

About Hugo Blanco

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This brief biographical note was prepared as introduction or annex to articles written by Hugo Blanco and reproduced on ESSF website: [The Epic Struggle of Indigenous Andean-Amazonian Culture](#) and [The “Indian Problem” in Peru: From Mariategui to Today](#).

Hugo Blanco was leader of the Quechua peasant uprising in the Cuzco region of Peru in the early 1960s. He was captured by the military and sentenced to 25 years in El Fronton Island prison for his activities. While in prison, he wrote *Land or Death: The Peasant Struggle in Peru*. It was published in English by Pathfinder Press in 1972 and is must-reading for anyone who wishes to understand the liberation struggles of peasants and indigenous people in that region. This mass upsurge, which led to armed clashes with the repressive forces of the regime, eventually led to vast changes in the Peruvian countryside, including an extensive agrarian reform. Here Blanco recounts the story of how the indigenous movement brought about the destruction of the brutal, semi-feudal system of landholding and exploitation of the indigenous population known as Gamonalismo.

The Peruvian socialist leader José Carlos Mariátegui was the first to offer a Marxist appreciation of Gamonalismo and of the vital role the indigenous people had to play in the struggle for national liberation in Latin America. In his 1928 book *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* Mariátegui dedicated a chapter to this question, titled “The Problems of the Indian,” from which Blanco also takes the title of his article. Mariátegui wrote: “The term Gamonalismo designates more than just a social and economic category: that of the latifundistas or large landowners. It signifies a whole phenomenon. Gamonalismo is represented not only by the gamonales but by a long hierarchy of officials, intermediaries, agents, parasites, et cetera. The literate Indian who enters the service of Gamonalismo turns into an exploiter of his own race. The central factor of the phenomenon is the hegemony of the semi-feudal landed estate in the policy and mechanism of the government. Therefore, it is this factor that should be acted upon if the evil is to be attacked at its roots and not merely observed in its temporary or subsidiary manifestations.” [1]

Following the military suppression of the Cuzco upsurge, Blanco was imprisoned and tortured. Only a massive international defence campaign, which won the support of such outstanding figures as Ernesto Che Guevara, Simone de Beauvoir, and Jean Paul Sartre, saved his life. He was forced into exile, spending time in Mexico and Chile. Fleeing from the Pinochet coup in Chile, Blanco then found exile in Sweden. During that second exile Canadian socialists, who had played a significant role in the international defence campaign of the sixties, organized a successful cross-Canada speaking tour for Blanco in 1976.

Upon his return to Peru Blanco was elected to the Constituent Assembly in 1978 and later to the National Parliament under the banner of the United Left movement.

Hugo Blanco remains today an outstanding voice of the campesino and indigenous movements in Peru, and is a leader of the Federation of Campesinos of Cuzco. He is a member of the editorial board of *Sin Permiso*, and a long standing leader of the Fourth International.

Blanco's most recent writings have stressed the strategic importance of the rise of indigenous consciousness and militancy to the mounting anti-imperialist struggles in the hemisphere – a question that is poorly understood on the international left.

In a September 2006 article "Progress of the indigenous movement against the system," also published in *Sin Permiso*, Blanco explained that "[t]he indigenous movement is in the vanguard, not in the sweeping sense that it must guide the rest of the oppressed people (each social sector will be its own guide, each of them forging its own leadership through its own struggles); it is the vanguard in the narrow sense that it is the most advanced sector in the struggle against the system and in the building of an alternative organization for society. Against neoliberal individualism, the collectivism of the 'ayllu'" [2].

In other articles Blanco has also stressed the critical role of the victory of Evo Morales in Bolivia and the rise of indigenous struggles in Ecuador.

Articles by Hugo Blanco on ESSF website: [BLANCO Hugo](#)

P.S.

* In the 1960s, Phil Cournoyer participated in the worldwide defence campaign to win Blanco's freedom and a decade later coordinated a cross-Canada speaking tour of the Peruvian indigenous leader.

Footnotes

[1] www.ilstu.edu/class/hist127/docs/jcmindio.html

[2] the indigenous communal form of social and economic organization