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Una Revolución Comunista Indígena: Rural Protest Movements in Cayambe, Ecuador

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At the inaugural session of a national assembly which gathered to establish the Ecuadorian Socialist party in May 1926, Jesús Gualavisí, an Indian leader from the rural canton of Cayambe, took the floor. He proposed that the congress salute "all peasants in the Republic, indicating to them that the Party would work intensely" on their behalf. His proposal passed unanimously (PSE 1926, 33). This congress in the capital city of Quito marked the first time in that country's history that an urban movement confronted rural issues in a significant and systematic manner. More impo rtant, this event illustrates the nature of the relationship that urban leftists and rural workers would come to enjoy in the Ecuadorian highlands of South America during the 1920s and 1930s.

Marxist interactions with the Indigenous peasantry in Latin America have commonly been interpreted as reflecting the dominant culture's racist and paternalistic attitude toward the marginalized rural and Indian masses. Deep cultural and historical divisions separated the two groups which made it difficult to them to organize together against their common enemies. Nevertheless, interactions at the founding of Ecuador's first Marxist party represent a peer relationship in which Marxists and Indians worked together to achieve common goals. Largely missing at this encounter was the cynical manipulation of rural protest movements that traditionally characterized Marxist attitudes toward Indians and peasants. Gualavisí's presence at the founding of Ecuador's first Socialist party represents a significant shift in attitudes toward Indigenous participation in social protest movements in Ecuador.

What accounts for the apparent congenial relationship between these two groups? Did Marxists truly avoid paternalistic attitudes toward the Indians? In other Latin American cases, Indians became dependent on urban intellectuals. Why was this largely not true in Ecuador? Was there something unique in this situation that led dissimilar groups to work together? What can be extracted from this history and applied elsewhere where disparate and sometimes conflictive groups share a common struggle for social justice?

Although it would be naive to assume that there were no problems or tensions in this relationship (such difficulties are inherent in any human interactions, particularly those divided by such wide cultural rifts), what is surprising is the degree to which Marxists and Indians were able to work together. This was due to conceptual openings on the part of both Marxists and Indians. During this period before the Communist International came to dominate and control leftist ideologies in Latin America, Marxist intellectuals were allowed more space to criticize their own national realities, including the incorporation of ethnicity in their analyses. Equally important and fundamental to understanding these relations were the changing attitudes toward class consciousness and ethnic identity within Indigenous groups in Ecuador. Indigenous participation in the founding of the Socialist party represents the start of Indians diffusing their own profound structural analysis of society. Gualavisí and other Indigenous leaders from the canton of Cayambe in the country's northern highlands understood that in order to end the oppression and discrimination they faced, they would need to effect radical changes in society. This was the beginning of a conceptual shift of Indigenous peasants turning away from searches for local solutions toward what were in reality much broader structural problems. Economic and social relations on the large landed estates called haciendas, where Indians worked, were integrally tied into the broader capitalistic world system. Simply changing social relations with the local landowners would not result in necessary, fundamental economic changes. For the first time, Indians began to confront the nation-state on its own terms. An analysis of Indigenous organizing strategies and demands reveals a deep understanding of the political nature of the Ecuadorian state and the changes that would be necessary in order to improve the social, economic, and political status of the rural population. This conceptual broadening of organizational actions opened up the possibilities for developing working relations with potential allies, including urban Marxists. These Indian leaders, however, did not embrace a class analysis of society to the exclusion of their ethnic identity as Indigenous peoples. Rather, Gualavisí and others emerged out of and continued to work with local, grass-roots Indigenous organizations.

Of all the political forces in Ecuador, the Socialist party (which was converted into a Communist party in 1931) was the most aggressive in its efforts to incorporate Indigenous demands into a political platform and party positions. Notably, it was the first party in Ecuador to attempt to organize the Indian masses as a political force. Traditionally, electoral politics were the domain of white, literate, landed male elites, thereby excluding the vast majority of Ecuador's population. Voting, therefore, ex-

cluded the Indigenous masses. Despite this situation, Ricardo Paredes, the founder and leader of the Socialist and later Communist party, presented himself as the "candidate of the workers, peasants, Indians, and soldiers." He promised bread, work, land, and liberty for the people (Muñoz 1985, 49). There was a good deal of confluence between leftist demands and those that Indigenous organizations presented. Agrarian reform headed the party's list of demands and was to continue to be the principal goal of Indigenous organizations for the remainder of the twentieth century. Indians needed allies to achieve their goals, and they found such friends among the members of the Socialist party. The two forces were to become natural collaborators in a unified struggle against the Ecuadorian oligarchy.

Early Peasant Organizations in Cayambe

Since the 1920s, various leftist leaders and organizations attempted to provide an organizational structure which would motivate Ecuador's large rural population to engage in social revolutionary actions. The earliest peasant movements emerged with the support of the Socialist party. Many of these peasant *sindicatos* (syndicates, or peasant unions) organized in rural communities where the majority of the population was Indigenous, and many of these efforts were based in the canton of Cayambe in the northern Ecuadorian highlands. Although the support of sympathetic outsiders was critical to Indigenous success, the leaders and issues were authentic and homegrown. The demands of these organizations often revolved around issues of better salaries and working conditions, housing, an end to abusive treatment from hacienda overlords, and respect for their organizing efforts. Far from the stereotype of peasants as isolated and conservative, Indigenous peoples in Cayambe in the 1920s were aware of and maintained contact with broader social movements. This contact with the Left became a defining characteristic of Indigenous organizations in the region.

The first rural organization in Cayambe (and, indeed, in all of Ecuador) emerged in January of 1926 in the civil parish of Juan Montalvo just south of the city of Cayambe. The organization was the Peasant Workers Syndicate of Juan Montalvo, which Jesús Gualavisí represented at the founding of the Socialist party. This organization sought to defend peasant lands, raise salaries, lower the number of tasks and the number of work hours, end nonpaid work requirements, and demand better treatment and the suppression of abuses from hacienda owners and their overlords (Salamea 1978, 52). Gualavisí, who was born in 1867 on the Changalá hacienda in this parish, was the primary leader of these early efforts. He served as the secretary-general of this syndicate from its founding until his death in 1962. He also was instrumental in the subsequent formation of peasant syndicates on haciendas in the northern parish of Olmedo in the late 1920s and 1930s. For his involvement in this struggle, he became known as a caudillo (leader) of the Indigenous peoples of Cayambe (Albornoz 1987, 155-88).

The immediate context for the formation of this syndicate was a land conflict on the Changalá hacienda. Changalá had a history of abuses against its Indigenous work force. The Indigenous peoples and other inhabitants of Cayambe presented legal claims that the hacienda had taken over lands to which they had historic title. When the owner Gabriel García Alcázar ignored these petitions, Gualavisí led an occupation of the disputed land. García Alcázar called on the government to protect what he claimed as his property from communist and bolshevist attacks.' This action exploded into a violent conflict in February 1926 when two army battalions arrived to repress these land demands. One journalist observed with trepidation the sight of seventy soldiers with machine guns facing a large group of unarmed peasants.2 The repression did not end the conflicts, and the following November a newspaper reported that a group attacked the police at Changalá, shouting "Long live socialism."3

Despite leftist support for the land demands in Cayambe, these local organizations were not a direct outgrowth of the Socialist or Communist parties. The peasant syndicate in Juan Montalvo predated the formation of the Socialist party in May 1926 by several months. Rather than emerging out of urban Marxist parties, Indigenous organizations developed simultaneously and in response to economic and social conditions similar to those faced by the parties. A small, elite group of people owned the land on which the Indians were oppressed and the factories in which urban workers were exploited. As was to be expected, these elites manipulated economic production so that it would benefit themselves rather than the broader society. These same elites held political power and resisted any attempts at modification that would open up the political process to other actors. Naturally, the result was a broad gap between the rich and the poor, with such class divisions ultimately being more important than the cultural divide between rural and urban workers. In an article published in the party newspaper twenty-five years later, the Communist party appears fully cognizant that Indian organizing efforts in Cayambe predated its founding. In fact, Indian uprisings in Cayambe may have raised issues that triggered the birth of the Socialist (and later Communist) party.[4] This helped set the stage for what would be a long and congenial struggle of urban leftists and rural Indians united for common goals.

Jesús Gualavisí played an important role in this process. He was both one of the earliest and most important Indigenous leaders in Ecuador and the first Indian in that country to become militantly involved in a Marxist party. Gualavisí was more than a token member of the party. He actively participated in discussions, particularly when they related to issues of land or the Indigenous population. For example, at the founding of the Socialist party, Gualavisí proposed that the party create an office to defend the interests of peasants and workers. The delegates voted on and accepted the

1. "El dueño de Changalá acude a la junta de gobierno," *El Comercio,* 25 February 1926, 1.
2. "La razón y la fuerza," *El Comercio,* 8 March 1926, I.
3. "Se atacó a la policía de Cayambe," *El Comercio,* 6 November 1926, 1. On the 1926 uprisings at Changalá, see "El pueblo de Cayambe ataca Changalá," *El Comercio,* 24 February 1926, 3; Abornoz (1987, 160-7); and Maldonado (1987, 103-5).
4. "El partido comunista organizador y defensor de los indios," *El Pueblo,* 2 June 1951, 6.

proposal (PSE 1926, 52). Later he would join the Central Committee of the Communist party. According to historian Oswaldo Albornoz (1987), Gualavisí understood the exploitation of the Indigenous masses because of his Communist orientation, which he saw as a way to combat those injustices.

Gualavisí was deeply involved in the Communist party, but he never lost his ethnic identity. He dedicated his entire life to the fight for Indigenous rights in Cayambe and throughout Ecuador. He also understood that it was the Communists who could give organizational expression on a national level to the Indigenous peoples' demands. Albornoz claimed that "this new form of organization, until then unknown by the Indians, gave strength and cohesion to their struggles." In addition, it introduced "the strike as a powerful battle arm which will never be abandoned and from the beginning demonstrated its great effectiveness." In combining "the peasant movement with the working class, it forged their alliance and gave a greater guarantee of victory." Albornoz contended that it was the Marxists in Ecuador who first recognized the need "to organize our Indians so that they could obtain their legitimate aspirations." These Communists were "the first to raise their consciousness and show them the path which they could take to victory" (Albornoz 1987, 166, 167, 182).

Hiding in caves, creek beds, and under cover of night, Indian workers formed the first peasant unions in Cayambe: El Inca (The Inka) in Pesillo, Tierra Libre (Free Land) in Moyurco, and Pan y Tierra (Bread and Land) in La Chimba. The primary issues which these organizations addressed were land rights, access to water and pasture, salaries, education, and the ending of abuses. Other than their names and the approximate dates when they were founded, little is known about these early organizations. Beginning in May of 1930, Socialists began meeting furtively with Indians in their huts. The workers on the haciendas turned to the Socialist party and its leaders including Ricardo Paredes, Rubén Rodríguez, and Luis F. Chávez in order to help them organize and present their demands. That August, Carlos Torres and Gustavo Araujo, two Socialist activists, were on the Pesillo and La Chimba haciendas helping organize agricultural syndicates.

Augusto Egas, the director of the Junta Central de Asistencia Pública, the governmental agency that administered the state-owned haciendas, claimed the urban leftists were stirring up trouble with the seditious intent of organizing a revolt and generally sowing rebellion. Indians were preparing a general strike at La Chimba for 1 September, and the insurrection threatened to spread to Pesillo by 4 September. The strike was a response to the imprisonment of two members of the peasant syndicate who had been detained because of their organizing activities. It was harvest time, and the police intervened to protect the interests of the haciendas' renters. Throughout the second half of 1930, reports from Cayambe indicate an increased pace of rural organization on the haciendas. Egas felt threatened by these organizational efforts, which he considered a bolshevik attempt to disrupt the social order of the country. Later he conceded that in Cayambe there was a serious threat of *una revolución comunista indígena* ("an Indigenous communist revolution"). Although he was aware that the workers and peasants

had a constitutional right to form syndicates, he resolved not to allow them to utilize this organizational form as a basis for a social revolution.5

Socialist activists played an important role in support of these early organizational efforts. The Socialist party announced on 21 August the formation in Quito of an organization called the Socorro Obrero y Campesino (Worker and Peasant Help) which was designed "to help with the demands of workers and peasants in their conflicts with capitalists, landlords, and authorities."[6] The first action in which this organization engaged was to free the imprisoned members of the agrarian workers' syndicate El Inca at Pesillo as well as members of the Communist Youth who had gone to help them with organizational efforts. In addition, the Socialist senator Luis Maldonado spoke in the National Congress on behalf of the workers in Cayambe and the Socialist party collected money for the imprisoned workers, which it sent to Cayambe along with a party member to help out with the situation. The Socialist party newspaper *La Hoz* claimed success for its new support organization, as the rapid and efficient mobilization of resources led to the release of the imprisoned activists.7

Later the Communist party would proudly proclaim that it had been the only one to come to the defense of the Indians. It supported the demands of workers on haciendas, members of Indigenous communities, and Indian tribes. Communists defended Indigenous interests in the national press, accompanied Indians when they presented accusations to the authorities, helped Indians with their organizations, defended workers against the abuses of landlords and their employees, and assisted in the formation of schools and literacy campaigns.[8] These claims were not entirely overstated; during a period in which many elites maintained deeply held racist sentiments toward Indigenous peoples, Communists comprised a rare group willing to defend their interests. This supportive role was to become critical in defining the nature of Indigenous organizations in Cayambe and throughout Ecuador.

Landholder reports indicate that although the Socialist activists on the haciendas were "outside agitators," they did not remain in Quito removed from the local

5. Letter from Augusto Egas to Sr. Ministro de lo Interior y Policía, 2 September 1930, in Libro de Oficios que dirige la Junta de Asistencia Pública, 1930, 353, Archivo Nacional de Medicina del Museo Nacional de Medicina "Dr. Eduardo Estrella," Fondo Junta Central de Asistencia Pública in Quito, Ecuador (hereafter cited as JCAP); letter from Augusto Egas to the Jefe Político of Cayambe, 2 September 1930, in Libro de Oficios que dirige la Junta de Asistencia Pública, 1930, 353, JCAP; letter from Augusto Egas to the Ministro de Previsión Social y Asistencia Pública, 3 September 1930, in Libro de Oficios que dirige la Junta de Asistencia Pública, 1930, 354, JCAP; letter from Augusto Egas to the Ministro de Previsión Social, 24 September 1930, in Libro de Oficios que dirige la Junta de Asistencia Pública, 1930, 379-80, JCAP; "Formación del Socorro Obrero y Campesino," *La Hoz* (Quito), 11 September 1930, 6; letter from Augusto Egas, Segundo D. Rojas V., and Ernesto Robalino to Ministerio de Gobierno y Asistencia Pública, 30 April 1931, in Comunicaciones Recibidas, Enero – Junio 1931, 900, JCAP. Also see a letter from the Ministro de Previsión Social y Trabajo to the Jefe Político of Cayambe, 16 October 1930, in Comunicaciones Recibidas, Julio–Diciembre 1930, 559, JCAP.

6. "El terror de los campos," *La Hoz* (Quito), 11 September 1930, 6.

7. "Formación del Socorro Obrero y Campesino," *La Hoz* (Quito), 11 September 1930, 6.

8. "El partido comunista organizador y defensor de los indios," *El Pueblo,* 2 June 1951, 6.

struggles, manipulating events at a distance. Rather, they worked hand in hand with workers on the haciendas to develop organizational structures and often suffered the same threats of police action and imprisonment as the Indigenous activists. It appears, furthermore, that the hacienda workers appreciated the support that the Socialists lent to their local struggles. The workers called them *compañeros,* a term which literally means "companions" but perhaps could be better translated as "comrades" and implies people joined together in a common political struggle. Far from the stereotype of Socialists being elite, urban, mestizo intellectuals with little understanding of the Indigenous reality, the leftists who became involved in Indigenous struggles in Cayambe in the 1920s and 1930s treated the Indians as equals as they fought for a common goal.

1930-**1 Strike**

On 30 December 1930, the *Jefe Político* (the local governmental official) of Cayambe sent a telegram to the minister of government in Quito noting that the Indians at Pesillo and Moyurco had revolted. No one was working, and some of the Indians had fled the haciendas. The leaders had not been found or detained, but he urged the government to take immediate action to contain the situation. Augusto Egas, the director of the Asistencia Pública program, denounced the presence of propagandists and bolshevik instigators whom he believed were imposing communist and other foreign ideologies and manipulating the Indians into attacking the haciendas. The Indians assaulted the main hacienda house at Pesillo, the haciendas's employees had to flee and, according to Egas, even local governmental officials had to hide. Responding to requests from Egas, the haciendas' renters, and local officials, the government sent in 150 soldiers with bloodhounds to arrest and torture the leaders, destroy their houses, and protect the interests of the landlords. Five leaders were captured and put on a train to Quito where they would be investigated for rebellion.9

According to an article in the Quito daily newspaper *El Día,* the immediate cause for the uprising was the presence of an army squadron in the area. There were, however, much deeper underlying causes for the work stoppage. The workers who had gone on strike presented a list of seventeen demands. In general, the demands revolved around issues of raising salaries, a forty-hour workweek, returning land to those workers from whom they had been taken, ending the Catholic Church's abusive practice of charging tithes (one-tenth of the agricultural production), paying women for their labor, and ending the practice of demanding personal service in the landlord's house. [10] All these

9. Letter from Augusto Egas to Sr. Intiendente General de Policía, 26 December 1930, in Libro de Oficios que dirige la Junta de Asistencia Pública, 1930, 471, JCAP; letter from Augusto Egas to Sr. Ministro de Gobierno, 7 January 1931, in Libro de Comunicaciones Oficiales de la Dirección de la Junta Central de Asistencia Pública, 1931, 6, JCAP; "La sublevación de los indígenas de una hacienda," *El Comercio,* 31 December 1930, 1; "Los indígenas de Pesillo y Moyurco se han sublevado," *El Día,* 31 December 1930, 1.

10. "Pliego de peticiones que los sindicatos 'El Inca' y `Tierra Libre' situados en la parroquia Olmedo, presentan a los arriendatarios de las haciendas donde trabajan," *El Día,* 6 January 1931, 1.

issues concerned economic conditions and the Indian workers' relation to social structures on the haciendas. Significantly, none of these seventeen demands explicitly addressed ethnic issues. There is no call for an end to racial discrimination, no demand to have Ecuador's ethnic diversity affirmed or to extend the franchise to Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, although it is not explicitly spelled out, an ethnic ideology underlies the entire list. Through concrete demands, Indigenous peoples sought to define a space for themselves in Ecuadorian society.

It is interesting to note that agrarian reform was not included in this list of demands. According to Egas, in organizing the peasant syndicates the previous year, the Socialists had been offering land titles to the Indians and filling their heads with the idea that the land was their rightful property." Apparently it was outside the realm of possibility for the workers to conceive of the idea that they could own the means of production on the haciendas. It was only later through the influence of the Communist party that this issue was even raised and became a common demand. It speaks volumes to the nature of their identity that they had so internalized a proletarian type of identity that land was not a major issue. They were not peasants who struggled only for a small plot of land that they could call their own and then asked to be left alone. Rather, their demands revolved around more traditional working-class issues of salaries and working conditions. When land later became an issue, the desire was not to have individualized plots but rather to administer the hacienda as a cooperative or in some other type of communal organization. In fact, the very nature of these demands created a common basis for analysis of their situation of exploitation which aided in the development of close relations with urban leftists.

Throughout this entire strike, the Indians in Cayambe enjoyed significant support from urban leftists. A lawyer named Dr. Juan Genaro Jaramillo accompanied a group of Indians from Moyurco who came to the Asistencia Pública offices on 31 December 1930, to protest the arrest of their companions at the beginning of the uprising. The following day, Jaramillo returned with Indians from Pesillo who also presented demands for higher salaries and better working conditions. Urban leftists also helped the Indians draft and present a list of strike demands that were published in the newspaper. Later, Ricardo Paredes was present during negotiations with the landlords to settle the strike.12

On 7 January 1931, José Delgado and Julio Miguel Páez, the renters of the Pesillo and Moyurco haciendas, reached a settlement with their workers. The Ministry of Government together with Alberto Batallas, the labor commissioner, arranged an agreement in which Delgado and Páez would respect an eight-hour workday, give the workers one day of rest each week, pay for the work that the workers' wives and

11. Letter from Augusto Egas to José Rafael Delgado, 2 September 1930, in Libro de Oficios que dirige la Junta de Asistencia Pública, 1930, 352, JCAP; letter from Augusto Egas to Sr. Ministro de Gobierno, 7 January 1931, in Libro de Comunicaciones Oficiales de la Dirección de la Junta Central de Asistencia Pública, 1931, 6, JCAP.

12. Letter from Augusto Egas to Sr. Ministro de Gobierno, 7 January 1931, in Libro de Comunicaciones Oficiales de la Dirección de la Junta Central de Asistencia Pública, 1931, 7, JCAP.

children did on the hacienda, abolish the custom of forcing the Indians to provide personal services for the haciendas' employees, and not fire workers except for reasons of bad conduct or insubordination. After signing the agreement, the workers on the Pesillo and Moyurco haciendas as well as on the neighboring La Chimba hacienda returned to work.13

Primer Congreso de Organizaciones Campesinas (1931)

Immediately on the heels of the strike at Pesillo and before all the issues in this conflict could be settled, Indigenous leaders organized the Primer Congreso de Organizaciones Campesinas (First Congress of Peasant Organizations) in Cayambe. The congress was planned to be held for three-and-a-half days at the beginning of February 1931 in the parish of Juan Montalvo. Despite the timing, the conference was not an immediate outgrowth of the strike at Pesillo. An article in the Socialist party newspaper *La Hoz* in December of the previous year (before the strike began) noted the plans in progress for this conference. It is significant that the congress was to be held in Cayambe. Peasant organizations in Cayambe that were in charge of organizing the conference were providing a vanguard leadership and example for the nascent rural protest movement in Ecuador. The *La Hoz* article noted that "it appears that the Congress will have a good number of delegates from a variety of provinces."14

The organizing committee released to the press the agenda they planned to discuss during the course of the congress. [15] As is true of the formation of many organizations, much of the time at the congress was to be dedicated to discussion of the structure of the organization, including the writing of bylaws and election of officers. But the formation of the organization would not overshadow its main political purpose, which was to draw up a list of complaints and demands. In all likelihood this list would be similar to that that the strikers at Pesillo had presented a month earlier. Unlike the Pesillo declaration, however, this agenda also stated an intention to work on the issue of land reform, a demand consistent with the Socialist party platform. Furthermore, this was to be a national organization and include peasants in economic and social situations distinct from that of the Indigenous agrarian workers in northern Cayambe.

Before the conference was to begin on 8 February, the daily newspaper in Quito carried descriptions of people flooding to Cayambe from all over the country. A week in advance, Indians from neighboring communities arrived to begin planning the

13. "Se soluciona el problema creado por los indígenas sublevados en las haciendas Pesillo y Moyurco," *El Comercio,* 8 January 1931, 1; letter from José Rafael Delgado to the Junta de Asistencia Pública, 24 January 1931, in Comunicaciones Recibidas, Enero—Junio 1931, 891, JCAP. The agreement is also discussed in a letter from the Secretaria de Policía to the Jefe Político, 7 January 1931, in Comunicaciones Recibidas, Enero—Junio 1931, 894, JCAP.

14. "El Congreso de Obreros Agrícolas y Campesinos," *La Hoz,* 20 December 1930, 4.

15. "Siguen llegabdi a Cayambe gentes de diversas procedencias para la celebración del Primer Congreso de Campesinos del Ecuador," *El Día,* 31 January 1931, 1; "Puntos que serán discutidos en el primer congreso de campesinos q' se realizarán en el Cantón Cayambe," *El Comercio,* 1 February 1931, 1.

conference. In addition, there was news that members of agrarian syndicates from Yaguachi, Milagro, Naranjito, Jesús María, Marcelino Maridueñas, Guale, Sibambe, and Tigua were mobilizing to come to the conference. As the news of the gathering spread, even more people planned to attend. In short, people were coming from throughout the sierra and coast to attend the congress. [16] Many people traveled on foot or on horseback for days or weeks to attend the conference. According to anthropologist Mercedes Prieto (1978, 55), two thousand leaders representing about one hundred thousand peasants and Indians planned to attend. [17] The local sponsoring committee was arranging housing, including the construction of numerous straw huts. Even though there were many delegates arriving for the conference, *El Día* noted that they were behaving themselves and abstaining from all alcoholic drinks.18

Although participants were not causing any problems, this massive mobilization made the government nervous. They feared that the amassed Indians planned to attack haciendas in the area and accused communists from Quito of instigating a revolution in Cayambe. President Isidro Ayora sent in one hundred troops to control the situation. On 31 January, the government took various measures to stop the planned meeting. Both the Ministries of Government and War were called in to prohibit the delegates already assembled from taking any action and to close roads to prevent more delegates from arriving. The government arrested and imprisoned several Socialists who had traveled from Quito to help with the meeting, including Luis Chávez, Alejandro J. Torres, Manuel Viteri (the secretary general of the party), Ricardo Paredes, Cerveleón Gómez Jurada, Juan Bustamante, Gustavo Araujo, and Leonardo Muñoz. Those arrested faced criminal charges for disturbing the public order and committing acts of violence. [19] Because of repression from the national government, this congress never took place.

The next day, the government announced that the situation was under control. The Socialist leaders captured the previous day were sent to prison where they were to be held until they signed statements that they would not meddle in affairs that attacked the public order. Several weeks later, Luis Fernando Chávez Molineros, a 22-year-old mechanic from Quito, described his involvement in these affairs. Three or four months before he had met with a group of friends in Quito to discuss the peasant congress. This group sent him to Cayambe to lay groundwork for the congress, and he was identified as the secretary general of the organizing committee of the Congress of Agricultural Workers and Peasants. The committee sent circulars and invitations to peasants all over the country.20

16. "Varios millares de indígenas se han concentrado en Cayambe para asistir al primer congreso de campesinos del Ecuador," *El Día,* 30 January 1931, 1.
17. An article in *El Día* mentioned a figure of ten thousand delegates, a number that is obviously inflated. See "Crónicas de Cayambe," *El Día,* 6 February 1931, 2.
18. "Varios millares de indígenas se han concentrado en Cayambe para asistir al primer congreso de campesinos del Ecuador," *El Día,* 30 January 1931, 1.
19. "Varios personas fueron capturados por hallarse comprometidas en el movimiento comunista de Cayambe," *El Comercio,* 2 February 1931, 1.
20. "La declaración rendida por el Sr. Luis F. Chávez," *El Día,* 20 February 1931, 2; "Fue puesto en libertad el doctor Ricardo Paredes," *El Día,* 20 February 1931, 4.

Chávez's declaration indicates the critical role that Socialists played in organizing this meeting. Without this logistical support, many people would not have heard of the meeting or planned to attend. The press in all likelihood would not have received notice of the organizational agenda. There is nothing to indicate, however, that the Socialists manipulated Indigenous interests in this affair, or that they organized the conference separate from the Indians who would benefit from it. Indians would not have flooded to Cayambe for a meeting that was foreign to their own interests. Rather, all indications are that the Indians and urban Socialists worked together for a successful meeting.

Editorials in *El Comercio* from this time are perhaps representative of elite attitudes toward the Indigenous efforts at organization and indicate the level of racism that the Indigenous population faced in Ecuador. On the day the congress was to start, the paper editorialized that "nothing serious or good can come out of that numerous, illiterate, and poorly prepared mass" of people assembled in Cayambe. The congress was nothing other than a demonstration "of the force and influence which the Communist party has or thinks it has." It was importing doctrines from Russia and was a danger to society. *El Comercio* criticized the government for allowing communism to flourish in Ecuador.[21] *El Día* adopted similar attitudes in its editorials. The Indians were children who had "little understanding" and were "susceptible" to negative outside influences which could result in violence. Their primitive mentality made them incapable of reflection or engaging in dialogue, but easily manipulated into violent actions. The Indians were stupid, the paper contended, and the planned meeting was nothing other than whites manipulating the situation to their own benefit. Furthermore, this could not be a political party assembly because the vast majority of the Indians were not even citizens and thus could not participate in electoral politics. Despite the fact that the Indians were public about their demands, published their planned meeting agenda in the newspaper, met with the press to explain the abuses they received at the hands of hacienda employees, and demanded respect for their human rights, the newspaper still claimed ignorance of the motives or intentions of the congress.22

These editorials also reveal the ideological issues that the Indigenous peoples were raising in the public eye. On the surface, the editorials merely reflect racist perceptions that Ecuador's elite had toward the Indigenous populations. These attitudes were predictable and well established. The editorials also reveal a deep-seated anticommunist fear within elite society. Other issues, however, including the question of agency, also

21. "El congreso de campesinos," *El Comercio,* 1 February 1931, 3. Although *El Comercio* repeatedly referred to "communism" and the "Communist party," it was not until the second party congress in October of that year that the Socialist party formally transformed itself into a Communist party, although it had been allied with the Communist International before then.

22. "Varios millares de indígenas se han concentrado en Cayambe para asistir al primer congreso de campesinos del Ecuador," *El Día,* 30 January 1931, 1; "El congreso indígena," *El Día,* 31 January 1931, 3; "El verdadero fondo del problema indígena," *El Día,* 2 February 1931, 3; "El comunismo y el consejo del estado," *El Día,* 6 February 1931, 3.

emerge in these editorials. The elite classes could not accept the idea that the Indians were able to organize their own movements for social change. The Indians' actions, however, contradict the claims that they were merely manipulated at the hands of leftist urban organizers. In addition, the fact that the government arrested various leaders indicates that it perceived the Indians' organizational efforts to be more of a threat to society than the government would have liked to admit publicly.

More significant, however, is the issue of citizenship. As the editorial in *El Día* perhaps inadvertently noted, the Indigenous actions challenged accepted notions of citizenship in Ecuador. The constitution defined "citizens" as literate adults. Most Indians (who often spoke Spanish only as a second language, if at all) fell into a secondary category of "nationals" who did not enjoy the privileges of citizenship, which included rights to vote and to play a political role in society. Other public voices also called for a change in these citizenship restrictions. Petronio, a columnist in *El Día,* noted the injustice of having twenty thousand "citizens" elect officials to govern the two million inhabitants of Ecuador. Indians were marginalized from national life, and Petronio noted that Indians simply wanted to join the dominant culture, particularly in the economic arena. To deny them this opportunity would result in revolts, and blaming the situation on communists was an overreaction and a fear not based on reality. Petronio believed there was an economic basis to the "Indian problem," and a change in economic patterns together with educational opportunities would dramatically improve the situation.23

Increasingly during their protest actions, the Indigenous workers claimed citizenship rights and demanded equal treatment from the central government, even though the government did not extend this recognition to the Indigenous peoples. [24] Gaining citizenship was neither an end in itself nor simply a desire to participate in political parties or electoral politics. Citizenship was not a rhetorical issue, but a very concrete concern Indians hoped would open political space which they could exploit to improve their social and economic status. Unless they gained access to state-level politics, they could not define the nature of the external forces that crushed down upon them.

For a period of several days in February 1931, Cayambe had become a police state. Military troops stopped all movement in the canton in an attempt to detain the leaders of the congress. Major Ernesto Robalino, the head of the military garrison in Quito, personally went to Cayambe to oversee the situation and to ensure that the Asistencia Pública renters complied with the January agreement they had signed with the government in an attempt to bring this state of affairs under control. Within several days,

23. Petronio, "El congreso de campesinos," *El Día,* 15 February 1931, 1, 4.

24. Kim Clark (1994, 67) has observed a similar phenomenon of Indigenous workers claiming citizenship rights in the province of Chimborazo in order to defend their interests. She notes, "Paradoxically, these forms of resistance also implied a recognition and legitimization of the state. In cases like this the complexity of the dialectic of resistance and accommodation in situations involving domination is made evident" (70).

the government proclaimed that all was calm in Cayambe. The Indians were returning to work on the haciendas, including those in Juan Montalvo where the congress was to have taken place and in Pesillo and Moyurco where the strike had occurred the previous month. Nevertheless, as a precaution the Ministry of Government sent a circular to all provincial governments and police chiefs prohibiting all socialist meetings.25

Initially the government announced plans for an imminent withdrawal of troops from the area, but despite public claims that all was calm, persistent unrest compelled them to retain military control over Cayambe. Press reports indicate that although Cayambe's Jefe Político and other local local leaders declared the situation to be tenuous, Robalino and other military leaders claimed that all was not under control—that the Indians had not gone back to work and were still demanding better pay and working conditions. Indigenous peoples were beginning to address a national problem of structural cracks in society, and the military perceived a need to implement a global "solution" to the problem. Perhaps the most threatening aspect of communist involvement in these Indigenous protest movements was not that they would instigate revolts or put ideas into the Indians' heads, but rather that the outside support gave these protests a dimension and sustainability that went beyond the capability of local governmental forces to contain and control them.

Marxists and Indians

These organizing actions in Cayambe reveal much about the nature of the relationship between Indians and the Marxist left in Quito. The press reported that the Indians had been "exploited by false apostles."[26] Newspaper stories created a scenario with a chain of command through which instructions flowed from Marxists in Quito to local, non-Indigenous Communist leaders in Cayambe to Virgilio Lechón and other local Indigenous leaders at Pesillo and finally to the peons on the hacienda. Páez, the renter of the Moyurco hacienda, charged that the local leaders blindly obeyed orders sent from communists in Quito to the point that without thought they would kill, burn, and destroy as they were ordered.[27] Cornel Alberto Albán, head of the First Military Zone, declared that the communists had convinced the workers that the hacienda land was theirs, and taught them to hate until death the owners and employees of the hacienda.[28] The ludicrousness of these ideas should be immediately obvious. Hundreds of years of exploitation had given the Indians a deep hatred toward their bosses. It did not take much reflection to realize that a context of absen-

25. "Se prohiben las reuniones socialistas," *El Comercio,* 6 February 1931, 1.
26. "Los indios de las haciendas de Cayambe han tornado a sus diarias ocupaciones en el campo," *El Comercio, 5* February 1931, 1.
27. Letter from Julio Miguel Páez to the Junta de Asistencia Pública, 20 January 1931, in Comunicaciones Recibidas, Enero¬Junio 1931, 777, JCAP.
28. "Declaracions del Coronel Alberto Albán," *El Día,* 6 February 1931, 3.

tee landlords who profited greatly while those who worked the land scarcely benefited from their labors was an unjust situation that needed rectifying. Nevertheless, the government continued to look for scapegoats to blame for the continual uprisings. Beginning in February 1931, the government began a campaign to root out communist influence in Cayambe's education system which they believed resulted in school teachers instigating the Indians to revolt.

In spite of elite and government hopes that peasant protests had come to an end, that was not to be. The underlying situation of economic exploitation and racial discrimination that had led to the initial revolts still existed. It was thus to be expected that the protests would continue. On 10 March 1931, barely a month after the government shut down the peasant congress in Juan Montalvo and repressed the strike at Pesillo, 141 Indians from Cayambe walked day and night to Quito in order to present their demands directly to the government. This group included fifty-seven women and about a dozen children. The group stayed at the house of Luis Felipe Chávez, a Socialist who supported their struggle and the father of Luis Fernando Chávez who had helped organize the congress in Cayambe. Egas, the director of the Asistencia Pública program, agreed to arrange a meeting between these Indians and the president of the republic and to have the renters of the government's haciendas raise their salaries five centavos. Rather than complying with this agreement, Egas sent the group of Indians to the police who arrested them and then forced them to return to their homes in Cayambe. In the process, the police injured several Indians including Virgilio Lechón, Rosa Catujuamba, and a boy named José Amaguaña.29

This incident highlights the importance that urban leftists assigned to the Indigenous movements and the nature of the role they played. Not only did Chávez provide the Indians with housing in Quito, but he also pressed for their rights with government officials there. After they were arrested and forcibly returned to Cayambe, Chávez met with Egas in a failed attempt to defend their rights. [30] The urban leftists played a critical role in assisting Indigenous peoples in communicating their concerns to the government.

During the first three months of 1931, rural protest actions in Cayambe repeatedly and consistently made front-page headlines in the national papers in Ecuador. Even after the uprisings had quieted in Cayambe, the actions there set the stage for protests elsewhere in the country. It was as if the revolt in Cayambe had opened the floodgates for other hacienda workers in other provinces to express their discontent. For example, *El Comercio* described an uprising in April on a hacienda in Guaranda in the central highland province of Bolivar as "almost equal to Cayambe." [31] The

29. "141 peones de Cayambe han venido a esta ciudad intempestivamente abandonando sus faenas del campo," *El Comercio,* 13 March 1931, 1; "Ayer fueron apresados 156 indígenas de las haciendas de Cayambe," *El Día,* 13 March 1931, 8; "No se efectuó la audiencia del presidente con los indígenas de Cayambe," *El Día,* 14 March 1931, 1.

30. "Se les obligará a salir de las haciendas de Cayambe a los indígenas," *El Día,* 17 March 1931, 1.

31. "Los indígenas de las haciendas de beneficencia de Bolívar producen agitaciones como las de Cayambe," *El Comercio,* 30 April 1931, 1.

protest actions in Cayambe did not end with this strike. In August of that same year, Paredes and Maldonado once again were in Cayambe helping to organize an uprising of about five hundred Indians.[32] These were not isolated incidents; such protests would continue through the agrarian reforms of the 1960s.

These actions took place in the context of the emergence of other leftist movements or intellectual trends. It is one thing to organize locally to resolve a land dispute with a hacienda owner or to gain better working conditions and wages, and it becomes a completely different situation if an organization's goals include effecting changes on a macrolevel. This is the fundamental difference between Indigenous revolts of the colonial period and the organizations that rural actors began to form in the 1920s and 1930s. The goals these organizations embraced required interacting for the first time with a state apparatus, which necessitated the accumulation of new skills.

In order to effect the desired profound changes in Ecuador's land tenure system, the Indigenous leaders would have to take their demands directly to the government located in the capital city of Quito. From as far away as northern Cayambe, people would walk, often barefoot with babies on their backs, to Quito for meetings and protests. They would first go to the town of Cayambe the night before a trip to sleep and leave from there at 3 A.M. At noon they would rest at Guayllabamba and later continue to Calderón by nightfall. The next morning they would arrive in Quito where they would spend anywhere from a few days to a month presenting their petitions to the government. Tránsito Amaguaña, one of the leaders from Cayambe, made twenty-six trips like this on foot to Quito (Rodas 1987, 25).

Once in Quito, the leaders met various obstacles in their attempts to present their demands to the government. They faced logistical problems, including those of room and board. There were cultural and language barriers to be overcome. Many of the peasants in Cayambe were monolingual Quichua speakers and often illiterate. Petitions to the government needed to be written in Spanish, often following a specific legal format. This was never a question of intelligence, conceptualization of issues that needed to be addressed, or the need for assistance in mapping out strategies; rather, it was a pragmatic issue of how to present demands to the national government.

For assistance with these issues Indigenous peoples from Cayambe turned to urban leftists and organizations. Leftists, sometimes with legal backgrounds, assisted in drawing up petitions and helping the Indigenous peoples present their demands to the government. It is a mistake to see this as a paternalistic form of assistance. To argue that the urban leftists manipulated the Indians purely for their own benefit is to deny agency to the rural actors. The Indians were caught up in capitalistic economic forces much larger than their small communities or haciendas, but they were capable of analyzing their situation and developing plans of action. While in Quito,

32. "Nuevo levantamiento de los indios de Cayambe se ha estado preparando," *El Comercio,* 16 August 1931, 1.

Indians would often stay at the Casa del Obrero (Worker's House), which was on the Plaza del Teatro in the center of town. The Casa del Obrero was a meeting place for peasants, artisans, artists, workers, students, and intellectuals who were interested in causes of social justice. It was also commonly used as the gathering place for Indians from Cayambe when they came to the capital to participate in protests or present their demands to the government.

At the same time, it is an oversimplification to see the urban leftists as simple conduits who transmitted rural demands to the central government without interacting intellectually with the authors of these demands. Naturally, in the process of drafting the legal petitions, the two groups discussed issues and problems they faced. The urban leftists introduced the Indians to intellectual trends that were broader than the immediate reality of Indigenous peasants in the countryside in the northern Ecuadorian highlands. For example, Nela Martínez, one of these urban Marxists who worked with the Indians in Cayambe, notes that in the 1920s and 1930s, *Amauta,* a journal edited by the Peruvian Marxist José Carlos Mariátegui, arrived in Ecuador where leftists would read and discuss his writings.33

What relevance would a Peruvian Marxist have for the rural population of Cayambe, and what kind of influence would his thought have on them? If Marxists in Quito were culturally distant from the reality of rural Cayambe, someone from the Peruvian coast (Lima) would seem even further removed from their reality and have little to say to them. Nevertheless, Mariátegui was one of the first Marxists to analyze seriously the situation of Indians in the Andean highlands and had much to contribute to an understanding of the problems they faced. Mariátegui contended that "the problem of the Indian is rooted in the land tenure system of our economy," and only through fundamental economic change and land reform would social change take place (Mariátegui 1971, 22). "The problem of the Indigenous peoples," he wrote, placing the problem in very concrete material terms, "is a problem of land" (1990, 42). He believed in the revolutionary potential of the Indigenous and peasant masses, and that only a class-based revolutionary movement could lead to their liberation and the end of exploitation. Mariátegui believed that once Indigenous peoples were introduced to revolutionary consciousness, they would be unequaled in their struggle for socialism (84-5). The rural communities could complement and even replace the historic role that Marxism traditionally gave to the urban working class. The Indigenous peoples would not simply implement a dogmatic copy of European socialism, but rather create an "indo-american socialism" which would grow out of Andean culture and language (1928, 3). So central were Indigenous concerns to Mariátegui's conceptualization of Marxism and social struggles in the Andes that one author has observed that all of his essays were written from this point of view (Dussel 1995, 32). These were the types of theoretical concepts leftists introduced to Indian workers in Cayambe.

33. Nela Martínez, interview by author, Quito, 27 April 1996.

This was the ideological context for the formation of Ecuador's modern Indian movement. Other changes also helped force transitions in organizational strategies. Indians in Cayambe no longer were as isolated as they previously had been. In June 1928, the railroad came to Cayambe, linking it with Quito. In October 1930, Julio Miguel Páez and José Rafael Delgado, renters of the government haciendas in northern Cayambe, built a road to Ibarra, the capital of the neighboring province of Imbabura.34 Not only did these changes in infrastructure more closely integrate rural workers in Cayambe into a capitalist world system, but they also made state power a much more immediate reality in rural areas. With roads and trains, it was easier for the government to move troops in quickly to repress uprisings and to extract Indigenous leaders to stand trial in Quito. But it was also easier for Indians to meet with their outside allies and to present their demands to the central government. Although Indians were excluded from exercising formal political power, with the assistance of sympathetic Marxists they had begun to insert themselves into the political discourse.

These organizational actions and protests in Cayambe marked an important turning point in the history of Indigenous and popular organizing efforts in Ecuador. For the first time, broad-based actions sought to shift the political and social balances of power. It unified isolated local struggles across the parish borders of Cayambe into a strong cantonal movement, then brought these actors into contact with their counterparts throughout Ecuador. Rural workers also allied with urban leftists to press for economic demands, strengthening the presence of the Socialist and Communist parties in Cayambe. Peasant actions permitted local Communist leader Rubén Rodríguez later to be elected to Cayambe's municipal council, "tearing from the landlords' hands the absolute control which until that point they had maintained over regional power structures" (Ramón 1983, 165). Indigenous actions had initiated a process of social change which could no longer be detained.

These changes introduced the Indigenous peasantry in Cayambe to a growing awareness of the broad nature of the struggle they faced. It was not sufficient only to fight to change their immediate surroundings. Through courting positive relations of mutual respect with the Marxist left, Indigenous peoples in Ecuador confronted the nation-state with their demands. Their success in defining a broad-based movement for social change helped define the subsequent history of social protest in Ecuador. The models and lessons from this encounter are worthy of consideration for application to and analysis of other situations that include deep ethnic and cultural divides.

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34. "Un trozo de carretero entre Cayambe e Ibarra construyen varios ciudadanos," *El Día, 5* October 1930, I.

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