

# Peru's prisons: the true story

by Ricardo Martín

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El Frontón, the Peruvian prison where most of the captured terrorists of Shining Path (*Sendero Luminoso*) were held, who recently revolted with the well-known bloody results, had been turned years ago, by the previous government of Fernando Belaúnde Terry, into a political-military training center, and a hellhole where the "Senderistas" used clubs to force all the inmates, terrorists or not, to sing communist songs and learn by heart the *Red Book* of the "Fourth Sword" of international communism, the great Shining Path guru, Abimael Guzmán.

El Frontón was built as a maximum security prison in 1921, at the dawn of republican life in Peru. Located on an island two nautical miles off the coast of the Lima port of Callao, El Frontón was considered a high-security prison, since it was practically impossible to escape from the island. The two miles of sea which divide Callao from Frontón Isle are traversed by a strong maritime current, known as "El Camotal." In the long history of this penal island, only a handful managed to escape, while many failed or vanished into the sea.

During the dictatorships which Peru has suffered, El Frontón was used to imprison numerous political, labor, and student leaders, and many atrocities were committed there. This motivated the order by the Constituent Assembly of 1979 (which Alan García took part in) that it be shut down for good. Its installations, considered inhumane, were blown up with dynamite.

But later, when the Popular Action regime came to power, it decided to rehabilitate El Frontón as a maximum-security jail. The corrupt justice minister of President Belaúnde, Enrique Elías La Rosa (now accused by Peru's Congress of embezzling jail construction monies, the "Guvarte Case") started building new installations to house only inmates charged with terrorism. Starting in 1980, dozens of persons accused of belonging to Shining Path began to arrive from every corner of Peru, so many that "they lost count," and it was not known how many prisoners were inside El Frontón.

When El Sexto jail was closed, most of the inmates were

moved to Lurigancho jail. In March 1984 a bloody revolt exploded in El Sexto, expressly planned by Shining Path's ideologue, Guillermo (or Antonio) Díaz Martínez, in complicity with drug traffickers Guillermo Porto Cárdenas, alias "Crazy Fly," and Enrique Núñez Baraybar, "The Mute," (accomplice of the jailed drug smuggler Carlos Langberg), with whom he shared a cell in that prison, to facilitate their escape.

As to Lurigancho (or San Pedro) prison, another site of a terrorist revolt, this was designed only for indicted detainees and had a maximum capacity of 1,500 prisoners. But in 1985 it held more than 8,000, in an inhuman pile-up where common first offenders were mixed with hardened criminals, drug traffickers, and Shining Path terrorists.

Traditionally, the system of life was vegetative; idleness and all sorts of vices ruled, since the industrial shops, kitchen, and laundry where the convicts were supposed to work never functioned, thus denying all rights and possibilities for rehabilitation. This was all a product not so much of previous regimes' improvisations, but the moral and economic crisis into which Peru was plunged by the unscrupulous politicians of the regimes of Presidents Morales Bermúdez and Belaúnde Terry, at the service of international usury and in many cases also of drug trafficking. This crisis created a hotbed for the spread of the crazed, murderous communist group Shining Path and other equally communist and terrorist bands.

Nothing is more false and biased, then, than to ascribe to President Alan García's government the Peruvian prison situation, as the *New York Times* and others claim. In reality, when Alan García took office on July 28, 1985, he faced a serious problem of prison overcrowding inherited from the previous government. Of a total of about 35,000 inmates in Peru's prisons, about 85% were indicted, but had not been tried; only 15% were serving sentences meted out by the courts. Moreover, in most cases the detainees who had not been tried had already been incarcerated far longer than their penalty would have been, and in countless cases should have been freed as innocent of the crimes imputed to them.

Contrary to U.S. media slanders, it was precisely President García who, overcoming many obstacles, started a true prison reform, providing legal mechanisms that allowed the release of thousands of citizens unjustly in jail due to the slowness of the administration of justice and other arbitrary features. The Depenalization Law ended the corrupt system of stacking up accused persons in the jails to enrich judges, secretaries, dirty lawyers, and employees of the justice administration, who collected generous "quotas" from the prisoners to "bless them with liberty."

In early 1986, President García shut down El Sexto, a dungeon which had served the oligarchy as the prison of hundreds of political leaders and social fighters over many years, and where García's own father was held six long years for his political militancy.

All of the above becomes relevant because on the occa-

sion of the recent events in Peru's prisons, where jailed terrorists carried out a synchronized revolt in three prisons (El Frontón, Lurigancho, and the Women's Prison of Callao, Santa Bárbara), an international web of lies has been woven to attempt to denigrate the democratic regime of Alan García.

Shining Path, the criminal band that started its terrorist activities in the Ayacucho zone in 1980, has been distinguished for the savagery with which it commits its crimes. It is therefore downright suspicious that the defenders of the Shining Path's "human rights" do not consider the human rights of the more than 8,000 victims of their demented actions, which have reached the extreme of using children as "child-bombs" Khomeini-style, to carry out terrorist acts in which they inevitably die.

Or the multitude of children lined up by Shining Path, one behind the other, in order to execute them with one bullet and save munitions. Or the brutal murders committed by Shining Path against mayors and other officials by burning them alive. Or the number of human beings who have been left homeless, victims of the "scorched earth" campaign waged by Shining Path against all those who refuse to join their sinister ranks. Or the children who have remained orphaned and homeless because their parents were assassinated by Shining Path?

Those of us who know the modus operandi of these criminal psychotics cannot but be horrified in the face of these madmen. Has some international entity—such as Amnesty International or the Red Cross—taken the trouble to investigate what criminal methods are used by Shining Path to "annihilate" the humble peasants, workers, and regional officials of the various villages in which they have committed their outrages? No, absolutely not.

Nor can one forget the "totally devastated" peoples of the Peruvian mountains, as a result of the policy of the Shining Path, where they leave absolutely nothing alive, wiping out not just the old, children, and women, but also killing livestock which is the only sustenance for these humble mountain folk.

No one has the right, least of all the Red Cross, to try to make the rest of the world believe differently.

As a Peruvian, I protest indignantly over the meddling in our affairs of these pseudo-humanitarian international institutions, which solidarize with the criminals of Shining Path, sponsoring them and encouraging their acts of genocide against the Peruvian people. It is absolutely to be repudiated that entities such as the International Red Cross and Amnesty International are ready to support and fund Shining Path and other terrorist gangs, like the Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement.

Amazing as it seems, these institutions back the crimes of Shining Path and other communist terror groups by financing publicity campaigns in their favor, and raising money to be turned over to the Shining Path to pay lawyers and, supposedly, to buy medicines and pay doctors, both things that

are given to the inmates by the Peruvian authorities.

## The terrorists' mutiny

Given this panorama, in which control and the most elementary sense of authority has long since been lost in Peru's jails, Shining Path planned the use of the jails as military training quarters. The proof of this is the near-military discipline which ruled in the pavilions where the Shining Path terrorists were kept, as well as the memorization of the Red Book of Abimael Guzmán, the harangues and chants which they coerced all the inmates to sing. Many pavilions were adorned with drawings and slogans praising their idols and their crazy war.

In the few inspection tours that were able to be done, many military training manuals were discovered, in which among other things it was skillfully demonstrated how to manufacture weapons starting from the most elementary utensils, such as spoons, bamboo rods, glass panes, etc. The manuals also contained groundplans of the prisons and sketches for building escape tunnels. Also found were detailed descriptions of the number of prison guards, the type of weapons they used, the hours of the guard change, how long it took to make their rounds, etc., which indicates the developed military preparation and the premeditation with which the revolts were planned.

Not accidentally, the Shining Path revolt went off simultaneously at 6 a.m. on June 18 in the prisons of El Frontón, Lurigancho and Santa Bárbara, and on the same day, the civil service personnel working in the penitentiary system went out on strike. That union's leaders are members of the Communist Party and part of the so-called United Left. For that day, an indefinite strike had also been called by teachers in the SUTEP union, whose leadership is also affiliated to the Communist Party and United Left. Peruvian authorities suspect that the pistols and dynamite charges used by Shining Path in the revolt were provided by the communist personnel working in the jails.

More weapons were close at hand. The Danish-flag ship *Pia Vesta*, at the request of President García's office, was stopped by Panamanian authorities on its return trip across the Panama Canal, after having anchored off Peru for several days without docking.

Panamanian authorities discovered a cargo of 250 tons of Soviet weapons placed on board in the port of Rostock in East Germany, including 32 olive-drab painted trucks, 3,000 K-47 assault rifles, and 3,000 modern RPG launch missiles. All the matériel was of Soviet manufacture, and according to intelligence sources, destined for Shining Path. It is noteworthy that the Peruvian Army also uses Soviet-made weapons (acquired by the government of Juan Velasco Alvarado). Had the revolt succeeded and the arms been received by Shining Path or their allies, these could have created chaos: It would have been almost impossible to distinguish between an Army truck and one used by the terrorists.