Who's Looting Peru's Privatized Pensions?

by Manuel Hidalgo

Peru's privatized pension system is a case study of what's wrong with U.S. President George Bush's proposed privatization of Social Security. Peru in 1992 became the second Ibero-American country to privatize its pensions, following Pinochet's Chile in 1981.

When the Peruvian Congress approved a reform of the privatized pension system on Nov. 11, 2004, forcing *all* retirees to place their pensions into that system, one of the national associations of retirees fingered foreign financial interests represented by the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the privatized pension funds (known as AFPs), as the actual authors of the legislation. With fascist plundering under the pretext of pension reform now firmly established by law 20530, the last public social security system to protect retirees has now been eliminated. Tens of thousands of enrollees under law 20530 will no longer have any option but to join the AFPs, despite the serious questions raised about that privatized system's financial health.

In July 1995, Jaime Cáceres Sayán, the president of the Association of AFPs, dared to charge that the state-run National Pension System is like the bankrupt CLAE, a reference to Carlos Manrique's pyramid-style savings plan, which suckered people into investing their savings by promising high returns, then went belly-up in 1992, resulting in 160,000 depositors losing their shirts. Ironically, it is Cáceres Sayán's own AFPs which would be more accurately described as the next CLAE.

In August 2004, the same Cáceres Sayán claimed that the investments of the AFPs were increasing the value of stocks on the Lima Stock Exchange, and called on the Central Bank to therefore allow private pension funds to increase

TABLE 1
Peru's Privatized Pension Funds (AFPs) and Their Foreign Owners
(Percent Ownership, November 2002)

Horizonte	
Holding Continental	54 %
BBVA (Spain)	24.9
Provida (Chile/BBVA)	15.9
Integra	
Wiesse Investments (INTESA-Italy)	30
ING (Netherlands)	30
ING Pensiones Perú (Netherlands)	29.5
Profuturo	
Citibank (U.S.)	42
Cervesur	20
Special transactions	19
Unión Vida	
Banco Santander (Spain)	100

TABLE 2
Placement of AFP Funds

Stocks on the Lima Exchange	34.6%
Long-term bank CDs	14.4
Government bonds	13.7
Foreign mutual funds	6.9
Non-financial corporate bonds	11.0
Others	19.4

their investments to not just 10% of their assets in foreign markets, as they had been doing, but a full 20%. If this increase were not allowed, and a bubble in the domestic stock market were created, said Cáceres Sayán, then the Central Bank would be responsible. Not surprisingly, on June 3, 2004, a 4% decline in stock values on the Lima exchange caused a loss of 850 million Peruvian soles, most of which was in a fund administered by the AFP. This fund also showed losses in 2000, and although there are claims that the fund has shown a profit over the long term, those profits are entirely speculative, and could evaporate tomorrow. This risk is global, given the speculative nature of the international financial system, whose collapse Lyndon LaRouche has repeatedly warned of.

The Peruvian AFPs are primarily controlled by foreign banks, as is shown in **Table 1.**

In combination, they administer a fund of nearly $7 billion, and they put that capital in speculative and risky investments like the above-mentioned stocks (mostly in the banks themselves!), certificates of deposit (also of the same banks), government bonds, foreign mutual funds, and others. In August 2001, a study showed that 75% of the fund was in stocks and bonds of companies in only 14 economic groups. (See **Table 2.**)

The reality is that the private pension system presents serious problems. Made up initially of eight AFPs, four of these closed and/or were absorbed by the remaining four. The powerful Romero group, affiliated to the Banco de Créedito, had to sell its AFP to a Spanish bank. Nearly 40% of the enrollees had ceased paying in, thereby losing all rights to their pensions. The rate of new memberships has fallen significantly because of the crushing recession, and growing precariousness of the job market. When in October 2003, there was discusson in the Congress of a project for the right to freely disenroll from the AFPs, press close to the financial interests behind the AFPs screamed that this would put the totality of workers' contributions at risk.

But this doesn't mean that the AFPs do not continue to get the lion's share of the loot: their commissions have risen to 28.7% of worker contributions (as compared to 15% as the regional average); in 2002 alone, they accumulated commissions of nearly $200 million. The profitability of the AFPs reached 68% in 2002. This comes on top of the right to invest $7 billion of workers' contributions in companies tied to the same economic groups as the banks that make up the AFPs! For example, the AFP Integra invests money from the fund it administers, into stocks of the Wiesse Bank (which in turn is linked to Wiesse Investments, co-owner of the AFP), despite the fact that the stocks were in free fall due to the insolvency problems of that bank!

The AFP system is based on forced savings, captured by means of the legal coercion of the workers (who must choose between an AFP or an impossible public pension system). Furthermore, the AFPs have all the advantages that banks have, except that the AFPs have no obligations to their depositors. Indeed, the AFPs have only survived this long because of the shameless intervention of the state in favor of the AFP oligopoly, as the following measures indicate;

- Reduction of pensions for which the state is responsible, with the threat of total shutdown of the state system.
- The state system only covers low-income contributors, while higher-income contributions move over to the AFPs.
- The state has floated special bonds to the benefit of the Private Pension Fund, for $1.82 billion.
- The age of retirement has been increased, thereby increasing the period for contributions and reducing the period for pension payouts.
- Restrictions have been imposed on disenrolling from the AFPs.
- The state is now officialy obligated to finance the minimum pensions of enrollees to the AFPs who have not contributed long enough to achieve an adequate pension level.
- The limit on investment of the fund in foreign markets has been officially broadened, from 10% to 20%.