

Peru: Amazonian indigenous people rise up

Thursday 25 June 2009, by [BLANCO Hugo](#) (Date first published: 2 May 2009).

“Since April 9, an uprising has been occurring in the Peruvian countryside involving the Amazonian indigenous peoples from 1350 communities and a diversity of ethnicities”, said legendary peasant leader, Hugo Blanco in an important message. A translation of Blanco’s appeal for solidarity with this so-far mostly unreported struggle is printed below.

Blanco is no stranger to mass struggle in Peru. He was a central leader of the Quechua peasant uprisings in the 1960s. For this, he was sentenced to 25 years jail.

In 1975, he was freed and expelled to Sweden. He returned in 1978 and was elected to the Senate. In the early 1990s, he was again forced into exile. He has since returned and heads the Peasant Confederation of Peru.

The current struggle is led by the Interethnic Association of Development of the Peruvian Jungle (AIDSEP), which unites 1385 indigenous communities.

Blanco said the uprising consisted “of taking over installations of depredator companies, blocking roads, taking over airports, interrupting water transport”.

The struggle is against a range of neoliberal laws that allow the looting of natural resources (particular in the Amazon jungle) and remove what little rights the indigenous people had.

At an April 20 meeting, the same day Blanco published his appeal, the government and various indigenous organisations agreed to talks to resolve the issues.

However, following a wave of strikes and protests, similar negotiations were agreed to last October. The talks led nowhere.

On April 24, the media reported new blockades in the Napo River against ships belonging to the Perenco oil company.

On April 27, Servindi said the president of the National Agrarian Confederation of Peru stated that peasant unions would carry out a new wave of strikes in support of the Amazonian indigenous communities.

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The current indigenous uprising covers areas in the northern, central and southern Peruvian Amazon jungle — an extensive region with a low population density.

It is supported by the mestizo (mixed-race) population in the zone, both in rural and urban areas — and in some cases by local authorities.

Highland indigenous populations from the centre and south are coming behind this struggle.

Peru is comprised of three regions: the desert coastline with valleys irrigated by rivers descending from the Andes; the Andes mountain ranges; and the Amazon jungle.

The Andean indigenous population inhabit the ranges — Quechua and Aymara heirs of Tawantinsuyo (the Incan empire).

The majority of the population in the jungle area did not belong to Tawantinsuyo. It is inhabited by diverse nationalities less contaminated by consumerist society.

In the front line of the current struggle are the Amazonian populations, who are more collectivist, better coordinated and more combative.

Motive

Their struggle is to defend the jungle against the criminal depredation of multinational companies, especially those involved in hydrocarbons. Other aggressors include logging and mining companies, plus those constructing hydroelectric dams.

Extracting hydrocarbons poisons rivers, one of the fundamental pillars of Amazonian life. As well as water, rivers provide fish — one of the jungle population's food staples.

The government and parliament are unconditionally at the service of the multinational companies. They have passed various laws that legalise the destruction and looting.

The police forces and the navy are also at the service of the corporations.

Moreover, laws have been passed that target the collective organisation of indigenous peoples.

Despite the fact that the Congress multi-party commission recommended the annulment of 12 legislative decrees on grounds that they were "harmful to the Andean and Amazonian peoples", Congress has not done this.

Roger Najar, president of the Congressional Commission on Andean and Amazonian Peoples, said "the political will does not exist either in Congress or the executive to resolve the question of the Amazonian strike".

The Amazonian indigenous peoples are completely clear on the attack on the people and environment that the Peru's various free trade agreements represent. They are demanding the annulment of agreements signed with the United States, the European Union and Chile, describing them as "an attack against ecology and biodiversity".

Conscious that the current constitution was written by their oppressors, they are demanding a constituent assembly to create a new one.

They are demanding respect for their communities that have inhabited these lands for millennia before European invasion.

During the take-over of an airstrip, an indigenous person said: "What is indignant is that through laws, [President Alan] Garcia considers this a zone for looting. Because we are the rightful owners, we are going to continue defending it so that our children can enjoy it."

They are also demanding compliance with Convention 169 of the International Labor Organisation, which affirms that any measure that affects an indigenous population requires prior consultation with them.

This convention is enshrined in Peruvian law. Approved by parliament, it has a constitutional character. This makes the large majority of neoliberal laws passed recently unconstitutional.

The Amazonian indigenous peoples are proposing the creation of a Vice-Ministry of Intercultural Health and a Ministry of Intercultural Education.

Although it is not in their written platform, the indigenous peoples are calling on Garcia to resign as president, as they know too well he is at the service of the destructive corporations.

A local leader said: "We are tired of sending so many memos, declarations. So far, the indigenous people have not been listened to ..."

"We are waiting to see if our national leaders can establish a dialogue with the government, because the indigenous people will not allow them to continue procrastinating."

Following the postponement by Prime Minister Yeude Simon (a supposed "leftist") of a meeting with the indigenous peoples, the leader of the indigenous dialogue team said: "The PM has to understand that in Amazonian wisdom there does not exist the messiahism that exists in his government.

"Instead, what exists is the consultation and consensus among peoples."

Today, April 20, a meeting is set to occur between the president of the Council of Ministers and the indigenous representatives. The indigenous commission said this would be the last meeting they would participate in.

Organising the uprising

One reason for the lack of international impact this important struggle has made is that there have been no deaths or injuries.

This is due to the strategy of the indigenous peoples, which aims to avoid such occurrences.

They have planned a long-term struggle that consists of taking over installations of the destructive corporations, blocking roads, taking over airports and interrupting water transport.

They know that the ones who most use the roads, airports and water are the offending companies.

When the well-armed police or navy arrive to counteract these actions, the indigenous peoples

peacefully withdraw. They then argue that the government's use of force is proof that it does not want peaceful negotiation, but to violently repress the protests. They demand that the ombudsman's office intervene.

Afterwards, they occupy another installation or blockade a different section of road.

With regards to the blockades of rivers, it is difficult to stop. When repressive forces pass through the river, they are simply let through. There is not sufficient personnel for the repressive forces to escort the boats of the destructive companies.

No one knows how long the uprising will last. However, the indigenous people are patient.

Struggle expands, solidarity needed

In the south, indigenous people from the Cusco department (state) mobilised to paralyse transport, including for tourists, leading to Machu Picchu and Lake Titicaca.

In the centre, Pasco and Junin, the indigenous Andean camelid breeders protested against the low price they are receiving for alpaca fibre. Eight were injured.

Miners interrupted transport to protest against sackings. The company backed down.

We are asking all those who fight for "another possible world" — ecologists, socialists, libertarians — not to wait until there are deaths to raise their voices in solidarity.

Send messages of solidarity to this important struggle of our Amazonian indigenous brothers and sisters. They are not fighting for their own self-interest, but instead to defend humanity by defending the Amazon forest — the lungs of the world.

Messages of solidarity can be sent to [luchaindigena yahoo.es](mailto:luchaindigena@yahoo.es).

P.S.

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