

The Indigenous Problem

Manuel González Prada

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What happened in Chucuito? Nobody knows for sure. It is useless to look for information in the daily press, because there is not a single newspaper in Lima that deserves faith: all of them must be read with distrust, mainly when they speak of matters related to politics. Thus, the newspapers of the opposition see horrific hecatombs in uproars where two or three heads are dented, while the Government papers look at a simple brawl in the riot where a few dozen corpses were left. Sane intentions, justice, truthfulness, are nowhere to be found.

One does not need to be a sociological eagle to say that since the arrival of the whites on the shores of Peru, one of the most serious questions that agitate Humanity has arisen, the ethnic question: two races were in contact, and one of them had to defeat, oppress and devour the other. Given the inborn cruelty of the Spaniards, a cruelty aggravated by the morbid greed of those who were thrown into South America, one can understand the ferocity of the conquest, the rapaciousness of the domination.

The whites of today and their allies the mestizos, not having finished eliminating the feline-Spanish blood, follow in the footsteps of Pizarro, obey the law. Not being possible, or rather, not being convenient to suppress the Indians nor being able to submit them to the slavery that they made gravitate on the unfortunate black, they turn them into beasts of burden, an object of exploitation. They would already tax all of them, without leaving a single sample, if they could find a pound sterling in the blind intestine of each cholo.

Let us not see, then, in the indigenous question a provincial and passing crisis, but a national and permanent problem: the local and intermittent symptoms denounce the evil of the whole organism, not of an isolated organ. With greater or lesser cruelty, with more or less hypocrisy, all those who exercise command contribute to perpetuate the regime of servitude. Caciques and gamonales oppress and exploit the Indian; but the accomplices and accomplices of gamonales and caciques are in the Legislative Chambers, in the Courts of Justice and in the halls of the Palace. This Senator and that Deputy, that Supreme Court Member and that Judge of First Instance, that Minister and that Prefect, all gentlemen who seem so humane and so solicitous in “protecting the helpless”, are the greatest culprits, the most worthy of execration and contempt. There is a mutuality of services: the one above protects the one below and the one below supports the one above.

In Peru there are two great lies: the Republic and Christianity. We speak of individual guarantees, we consign them in the Magna Carta, and the greatest number of Peruvians do not have

their freedom or life secure. We speak of evangelical charity, we preach it from the Masonic temple to the Catholic Union, and we watch impassively the crucifixion of a race. Our Catholicism is reduced to an inferior Paganism, without the grandeur of philosophy or the magnificences of art; our political form must be called a prolongation of the Conquest and the Viceroyship.

And how to solve the indigenous question? Surely not by means of a political revolution, initiated by landowners, miners, capitalists, conspirators by trade, military men with no place in the ranks, or *presupuestívoros* [*a person who uses public budget to benefit financially*] in forced Lent. Damn if such men care about the misfortune or welfare of the Indian. If they could climb to power, climbing a mountain of corpses, they would ascend without the slightest scruple or the slightest compassion.

The poor devils who voluntarily or forcibly gave their lives yesterday for histrionics and evildoers like Piérola and Cáceres deserve real pity. Those who tomorrow will sacrifice their lives for the same histrionics and evildoers who today are decked out in the puppet costumes of old principles that have been buried, will also deserve pity. Constitutionalist and Democrats, Civilists and Liberals, all can go in the same cart to be thrown into the same dumpster.

Here, revolutions have been (and will continue to be for a long time) civil wars between conquerors. For that reason, the Indian who has a rifle and a supply of capsules should fire as much on the soldier who comes to take him as a levy, as on the montonero who intends to drag him into the revolution.

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