Cajamarca and Ancash. But the pivot of resistance was Trujillo. For three days the bloody conflict raged, and was put down only after the mobilization of Peru's entire army, navy and aerial forces. It was followed by the cold-blooded massacre of several thousand Apristas, a slaughter comparable to that perpetrated some time later by bloody President Martínez in Salvador.

Sánchez Cerro, to overcome his great personal unpopularity and strengthen his tottering position, precipitated the Leticia controversy with Colombia. It distracted public attention from domestic difficulties, but the manœuvre proved dangerous. In preparing for war, Sánchez Cerro soon discovered the danger of arming volunteers and conscripts. Practically all were Apristas. A dilemma. The new recruits were drilled without guns. So great was the government's fears, that even at the front the guns of new soldiers were taken away from them at night. One encampment was slaughtered by the Colombians and a victory won because the Peruvians had no arms with which to defend themselves. A recruiting officer in Lima addressed a new regiment of volunteers on the evils of Aprismo. The government, he stated, preferred to discharge any members of that party rather than have the forces contaminated. He called on all Apristas to step forward. The whole regiment moved forward as one man. The official in question suddenly decided that *Aprismo* was not such a bad thing after all.

Following Sánchez Cerro's assassination in April 1933 by a fanatical student, Haya de la Torre — released through an amnesty granted by the new provisional president, General Oscar Benavides — at once dedicated himself to the active reorganization of the party. The whole country breathed a deep sigh of relief when the erratic and sanguinary Sánchez Cerro had been laid to rest. The immediate reaction to his fantastic follies was an enthusiastic reassertion of Apra strength.

Ere long the Benavides government and all old-line political elements became seriously alarmed. Repressive anti-Apra tactics were resumed. The old Leticia trouble was revived and a patriotic drive started to make Apra propaganda savor of treason. Last April the Apra papers in Lima were suppressed, the police smashed up Apra headquarters, schools, restaurants, and jailed whomever they could lay their hands on. Manuel Seone, one of the outstanding leaders, when cornered by forty secret police, fought his way out pistol in hand from the national stadium, leaving two dead behind him. Haya went into hiding. The Apra movement again entered a definite period of official persecution. The government censors even forbid the mention of Haya de la Torre's name in foreign dispatches. All pretense of constitutionality has been thrown aside. Congressional elections were postponed until September because of the Leticia trouble. As a result

of a bloody general strike in that month in Trujillo and on the big foreign-owned estates, the idea of holding elections has been abandoned entirely. The Apristas now believe that their only recourse is to prepare for armed revolution.

## III

Chan Chan, near Trujillo, is a vast conglomeration of crumbling adobe walls, which in its heyday, perhaps 1200 A.D., probably harbored several hundred thousand people. It and Pachacamac, near modern Lima, were the two great pre-Inca coast metropolises of the Chimú civilization. Chan Chan ruled supreme until — a few centuries before the coming of the Spaniards — Inca Yupanqui's 50,000 warriors subjugated the coast and the bulk of the city's unappeasable inhabitants were sent as colonists to other parts of the empire. The Spaniards found the place nearly abandoned. I made two trips to Chan Chan, one to learn about its ancient splendors; the other, with Apra revolutionists, to learn about its modern tragedy.

The Apristas showed me numerous crosses over dozens of crumbling buildings. These crosses are white with buzzard droppings — for under them lie the half buried bodies of over a thousand people lined up and shot after the failure of the 1932 revolt which shook this whole region from Trujillo clear up into the Cajamarca Sierra. Beyond the stadium — “APRA” painted in big letters on its roof — was another trench with many crosses. “At least thirty are buried here!” We penetrated on into the tangle of Chan Chan. There people, taken out in trucks, had been lined up alongside of ancient ditches and reservoirs, and shot into their graves. For months Chan Chan was a carnal house. Its pestiferous stench rose to high heaven for miles about, even to Trujillo.

Trujillo still remains ardently Aprista. Frequent pilgrimages are made to martyr graves. The Apristas control one of the leading dailies, *El Norte*, edited by Haya de la Torre's brother and by Antenor Orrego, for some strange reason not suppressed along with almost all other Apra periodicals. Pérez Treviño edits a weekly magazine. Propaganda is active. The recent bitter strike reveals that despite dreadful massacre the same feeling prevails among the people. The Apra movement's bath of blood, its roll of martyrs, its traditions of struggle, have closed up the files of the party in iron-clad discipline.

## IV

The Apristas lose no opportunity to state their case, both at home and abroad. Though my visit to Peru was unannounced, Carlos Manuel Cox, one of the principal leaders, greeted me on board the *Santa Clara* as soon as we reached Callao. The following day, Haya de la Torre and his secretary called on me at my hotel, and the following evening I had supper with him and three other Apristas in a little German pension facing the sea in La Punta. The reunion was semi-secret, for although at that time theoretically the party was not suffering persecutions, several attempts had been made to assassinate Haya. He went well-armed and never slept twice in the same place.

He has lost none of the enthusiasms that characterized him ten years previously. He still retains his remarkable powers of expression. Though now the key man in Peruvian politics and Latin America's most prominent figure, he is still as informal and jovial as ever. Of medium height, stocky build, and massive features, his face is constantly illuminated by a vivacious smile, and his persuasiveness and amenity coupled with his remarkable insight into the character and motives of others invariably captivate everyone with whom he comes in personal contact.

What is the Apra program? I have before me two score books and pamphlets detailing its struggles and program, including the vivid verbatim account of Haya de la Torre's preliminary hearings during his imprisonment under Sánchez Cerro, an account which reads like a seminar in political economy rather than a police or court record, and which places Haya de la Torre at an astronomical distance, intellectually and morally, above his interlocutors and persecutors.

Haya was seeking an adequate political formula for Latin America. He had studied, through their literature, and at first hand, the revolutionary movements of Mexico, Russia and Italy. He was well versed in the bases of American and English democracy. Above all he had studied political tactic and organization. He came to the conclusion that neither the communist nor fascist movements offered a way out for the Latin countries, for both were phenomena of industrial or semi-industrial nations, whereas most of Latin America, and certainly Peru, had only the beginnings of a proletariat. The pivot of any social



regeneration for him was the fight against foreign capitalism — imperialism. This had become the most powerful factor in maintaining backward feudal and military dictatorships and preventing popular education, economic freedom, and national independence. Leguía had been maintained in power by American loans, corruptly contracted and corruptly expended.

Haya realized that successful resistance could be waged not by the handful of proletariat, but by a concurrent appeal to intellectuals, to the indigenous peasant masses and the new but ambitious middle-class. Even new native capitalist elements would be drawn into such a movement. Not all amicable bed fellows, but all useful. The general thesis was anti-imperialism; war upon all feudalism, therefore upon landholders, the Church and militarism; the simultaneous building up of native private and state capitalism, with bonafide collectivism whenever and wherever possible; rapid education to provide a true national basis for political stability; the freeing of the Indians from pseudo-serfdom; the enforcement of an enlightened labor code. The ultimate goal was to be democratic collectivism.

For the communists this is obviously a new brand of fascism; for the feudal elements it is obviously little removed from outright communism. The tags do not fit. The economic and political facts of Peru and neighbor countries are unique.

Italian Fascism and the Nationalist Blue Shirt allies utilized radical phraseology. Italy, according to Corridini, was a "proletariat nation that must fight the capitalist nations." Hitler has made alleged socialism a cloak for nationalistic pretensions. Something of this undoubtedly lurks in the Aprista attitude, but it is only part of the picture.

Carl Dreher in a recent illuminating article<sup>1</sup> defines Fascism as "a fraudulent simulation of collectivism applied to the minds and bodies of men, exempting only the large property owners from its tyranny." It is an attempt through severe governmental regulation to save part of the capitalist mechanism and its benefits for the middle class by eliminating its chaotic and unworkable features. In Latin America capitalism cannot be saved because it has never existed. Democracy and certain liberties which are inimical to a tottering capitalism cannot be destroyed in Latin America because they have never existed. The middle class cannot be saved from being crushed in the war between

<sup>1</sup> *Harper's Magazine*, September 1934, p. 484.

capital and labor because the Latin American middle class is only beginning to emerge.

Similar observations occur regarding communist tendencies. To postulate a capital-labor class struggle is to postulate, to a certain extent, a Pyrrhic battle—the protagonists still have to be breathed into life. Collectivism must be created not by collectivizing industry but by creating an industry along collective lines; the agrarian masses do not have to be collectivized because great sections of them have never abandoned a collective system. Only the great estates can be directly collectivized and the peons freed.

Latin America has always had dictatorships, but these have never been—despite the bandying of verbiage—either collective or fascist. Their basis has nearly always been feudal, sometimes in alliance with the growing middle class, more recently, thanks to bankers' loans, in alliance with foreign capital.

The nearest approach to Fascism in the New World has been made in Mexico, ruled by the "full-car" National Revolutionary Party, which runs a government closely approximating the Dreher definition of a fraudulent simulation of collectivism exempting the large property owners from its tyranny. But even in Mexico it has original characteristics: the Mexican revolution, to fight imperialism, had to arm the workers and peasants, but its directing force was the new middle class of *mestizos*, who have used the state to become industrialists. If previous patterns had been followed the successful revolutionists would have sunk blissfully back into the arms of feudalism, but the penetration of foreign capital is rapidly making that impossible. Success has channeled the movement increasingly into a fascist tendency, save that hitherto non-existent democracy is given at least lip-service, and collectivism, especially in connection with agriculture, is stressed because this hinders the invasion of foreign capital and aids the rise of a native bourgeoisie. A well-controlled labor and peasant movement further blocks foreign competition, but being officially wielded permits native interests to expand their industrial enterprises, banks, tropical estates. This explains the queer Mexican phenomenon of revolutionary leaders become fabulously wealthy but still ardently supporting a socialist program.

The same ideology and possibilities are latent in the Cuban A.B.C. movement; they are also latent in the Apra movement. Whether the latter when it gains power will become increasingly fascist as in Mexico, or whether collectivism will tip the balance

more strongly, will depend upon various factors, among them the general current in the world at large.

Thus into the Apra movement, much as in Mexico, is projected the age-old Indian agrarian collectivism, the aspirations of the new proletariat, the aspirations of the new middle class, and certain of the aspirations of the new native bourgeoisie. The battle, in short, is against the Spanish-created feudalism and foreign capitalism; and Haya de la Torre has been shrewd enough to disdain no weapons — collective, proletarian, middle-class or bourgeois. This merely implies confusionism to a communist. Undoubtedly it is the prelude to subsequent struggles. But though it does not permit the immediate injection of a Marxian class-struggle between classes that only exist in embryo, it is clear enough in its outlines, its ideology, and its purposes.

To label the movement as either fascist or communist, whatever it may soon tend to become, is to deny its facts and purposes. Rather is *Aprismo* a movement moulded to immediate needs which achieves a synthesis of the doctrines and tactic of democracy, Marxian communism and fascism. This, in fact, is the only type of movement that meets the actual issues and is likely to succeed. To combat militarism, the Church, feudalism, it advocates democracy for the masses which have never known democracy; as an anti-imperialist and anti-landlord movement it proposes collectivism to the extent possible; it is fascist in that it is nationalistic, does not disdain force, and does not demand complete abolition of private property.

v

*Aprismo* is bigger than its immediate demands. It represents a mass movement of great potentiality. Its members are imbued with almost mystic fervor; they are the stuff of which martyrs are made. They have been exiled, have gone to jail, have been wounded in battle. They are fighting for what to them is a sacred cause. It is a singing movement; they have hundreds of songs which are chanted at all gatherings throughout the country. They have a fervent faith in their leadership. Haya is perhaps too much of a god to them. Apra headquarters are plastered with pictures of Haya in entirely too-Mussolini-esque poses. Their discipline is almost puritanical. They war upon the vices and promote Aprista sports. Haya's own brother was expelled from the party for refusing to obey superior orders.

It is necessary to recall that Peru has never had a party based upon principles. Previously it has merely had ambitious political and military cliques, greedy for power and privilege. Thus in 1904 Prada declared that the Peruvian's electoral choice between the *Civilistas* and the Democrats consisted in walking through a narrow alley, both walls smeared with mud and blood so that one was soiled whichever side was touched. Apra is the first party in Peru's entire history with a concerted body of principles other than that of sustaining a small clique in power.

Peruvian governments have never been rooted in economic facts. There has been no census since 1876, if we except an estimate made in 1896 and an even more superficial estimate in 1923; hence no Peruvian government has ever known (except in 1876) how many Peruvians there are, how much Peru produces, or what Peru and its people need. Hence no government has ever attempted to root itself in the entire Peruvian nationality. Hence the ignorant feudal governments of Peru have always been unstable. Politics have shuttled between anarchy and tyranny, tyranny being but one facet of anarchy. Apra seeks a broad national mass basis, a democratic functioning, and increased economic justice. Apra principles are not empirical. They have evolved through the trial and error method — an ideology gradually crystallizing out of prior student and labor struggles. Though influenced by world trends, it is basically related to Peruvian conditions and needs, and to general Latin American needs.

An Aprista victory will immediately precipitate new problems. The leaders will be obliged either to make a compromise peace with the feudal *Civilistas*, or they will have to deepen their economic program and create a stronger alliance with peasant and Indian forces. Whatever its defects, however uncertain its future program, *Aprismo* is a great popular movement with remarkable discipline and remarkable leadership. It is the first stirring of a long oppressed people. It is the beginning of a new Peru. It is a movement which, in one guise or another, is rapidly reshaping the destinies of all Latin America. Haya de la Torre is a figure who provides the key to Latin American developments for the next few decades.