

To Fight Soviet Agents in the Fatherland: Anti-Communism in Ayacucho's APRA, 1945-1948

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Crafted upon a hillside, an enormous hammer and sickle greeted residents in the Ayacucho city of Huanta as they opened their front doors early one June morning. Described today, such a scene summons up memories of the devastating 1980-1992 Shining Path War, when militants of the Peruvian Communist Party-Sendero Luminoso crippled Huanta, Ayacucho and much of Peru not just with Marxist graffiti, but also with threats, murders, and devastating massacres. Yet this particular June morning did not occur in the 1980s, it took place in 1947, at a moment when the Peruvian Communist Party (PCP) was enjoying a surge of popularity in the department of Ayacucho. That popularity did not go uncontested. Government officials, landlords, and the Catholic Church bitterly denounced Communism and Communists. But many of the strongest and the loudest critiques of the PCP and its members came from a third source: members of the populist American Popular Revolutionary Alliance, or APRA. Indeed, the very day when Communist Party members fashioned their hammer and sickle, a number of APRA militants tried to destroy it. As one PCP member described it, "a group of Apristas tried to erase our

insignia, but our *campesino* comrades were guarding it and they made them retreat.”¹

Anti-Communism—understood here as opposition to the Peruvian Communist Party, its ideology, and its members—gave Apristas purpose, relevance and definition during the earliest moments of the global Cold War. This article considers Aprista anti-Communism in Ayacucho during the 1940s, focusing on the years of the 1945-1948 presidency (the *trienio*) of José Luis Bustamante y Rivero. The 1940s are arguably the least-studied years of Peru’s twentieth century, notwithstanding important works by Gonzalo Portocarrero, Nigel Haworth, Carlos Monge, and Denis Sulmont.² This relative inattention is surprising, for the 1940s in general, and the *trienio* in particular, marked years of considerable political ferment in Peru. Without question, Aprista anti-Communism predated the 1940s. Indeed, from the moment of the Peruvian Communist Party’s official emergence in 1930, Apristas challenged their Communist rivals.³ Scholars like Carmen Rosa Balbi, Manuel Burga and Alberto Flores Galindo, Steven Hirsch, Steve Stein and others have demonstrated that Apristas and Communists waged acrimonious fights during the 1930s, competing for the sympathies and support of laborers, students, and leftists in general.⁴ Paulo Drinot’s recent

* I would like to thank participants in the 2009 ICA panel “Formación y desarrollo del Apra: entre lo nacional y lo indoamericano, 1920-1948” for their suggestions on an earlier version of this paper.

¹ *Labor*, 4 July 1947, 4.

² Gonzalo Portocarrero, *De Bustamante a Odría. El fracaso del Frente Democrático Nacional, 1945-1950* (Lima: Mosca Azul, 1983); Nigel Haworth, “Peru,” in *Latin America between the Second World War and the Cold War, 1944-1948*, edited by Leslie Bethell and Ian Roxborough (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 170-189; Carlos Monge, “If The People Are Sovereign, The People Must Be Fed: Agricultural Policies and Conflicts during the Bustamante y Rivero Administration, Peru, 1945-1948.” (PhD Dissertation: University of Miami, 1993); Denis Sulmont, *El movimiento obrero peruano (1890-1980). Reseña histórica* (Lima: Tarea, 1980).

³ The Socialist Party of Peru was founded in 1928. Two years later, that party became the Peruvian Communist Party.

⁴ Carmen Rosa Balbi, *El Partido Comunista y el APRA en la crisis revolucionaria de la años treinta* (Lima: G. Herrera, 1980); Manuel Burga and Alberto Flores Galindo, *Apogeo y crisis de la república aristocrática: oligarquía, aprismo y comunismo en el Perú, 1895-1932* (Lima: Ediciones Rikchay Perú, 1980); Steven Jay Hirsch, “The Anarcho-Syndicalist Roots of a Multi-Class Alliance: Organized Labor and the Peruvian Aprista Party, 1900-1933.” (PhD Dissertation, George Washington University, 1997); Steve Stein, *Populism in Peru: The Emergence of the Masses and the Politics of Social Control* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997). See also Héctor Béjar, “APRA-PC 1930-1940: Itinerario de

work, in particular, shows how APRA mobilized anti-Communism in its efforts to gain control of Peru's organized labor movement between 1930 and 1934.⁵ But in Ayacucho—an overwhelmingly rural region where urban, organized workers were scarce—Aprista anti-Communism differed in both timing and purpose. It was in the 1940s, rather than the 1930s, that Aprista anti-Communism became especially heated in Ayacucho, as the trienio ushered dramatic political transformations into the department and into the country as a whole. Those transformations impacted both the tenor and functions of Aprista anti-Communism inside Ayacucho.

Anti-Communist actions and words firmly grounded APRA during a moment of dizzying political flux. Like many other Latin American countries, Peru dove into a period of “democratic spring” in the immediate aftermath of World War II.⁶ The outgoing government of Manuel Prado legalized both the APRA and the Peruvian Communist Party in the lead-up to the 1945 presidential elections.⁷ Newly legalized, Apristas and Communists plugged their political noses and allied in the months and weeks before the 1945 presidential elections, working together to form the *Confederación de Trabajadores Peruanos* (CTP) in 1944, although APRA soon gained control over the organization.⁸ Members of the two parties also entered into a pragmatic national alliance, supporting the National Democratic Front's presidential candidate José Luis Bustamante y Rivero against the conservative candidate General Eloy Ureta. Bustamante was neither an Aprista nor a Communist, but members of those parties readily endorsed him as an alternative to Ureta. Bustamante won those elections, and eventually rewarded Aprista support by extending the party a formal

un conflicto,” *Socialismo y Participación* 9 (1980), 13-40; José Deustua and Alberto Flores Galindo, “Los comunistas y el movimiento obrero,” in Alberto Flores Galindo, *Obras completas I* (Lima: SUR, 1993), 137-166.

⁵ Paulo Drinot, “Creole Anti-Communism: Labor, the Peruvian Communist Party and APRA, 1930-1934,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* (forthcoming).

⁶ Gilbert M. Joseph, “What We Now Know and Should Know: Bringing Latin America More Meaningfully into Cold War Studies,” in *In From the Cold: Latin America's New Encounter with the Cold War*, edited by Gilbert M. Joseph and Daniela Spenser (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 19-20.

⁷ Haworth, “Peru,” 178.

⁸ Peter Klarén, *Peru: Society and Nationhood in the Andes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 286; Carlos Monge, “If The People Are Sovereign,” 353.

role in the government cabinet between January 1946 and January 1947.⁹ For the first time in their history, Apristas were a part of—rather than an opponent to—the national government. That unprecedented political inclusion left Apristas floundering. Party members had long understood themselves both as victims of state persecution and as aggressive challengers of government officials; incorporation into the state suddenly deprived Apristas of a vital political foil. Communists became that needed foil during the *trienio*, serving as an opponent against whom Apristas could build their political identity and find their political purpose.

The pages that follow explore Aprista anti-Communism in the department of Ayacucho during the *trienio*. A focus on a region like Ayacucho shifts attention away from traditional Aprista strongholds in Lima and Trujillo, continuing the efforts of historians like Lewis Taylor and David Nugent to “decenter” our understanding of Aprismo.¹⁰ Consideration of the Ayacucho case also allows us to “de-Haya” our take on Aprista anti-Communism. Looking beyond the anti-Communist words, actions, and choices of the APRA’s overbearing leader, Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre, this article considers the local motivations, practices and consequences of anti-Communism. So doing, these pages provide a textured portrayal of the ways anti-Communism infused the everyday politics of Ayacucho’s Apristas. What emerges is a picture of sharp political animosity characterized by pointed rhetoric and steady, if low-level, political violence.

Apristas and Communists in Trienio-era Ayacucho

The 1945-1948 *trienio* was a period of considerable change for the Ayacucho branches of both the APRA and Communist Parties. For APRA, the 1940s marked a time of growing conservatism, when the party was increasingly identified with relatively wealthy *hacendados* (landlords) like César and Santiago Aibar in Huanta and Ernesto and Carlos Cárdenas in Cangallo. The composition and character of Ayacucho’s mid-century APRA is a topic I have taken up elsewhere, but it bears repeating that the party was

⁹ Haworth, “Peru,” 177.

¹⁰ Lewis Taylor, “The Origins of APRA in Cajamarca, 1928-1935,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 19 (2000): 437-459; David Nugent, *Modernity at the Edge of Empire: State, Individual, and Nation in the Northern Peruvian Andes, 1885-1935* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

much stronger in Ayacucho than scholars once believed. Membership in Ayacucho's APRA ranged from wealthy peasants to large-scale hacendados, and from urban students to prominent Ayacucho lawyers. Women, like men, belonged to Ayacucho's APRA, and the party attracted a significant number of youth into its ranks.¹¹ The party's rightward shift inside Ayacucho coincided with APRA's turn at the national level, and took the party further and further away from its original ideological principles of anti-imperialism, nationalism, and support for the laboring classes. Yet APRA remained strong inside Ayacucho, especially in the provinces of Huanta, Cangallo, and Ayacucho. District and departmental authorities made countless complaints about Aprista activities, organization, and propaganda, bemoaning APRA's continuing prominence in Ayacucho. In the (albeit exaggerated) assessment of Huanta's provincial Subprefect in 1942, "almost 80% of [urban Huanta's] population is Aprista."¹²

Although Apristas far outnumbered Communists in 1940s Ayacucho, the trienio was nonetheless a period of dramatic growth for the Communist Party in the department. Present inside Ayacucho since the 1930s, the Communist Party only became a significant presence in the department during the 1940s. By the mid-1940s, the PCP had cells in the capital city of Ayacucho, and in the provinces of La Mar, Parinacochas, and Huanta.¹³ Of those Ayacuchanos who belonged to the PCP in the 1930s and 1940s, most fell into one of several clusters of people: artisans, middle-class professionals, and (on rare occasion) peasants. And, like the APRA, the PCP attracted both women and youth, although in much smaller numbers.¹⁴ Admittedly, it is quite difficult to determine just who filled the Communist Party's ranks in Ayacucho during the trienio. Much of the problem in identifying members stems from the fact that the label "Communist" was a quick and effective tool of political slander during this period, and many

¹¹ Jaymie Patricia Heilman, "We Will No Longer Be Servile: Aprismo in 1930s Ayacucho," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 38 (2006), 491-518; Luis Miguel Glave and Jaime Urrutia, "Radicalismo político en élites regionales: Ayacucho 1930-1956," *Debate Agrario* 31 (2000), 1-37.

¹² Archivo Regional de Ayacucho (ARA), Prefectura Legajo 15, Oficio 161 (2 March 1942).

¹³ Archivo General de la Nación (AGN), Ministerio del Interior (MDI), Pref. Ayacucho 1936, Oficio 62 (24 July 1936); *Labor*, 19 January 1946, 8.

¹⁴ ARA, Pref. Leg. 15, Oficio 506 (23 September 1941); ARA, Pref. Leg. 8, Oficio 59 (2 March 1932); ARA, Pref. Leg. 21, Unnumbered oficio (23 March 1950).

(probably even most) of those accused of being Communists were anything but. To give just two examples, Huanta Subprefect Eduardo Mendoza complained in 1948 that he had been slandered as an affiliate of the Communist Party, while a campesino named Manuel Jesús Pacheco complained that a local civil guard had imprisoned and beaten him on the false pretext that he was a Communist.¹⁵

These difficulties with identification notwithstanding, it is fair to say that Ayacucho Communist Party membership of the 1940s probably reached a highpoint of several hundred affiliates. The official PCP newspaper *Labor* reported that over 400 party members attended the 1946 Congress of the Ayacucho Communist Party, along with hundreds of sympathizers.¹⁶ That 1946 Congress likely marked the pinnacle of membership numbers, coming as it did in the aftermath of both a major 1945 recruitment campaign by the PCP and President Bustamante's legalization of the Communist Party.¹⁷ Just four years earlier, only a single Ayacucho member of the Communist Party was able to attend the party's First National Congress in Lima, making for a decidedly less than overwhelming Ayacuchano presence at that gathering.¹⁸ Although the PCP's growth in 1940s Ayacucho was impressive, the party was far from a dominant political force. Indeed, to look at the PCP in 1940s Ayacucho (or even in Peru as a whole) is to consider a case of political weakness. The party had, at most, a few hundred members in a department where the total population stood at 414,208 in 1940.¹⁹ The party was not even strong enough to run its own candidates in Ayacucho's elections, endorsing the Socialist candidate Oswaldo Regal in the 1945 Congressional elections.²⁰ The party's weakness, however, did not render the party or its ideology any less threatening to its opponents in Ayacucho's APRA, and Aprista anti-Communism ran strong inside the department.

¹⁵ ARA, Pref. Leg. 9, Oficio 683 (24 Nov. 1948); ARA, Corte Superior de Justicia (CSJ) Huanta, Leg. 1670, fol. 1. Case initiated 29 Nov. 1943.

¹⁶ *Labor*, 16 March 1946, 1.

¹⁷ *Unidad*, 30 Nov. 1967, 3. This 1967 story references the 1945 recruitment campaign.

¹⁸ *Labor*, 19 January 1946, 3.

¹⁹ Alberto Arca Parro, "Census of Peru, 1940," *Geographical Review* 32 (1942), 7.

²⁰ *Labor*, 22 June 1946, 1.

The Character of Aprista Anti-Communism

Aprista anti-Communism won regular denunciations in the pages of Peruvian Communist Party newspapers. The PCP newspaper *Labor* complained in 1946 of APRA leader “Mr. Haya de la Torre’s rabid anti-Communist campaign” and it asserted that APRA was “transforming into an Anti-Communist League.”²¹ These accusations were well founded. APRA’s anti-Communism was indeed so pronounced that it caught the attention of United States officials; the State Department asserted that Haya de la Torre was “emphatically opposed to the present international communist line.”²² But APRA’s anti-Communist rhetoric and action stretched far beyond its leader; the Ayacucho case suggests that the fight against the Communist Party became local Apristas’ *raison d’être*, nourishing them politically as their own party strayed further and further from its original ideological line.

Ayacucho Apristas expressed their anti-Communism with a broad variety of words and actions. Ayacucho Apristas made active use of the national press. An Aprista communiqué sent to the Lima newspaper *La Tribuna* led to a story headlined, “COMMUNIST COWARDLY KILLS AN ELDERLY MAN IN THE TOWN OF HUANTA.” The ensuing story was even more sensational than the headline, claiming “a Soviet agent killed an elderly man who did not put up with his totalitarian Russian ideas...This is how Soviet agents work in our Fatherland.”²³ The PCP’s newspaper *Labor* decried the story as completely false and slanderous, charging that Apristas were attempting “to exploit the situation politically” and that the story reflected how Apristas “try to throw mud at our Party, in their anti-Communist hatred.”²⁴

Apristas also employed violence in their attacks on PCP militants. Huanta Communist Party Secretary Baldomero Bendejú telegraphed the department Prefect in June 1946, relaying that Aprista *búfalos* (thugs) had attacked Communist Party member Mario Cárdenas on the night of May 29th. The Apristas beat and tortured Cárdenas, trying to compel him to renounce the Communist Party and endorse the Aprista candidate for the

²¹ *Labor*, 9 March 1946, 5.

²² Haworth, “Peru,” 184.

²³ ARA, CSJ Huanta, Leg. 1672, Cuad. 2, fol. 40. The case references the Lima newspaper *La Tribuna*, 9 November 1946, 10.

²⁴ *Labor*, 22 November 1946, 1.

national deputyship. Bendezú added that the next day, thirty Aprista *búfalos* attacked another comrade, leaving him hospitalized and in an “extremely grave state.” Bendezú’s telegram ended with the charge that a crowd of drunken Apristas had attacked PCP militant Samuel Cárdenas that very same day.²⁵ That “attack” was actually more like a drunken scuffle. On a June afternoon, three Huanta Apristas sat in a local corner store, chatting and drinking. The men saw Samuel Cárdenas pass by and they called out to him, inviting him to come and drink with them. Cárdenas joined the men, and the group sat drinking and talking and drinking some more. Conversation turned to politics, and the more the men drank, the more heated the conversation became. Soon enough, the discussion degenerated into blows, and a fistfight took place.²⁶ Other acts of violence soon followed. Just two months later, *Labor* ran a front-page picture of a Huanta man with a swollen eye, blood running from gash in his forehead, and badly bruised face. The man was Communist Party member Victor Oré Rivera, and the story explained that he was “brutally wounded by a killer hired by APRA.” The same story added that the attacker had earlier assaulted PCP militant Ezequiel Bendezú and that the prominent Huanta Aprista Santiago Aibar was sheltering the attacker inside his Huanta home.²⁷ Another assault occurred in June 1947. At four in the morning on 5 June 1947, eight Apristas attacked the home of José Poma Rondinel, the Secretary of Ayacucho’s Communist Youth. The eight men fired several shots at the house from a revolver and then tried to force their way into the home, blocked from doing so by the efforts of Poma Rondinel, his parents, and his siblings. The PCP’s Ayacucho Secretary General cast the attack as an effort to “intimidate all those citizens who think freely and with confidence.”²⁸

Paralleling their attacks on individual Communists, APRA militants also put a bloody damper on Communist Party political events. The Ayacucho Communist Party sent a telegram to President Bustamante, complaining about Aprista violence against participants at the Party’s 1946 Departmental Congress in Huanta. The PCP described the attack as a

²⁵ AGN, MDI, Paq. 482, Pref. Ayacucho, Oficio 484 (8 June 1946).

²⁶ AGN, MDI, Paq. 482, Pref. Ayacucho, Oficio 175 (21 June 1946).

²⁷ *Labor*, 10 August 1946, 1.

²⁸ ARA, Pref. Leg. 104, Oficio 169 (5 June 1947).

“savage terrorist strike against freedom of expression and association,” in which Apristas attacked Communists and their sympathizers with dynamite, stones, and sticks as they left their Congress for the day. Ruperto Aviles, a leader of Ayacucho’s Communist Youth, and party sympathizer Germán Cerrón were among those injured in the attack.²⁹

Apristas also turned schools into anti-Communist sites. That schools became a stage for fights between Apristas and Communists owes, in part, to the prominence of teachers within Ayacucho’s Communist Party and the popularity of APRA among students.³⁰ One of the very first Huantino Communist Party members, Teófilo Ugarte Guillén, taught physics in the Gonzáles Vigil high school.³¹ Several other Huanta teachers were likewise singled out for their affiliation with the Communist Party in the 1940s, and Baldomero Bendejú Valdéz, the head of the Huanta branch of the Peruvian Communist Party, was accused of having inculcated “Marxist ideas” in the minds of both Huanta youth and primary school teachers during the 1940s.³² Among students, however, membership in the PCP was far less common. Certainly, the PCP did have student members. Young men in the province of Coracora organized the Parinacochas Communist Youth in 1946, choosing a General Secretary as well as Secretaries of the Interior, of Organization, of the Economy, of Press and Propaganda, and of Culture. If any girls joined this group, they did not make it into the leadership committee or onto early membership lists. Teenagers in Huanta and Ayacucho provinces likewise formed Peruvian Communist Youth branches in the mid-1940s.³³ These youth organizations, however, were not particularly strong: only one Ayacuchano managed to attend the “First National Conference of Communist Youth” in March 1946.³⁴

APRA’s youth branches—the Juventud Aprista Peruana and the Federación Aprista Juvenil—were far stronger, and they sometimes brought

²⁹ *Labor*, 16 March 1946, 1.

³⁰ ARA, Pref. Leg. 21, Unnumbered oficio (23 March 1950).

³¹ Interview with Edgar Romero (pseudonym) (Huanta, 24 May 2005); AGN, MDI, Paq. 308, Pref. Ayacucho 1931, Oficio 454 (Dec. 1931).

³² ARA, CSJ Huanta, Leg. 9, Exped. 1167 (12 January 1963). This case references Bendejú’s activities in the 1940s.

³³ *Labor*, 9 March 1946, 5; *Labor*, 30 March 1946, 2; *Labor*, 19 January 1946, 8.

³⁴ *Labor*, 9 March 1946, 5; *Labor*, 30 March 1946, 2.

their political struggles into their schools. Consider, for example, the events that took place at Huanta's Gonzáles Vigil high school in October 1945. That month, Manuel Barrón Tineo assumed his post as the new principal of the Huanta school. Barrón was an active member of the Communist Party and that status brought him considerable trouble from the school's Aprista students. When Barrón addressed the student body on his first day as principal, students drowned out his speech with angry whistles. A few days thereafter, Gonzáles Vigil students declared themselves on strike, demanding Barrón's resignation. A few days into the strike, around forty students snuck into the school at midnight and blocked its doors from the inside, preventing anyone from entering the school. And when a small explosion and several gunshots rang out inside the school, the strike's leaders were quick to blame "Communists who wanted to enter and eject them."³⁵ There is no question that political sympathies (and antipathies) drove the students' actions. Huanta's Subprefect relayed that Gonzáles Vigil students "have affiliated themselves, although they are minors, with the Aprista Party, whose meetings they applaud."³⁶ These students also enjoyed the active support of Santiago Aibar, who was both a prominent Aprista and the mayor of Huanta. Aibar helped the students sneak into the school, allowing them to pass through his home to reach the school's back entrance.³⁷

A final expression of Aprista anti-Communism came in the form of official action and inaction. Inside Ayacucho, many provincial and departmental authorities were members of APRA, and they used their positions of authority to take action against the Communist Party.³⁸ Often, these Aprista authorities acted against the Communist Party by simply doing nothing. Socialist candidate Oswaldo Regal complained that the Huanta Subprefect's secretary was an Aprista, and thus misrepresented or misfiled complaints about Aprista violence. Communists further complained that Aprista police were indifferent to APRA violence, and that Huanta's main physician—also an Aprista—refused to attend to those

³⁵ ARA, Pref. Leg. 15, Oficio 299 (6 October 1945).

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ ARA, Pref. Leg. 104, Oficio 101 (9 September 1948).

wounded by Aprista actions.³⁹ Aprista authorities also used their positions to harass and arrest Communists. *Labor's* correspondent in the Ayacucho province of La Mar reported in 1946 that a “campaign of anti-Communist repression” had begun in the province, leading to the arrest of Communist Party member Comrade Arramburú. The arrest happened, the correspondent explained, simply because La Mar’s Subprefect was also the provincial APRA Secretary and Arramburú had voiced Communist ideas.⁴⁰

Understanding Aprista Anti-Communism

Many factors drove the anti-Communist actions and invective of Ayacucho Apristas. At one level, Apristas attacked Communists in order to define themselves and to draw sharp distinctions between their two parties. The need for such a distinction dates back to the early 1930s, as political authorities and civilians regularly proved unable—or unwilling—to distinguish between Aprismo (the ideology of the APRA party) and Communism. During these decades, Ayacucho authorities regularly referred to “aprocommunism” and accused Apristas of Communism.⁴¹ An official 1932 complaint about the Aprista notary Angel Arónes, for example, cast him as a “tireless propagandist for APRA, spreading Communism amid the unconscious masses.”⁴² That same year, Parinacochas authorities denounced the “Apro-Communist ENRIQUE LEMA, an individual with a terrible record.”⁴³ In 1934, Huanta’s Subprefect complained that Huanta’s municipal council was filled “by Apro-Communist elements, who carry out anti-patriotic and dissociative labor.”⁴⁴ In 1939, a man from the eastern Cangallo district of Carhuanca complained that local Apristas Vidal and Augusto Cárdenas had “declared themselves not just Apristas, but instead Apro-Communists” and they were shouting vivas to Communism as they walked through Carhuanca’s streets.⁴⁵

³⁹ *Vanguardia*, 6 August 1946, 1.

⁴⁰ *Labor*, 26 January 1946, 3.

⁴¹ Drinot notes this same issue for Lima in “Creole Anti-communism,” 25.

⁴² ARA, Pref. Leg. 19, Oficio 204 (19 April 1932).

⁴³ AGN, MDI, Paq. 321, Oficio 217 (18 November 1932).

⁴⁴ ARA, Pref. Leg. 14, Oficio 177 (3 May 1934).

⁴⁵ ARA, Subprefectura Cangallo (SC), Oficios de Carhuanca 1939 (24 Feb. 1939).

The term “Apro-Communist” was in some instances political shorthand, a way for authorities and civilians to reference both Apristas and Communists with one single term. Equating Aprismo with Communism also afforded authorities an easy and effective means to discredit the APRA party. That strategy was evident in the title of a 1936 publication from the Ministry of Government and Police: *The Truth about APRA: Aprismo is Communism*.⁴⁶ The fusion of Aprismo and Communism was indeed so frequent that APRA published its own book, subtitled *Aprismo is not Communism*.⁴⁷ Just as often, though, it seems that government and non-governmental actors used the terms Communism and Communist to denote any person or activity demanding socioeconomic justice. Adolfo Carrasco, owner of an hacienda in the eastern Ayacucho district of Carhuanca, punctuated a lengthy 1934 complaint against district Apristas with the comment that they, “form a band of frenzied bandits, supposing that Aprismo authorizes them to commit crimes, robberies, extortions, pillaging properties, armed assault *etcetera* because they have the conviction that Aprismo and Communism are the same thing.”⁴⁸ Other times, use of the term Apro-Communist simply revealed the speaker’s general ignorance of what either Aprismo or Communism entailed. Such political innocence showed in the 1944 comments of a military sergeant who suggested that local Communists were the likely culprits of vandalism against APRA propaganda, because the Communist Party, “as is known, goes against the leftist current.”⁴⁹ Violent attacks on Communist Party members together with frequent anti-Communist invective helped Apristas pointedly differentiate themselves from members of the Communist Party. Apristas drew such sharp lines between themselves and Communists to distinguish their two political parties in the minds of Peruvian citizens and authorities. Those same lines, however, also helped Apristas understand themselves. As the 1930s bled into the 1940s, and as Haya de la Torre moved further and

⁴⁶ Ministerio de Gobierno y Policía. 1936. *La verdad sobre el APRA, Aprismo es comunismo* (Lima: Ministerio de Gobierno y Policía, 1936).

⁴⁷ Partido Aprista Peruano, *El plan del Aprismo. Programa de gobierno del Partido Aprista Peruano. Aprismo no es comunismo* (Lima: Editorial Libertad, 1933).

⁴⁸ ARA, SC, Oficios de Carhuanca 1934 (30 Dec. 1934).

⁴⁹ AGN, MDI, Paq. 446, Pref. Ayacucho 1944, unnumbered oficio (14 Sept. 1944).

further away from the original tenets of the APRA, many Apristas were increasingly unsure how to understand themselves and their party. But while Apristas were uncertain of what they were, they were certain of what they were *not*: Communists.

Anti-Communism also gave Apristas a means to refashion the APRA's longstanding position as a nationalist, anti-imperialist party. Anti-imperialism was one of APRA's central tenets, but party founder and leader Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre imperiled APRA's anti-imperialist credibility through his post-World War II rapprochement with the United States. Not only did Haya abandon his sharp criticisms of the United States, he also supported the infusion of US funds into the Peruvian economy to stimulate economic growth and he extended support to the long-derided International Petroleum Company. The United States government, in turn, recognized APRA as a key ally in the international struggle against Communism.⁵⁰ Without question, Haya's reconciliation with the United States deeply angered numerous Apristas, many of whom had first been drawn to the party because of its opposition to US imperialism. Alfonso del Pozo, a Secretary of Discipline in the Luricocha (Huanta) Aprista Committee renounced APRA in April 1947. Del Pozo explained that he had been one of the APRA's "fervent militants because I believed that it really was the Party that fought for National independence, for Sovereignty, and for the defense of democracy." But, del Pozo further explained, because "the Party has drawn its line contrary to its postulates, that it tried to defend, wanting to sell our riches...to North American imperialism against which we used to fight, it tramples democracy today with its Nazi-fascist ideology...in my condition as a conscious worker I terminally renounce my membership."⁵¹ Desperate to retain its credibility as an anti-imperialist party, APRA utilized anti-Communism to reinvent its anti-imperial party line, shifting its denunciations away from Yankee imperialists to Soviet Agents.⁵²

⁵⁰ Haworth, "Peru," 177.

⁵¹ *Labor*, 19 May 1947, 4. An abbreviated version of this quote appears in Jaymie Patricia Heilman, *Before the Shining Path: Politics in Rural Ayacucho: 1895-1980* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 117.

⁵² D.S. Parker notes that APRA celebrated itself as truly Peruvian, contrasting itself against Europe-imported Communism. See *The Idea of the Middle Class: White-Collar Workers and Peruvian Society, 1900-1950* (University Park:

Aprista efforts to cast Communism as a foreign ideology and its devotees as foreign agents were assisted, in part, by the pro-Soviet actions of Ayacucho Communists themselves. In November 1946, for example, PCP militants in Parinacochas staged a public demonstration, commemorating the twenty-ninth anniversary of the Russian Revolution and demanding the restoration of diplomatic and commercial relations between Peru and the Soviet Union.⁵³ Such actions only reinforced longstanding tropes that associated Communism with foreignness. Ayacucho authorities' very first warnings about Communism—issued even before José Carlos Mariátegui formed the PCP's predecessor, the Socialist Party of Peru, in 1928—highlighted the matter of foreignness. The Director General of the Civil Guard and Police sent the Ayacucho Prefect a notice in 1927, warning that Chile was expelling “Communists, Bolsheviki” from its territory and that all authorities and police should “adopt extraordinary measures of control and vigilance” in case these exiles entered Peruvian territory.⁵⁴ In 1931, Ayacucho's Prefect asserted that he had knowledge that “pernicious elements had penetrated this department to make propaganda of dissociative ideas among the indigenous masses.” As such, he had sent the Subprefects urgent telegrams alerting them to the danger and warning them to be vigilant and take urgent measures, for failing to do so would bring the “inevitable ruin of the country.”⁵⁵

At a general level, these comments reflected a popular perception that Communism was a necessarily foreign ideology, present in a given region only because outsiders had imported it. There was also a small element of truth in these assertions, for there were indeed a few foreign nationals actively promoting the Communist Party inside Ayacucho. Cangallo's Public Health Commissioner Carlos Postigo, for instance, was a Spaniard who had fought for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War before fleeing to Peru. Once settled in Cangallo, Postigo became a vocal

Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 161. Paulo Drinot, in turn, shows how APRA denounced the Benavides government in the late 1930s on the grounds that it was making concessions to German, Italian, and Japanese “fascist imperialism.” Drinot, *The Allure of Labor: Workers, Race and the Making of the Peruvian State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 190.

⁵³ *Labor*, 15 November 1946, 4.

⁵⁴ ARA, Pref. Leg. 102, Oficio 20 (14 March 1927).

⁵⁵ AGN, MDI, Paq. 308, Pref. Ayacucho 1931, Oficio 34 (11 April 1931).

advocate of the Soviet Union, Spanish leftists, and Communist ideology.⁵⁶ But, as Paulo Drinot has argued, the best explanation for this emphasis on foreignness rests with the fact that casting Communists as foreign “others” justified their repression.⁵⁷

Probably the most pressing impetus for Aprista anti-Communism was simple fear. Ayacucho Apristas saw themselves losing political ground to the Communist Party, and they used hostile words and actions against the Communist Party to try to check the PCP’s growth. The 1945 elections reflected this fear, for while Apristas and Communists allied in support of Bustamante’s candidacy, they fought a bitter electoral competition at the regional level. Inside Huanta, the 1945 congressional elections were particularly heated. The Aprista candidate Alejandro Carrillo ran against the Socialist Oswaldo Regal, an anti-Aprista candidate supported not only by the Socialist Party, but also by Communists and even right-wing parties. The campaign witnessed repeated verbal and physical fights between Apristas and Communists. The regional newspaper *Sierra* reported that the Huanta campaign stop of Communist-backed candidate Oswaldo Regal led to a “pitched battle between Apristas and Communists.”⁵⁸ The actual election brought little resolution to this tense situation, as the national electoral board ended up annulling the Huanta elections due to irregularities.⁵⁹

Aprista concern about Communist Party strength only increased during the trienio. The PCP gaining ground in Ayacucho and sometimes came at the expense of the APRA. Alfonso del Pozo, the Aprista who renounced his APRA membership in 1947 over the party’s retreat from its anti-imperialist principles, promptly joined the PCP. As he explained it, he was affiliating with the PCP because “proudly understanding the democratic line of the Peruvian Communist Party, defender of liberties and territorial integrity, I joined.”⁶⁰ Luricochano Vidal Cartolín Aguilar said much the same. “Convinced of the enormous betrayal that the Partido del Pueblo [APRA] is causing to sovereignty and territorial integrity and the democratic cause,” Cartolín explained that he was quitting APRA and joining the PCP,

⁵⁶ ARA, Pref. Leg. 20, Oficio 423 (19 May 1939).

⁵⁷ Drinot, *Allure of Labor*, 21.

⁵⁸ *Sierra*, 1 and 2 Quincena March 1946, 2.

⁵⁹ *Sierra*, 1 Quincena August 1945, 4.

⁶⁰ *Labor*, 19 May 1947, 4.

“which is the party that defends national interests and integrity and has a truly democratic line.”⁶¹

Lastly, Apristas’ anti-Communism reflected a desire to shore up their position in the countryside. Aprista landowners were concerned about Communist influence and activity in rural zones and they also used accusations of Communism to discredit those who challenged their wealth. Now, as I have shown elsewhere, many Ayacucho peasants embraced Aprismo in the 1930s, challenging the standard view that APRA appealed only to urban sectors and plantation workers.⁶² But it is no less true that many Ayacucho hacendados joined the party in that same decade, and by the 1940s, hacienda owners were a dominant force inside Ayacucho’s APRA. Aprista hacendados’ concerns about the Communist Party were not entirely without foundation; the Communist Party did indeed have a presence in Ayacucho’s countryside. Certainly, that presence was far from overwhelming. Until the 1960s, Peru’s left-wing parties favored the city over the countryside, believing that revolutionary potential rested with the urban working classes. As Trotskyist Hugo Blanco remembered it, “To be quite honest, we must recognize that we did not begin our peasant organizing because we had a clear political idea beforehand of the importance of the peasantry in our country; rather, it was largely a result of the pressure of circumstances.”⁶³ While that self-criticism was rooted in fact, it is still true that Peru’s Communist Party did pay some attention to campesinos. This attention was mandated by Moscow; the Comintern’s South American Bureau instructed the Peruvian Communist Party in 1932 that, “the party should form Communist units of poor peasants” and that it should “create a Communist cell for every community, on every hacienda, and on every plantation”.⁶⁴ Although PCP militants did not manage to follow that instruction, they did not forget it. In a 1947 article entitled “How to Organize a Cell,” the PCP’s official paper *Labor* called for the selection of a Secretary

⁶¹ *Ibid.* An abbreviated version of this quote appears in Jaymie Patricia Heilman, *Before the Shining Path: Politics in Rural Ayacucho: 1895-1980* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), 117.

⁶² Heilman, “We Will No Longer Be Servile.”

⁶³ Hugo Blanco, *Land or Death: The Peasant Struggle in Peru* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1972), 20.

⁶⁴ Balbi, *El Partido Comunista y el APRA*, 52.

of Campesino and Indigenous Work. This secretary would be in charge of organizing party cells on haciendas and in communities. The article also asserted that “the triumph of the working class will not be possible without an alliance with campesinos and it is the duty of Communists to establish relations with workers in the countryside and to bring revolutionary orientation to them.”⁶⁵

There is some evidence that Ayacucho Communists took these instructions seriously. One local hacendado complained in 1947 that “certain individuals who say they are Communists” were causing trouble on his estate. The landlord informed authorities that “Indians of my Yanayaco estate rose up, ignoring my rights, incited by Ruperto Aviles and Tomás Palomino.” Those two men were indeed Communists; Tomás Palomino was the party’s regional Secretary General and Ruperto Aviles was a leading member of the Ayacucho Communist Youth.⁶⁶ In another instance, campesino tenants from the Mollepata estate requested support from the Ayacucho branch of the PCP when they faced eviction from the estate’s new owner. Regional PCP Secretary General Tomás Palomino took their complaint to Ayacucho’s Prefect and petitioned for intervention, explaining that the Communist Party acted “in defense of the peasantry and of exploited classes.”⁶⁷ In addition, when the PCP’s National Secretary General Jorge del Prado visited Huanta in 1947, he met with delegations of peasants and visited a local campesino community.⁶⁸ Several peasants from the Huanta communities of Maynay, Huanza y Espíritu may also have joined the party; it was these “campesino comrades” who guarded the hammer and sickle described at this article’s outset.⁶⁹

But for every example of Aprista hacendados’ concerns about *actual* Communists, there are several more examples of their complaints about *imagined* ones. Aprista hacendados were particularly skilled at dreaming up Communist conspiracies. Take the example of the Aprista hacendado Vicente Pérez Morales. Pérez initiated a lawsuit in 1947, claiming that 98

⁶⁵ *Labor*, 11 April 1947, 4.

⁶⁶ *Estrella*, 23 May 1947, 3. For other Aprista/Communist struggles in rural zones, see Monge, “If The People Are Sovereign,” 512-513.

⁶⁷ ARA, Pref. Leg. 9, Oficio 427 (11 Feb. 1946).

⁶⁸ *Labor*, 19 April 1947, 1.

⁶⁹ *Labor*, 4 July 1947, 4.

indigenous campesinos had invaded his hacienda in Carhuaurán, Huanta. By Pérez's telling, the invaders stormed onto his estate crying "Long Live Communism!" and "Long Live Pedro Abraham Chávez!" as they proceeded to harvest the estate's potato crop. The invaders remained for two days, taking with them 1400 *soles* worth of potatoes.⁷⁰ Pérez testified that the invaders "were working on the orders of the lawyer Dr. Pedro Abraham Chávez Riva, Communist Party Candidate for the Provincial Deputyship." The hacendado further asserted that the invasion reflected the "culmination and realization" of the Communist tenet "that denies private property and promises to make tenants and sharecroppers owners of the land they sow. It is also a form of political propaganda, to show the ignorant masses that Communism fulfills its promise to give lands to those who do not have them, taking it from hacendados."⁷¹ The main problem with the hacendado's charge was that Chávez Riva was not, in fact, a member of the Communist Party. He instead led the Huanta Democratic Unity coalition, a political alliance that contained a diverse group of anti-Aprista political parties. Chávez Riva himself dismissed Pérez's claims, explaining that the charges were driven by the Aprista hacendado's "political motive."⁷² Chávez Riva also asserted that Pérez was acting as "an instrument of my political and personal enemy, Dr. César Aibar Valdez," the Secretary General of the Huanta APRA branch. The fact that Chávez Riva had represented one of Pérez's campesino tenants in an earlier lawsuit against the hacendado casts even more doubt on the accuracy of Pérez's claims.⁷³

Other Aprista hacendados invoked the specter of Communism to deflect criticism of their own wrongdoings. Juana Aibar—sister of leading Huanta Apristas César and Santiago—blamed her dispute with neighboring campesinos on the "destructive and terrible ideas of International Communism." Aibar asserted that those notions had led local campesinos to believe that two water sources on her property should be accessible to all. By casting this issue as a problem of Communism, Aibar turned attention away

⁷⁰ ARA, CSJ Huanta Leg. 1673, Cuad. 31 (Initiated 25 July 1947), fol. 1.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

from the legal question of who had the right to that water and shifted the focus toward politics.⁷⁴

One of the most significant examples of anti-Communism among Ayacucho Aprista hacendados came from the eastern Cangallo district of Vischongo. There, the respective owners of the Ninabamba and Ccaccamarca haciendas conducted an aggressive anti-Communist initiative against several of their estate tenants. These landowners were dedicated Apristas; a 1949 letter from Cangallo's Subprefect listed these hacendados as especially "belligerent and fanatic" Apristas in a list of the province's leading Apristas.⁷⁵ Ccaccamarca hacendado Ernesto Cárdenas accused the campesino Moisés Ayala of registering Concepción peasants in the Communist Party in 1948, signing their names and affixing their fingerprints to documents declaring their membership in the Communist Party.⁷⁶ A witness sympathetic to the hacendado asserted that Moisés Ayala was the Communist Party's delegate on the Hacienda Ccaccamarca and that Ayala was aiming to divide up the Ccaccamarca estate in secret, keeping the hacienda's best lands for himself.⁷⁷

These Aprista hacendados soon turned their anti-Communist efforts against another local leader: a peasant by the name of Manuel Llamojha Mitma. Born in 1921, Llamojha Mitma eventually became one of Ayacucho's most prominent and influential left-wing activists in the 1960s and 1970s, running as a congressional candidate for the leftist Frente de Liberación Nacional (FLN) in the 1962 elections and serving as secretary general of the Peruvian Peasant Confederation (CCP) from 1962 until 1973.⁷⁸ While Llamojha has asserted that he did not belong to any political party in the 1940s, he most certainly challenged local hacendados' ownership rights. Together with Vischongo migrants residing in Lima, Llamojha formed a migrant mutual aid association in 1941, serving as its first Secretary General.⁷⁹ The migrant association's primary purpose was to win Vischongo

⁷⁴ ARA, CSJ Huanta, Leg. 1686, Cuad. 27, fol. 1.

⁷⁵ ARA, Pref. Leg. 21, Oficio 67 (6 May 1949).

⁷⁶ ARA, Pref. Leg. 21, Oficio 259 (28 May 1948).

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ ARA, SC, Institutos Armadas 1962 (February 1962).

⁷⁹ Defensoría del Pueblo, Centro de Información para la Memoria Colectiva y Derechos Humanos (CIMC), Interview with Manuel Llamocca (sic) Mitma, fol. 8.

campesinos' land back from their Aprista landlords. Llamojha explained that the migrant association petitioned the national government for the Vischongo community of Concepción's recognition and registration as an official indigenous community, a recognition granted in 1944. "And from there," Llamojha relayed, "we continued the fight against all the hacendados."⁸⁰ The next step in that fight came in 1948, when campesinos from the Ccaccamarca hacienda asked Llamojha to assist them in their struggle to acquire land. Llamojha remembered, "The campesinos called on me to organize them...I organized a tenants' union and we started the struggle."⁸¹ Llamojha spoke to campesinos one by one, usually bringing his typewriter along to record their words. He then composed lengthy petitions, detailing hacendados' abuses and campesinos' suffering, requesting permission for the estate's tenants to purchase the hacienda from its owners. Llamojha even penned a letter to President Bustamante in March 1948, detailing the abuses Ccaccamarca campesinos suffered at the hands of the Cárdenas hacendados. He described "the true situation that we poor Indians are going through, victims of outrages, abuses and crimes that the Hacendados Mr. Carlos and Ernesto Cárdenas are committing."⁸² Government officials not only denied the request for Ccaccamarca's purchase, they also imprisoned Llamojha, holding him in jail for six months.⁸³

Whether or not Llamojha's assertions about his political non-affiliation in the 1940s are true—and they may very well be—the Aprista hacendados who fought him made Communism the crux of their complaints. Evidence from a 1948 trial included a letter in which Llamojha addressed Moisés Ayala, asking whether the latter had "visited with our Communist friends in Ayacucho," and relaying that within Ccaccamarca "our work has advanced considerably and within just a few days we will be yelling out with our other brothers a 'viva' to our Party."⁸⁴ A second letter stated that "the people are ready to act against the Cárdenas brothers in an active way, for we are determined to hang them and repeat the heroic

⁸⁰ CIMC, Interview with Llamocca, fol. 8.

⁸¹ CIMC, Interview with Llamocca, fol. 9.

⁸² ARA, CSJ Cangallo, Leg. 9, Exped. 4 (8 May 1948).

⁸³ CIMC, Interview with Llamocca, fol. 9.

⁸⁴ ARA, CSJ Cangallo, Leg. 9, Exped. 4 (8 May 1948).

attitude of our ancestors and in that way we will impose our Communist desires for which the party will congratulate us...Long live our Party!”⁸⁵ These typewritten letters were almost assuredly fakes. They bear little resemblance to others Llamojha penned at the same time, having none of the grace or even the mannerisms of his other letters. To give just one example, in his letters, Llamojha always spelled Ccaccamarca with Quechua orthography, as Jhajhamarca, but that name appears in its Hispanicized form in these trial letters. The letters also included only a typed name at their close, not Llamojha’s usual flowing signature.⁸⁶ Fake or not, these letters remain relevant precisely because they show how Aprista hacendados used accusations of Communism to defend their landed wealth.

Tempering Aprista Anti-Communism

As real as Aprista anti-Communism was, we need to temper this discussion of Aprista anti-Communism and anti-Communist violence with several crucial qualifiers. First, Apristas were far from the only source of anti-Communist rhetoric and action in Ayacucho during the trienio. Provincial and departmental authorities, many of whom had no ties to APRA, often criticized the Communist Party. Just prior to the 1945 presidential elections, the Huanta Subprefect penned a letter listing individuals affiliated or inclined toward the Communist Party. That letter described José M. Betalleluz as a “red Communist and all his activities are known to be anti-Government.”⁸⁷ The Catholic Church was a second important source of anti-Communism. The Peruvian Episcopate made a formal declaration against Communism in January 1945, and the Ayacucho Bishop voiced a similar denunciation the following month. The Bishop asserted that “Atheist Communism” posed a “grave danger” for both the Church and the country, and he charged that Communism “works against the divine mission of the Church in this world.”⁸⁸ There was a “Catholic Workers’ Circle” in Ayacucho, which had its own periodical, *Trabajo*. The

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ ARA, Pref. Leg. 15, Oficio 129 (23 April 1945).

⁸⁸ *Excelsior*, 28 February 1945, 3; *Excelsior*, 15 March 1945, 2.

newspaper, like the organization, was anti-Communist.⁸⁹ Many non-Aprista Ayacucho hacendados also uttered the same sorts of complaints about Communists as their Aprista counterparts, for essentially the same reasons.⁹⁰ Lastly, members of other Marxist parties in Ayacucho likely grumbled about the Communist Party and its particular ideological line. Certainly, such critiques happened in national forums. A Trotskyist newspaper, for example, charged in 1947 that, “STALINISM IS THE SYPHILIS OF THE WORKERS’ MOVEMENT!”⁹¹ While I have found no evidence of similar complaints in Ayacucho documents, it is not too great a stretch to imagine that Ayacucho Socialists and Trotskyists criticized Communists, even if only behind closed doors.

Aprista anti-Communism also operated within a broader political context of Aprista opposition to many other political parties and actors. Ayacucho’s Apristas did not limit their verbal and physical attacks to Communists, real or alleged. Instead, the department’s Apristas were quick to challenge just about anyone who criticized their party. The Socialist newspaper *Vanguardia* asserted that, “Apristas have tried to instill terror in the province and unleash a wave of attacks and abuses [*atropellos*] and acts of vandalism. Socialist and independent forces have energetically repelled this Aprista terrorism and they have proclaimed their firm will to instill democracy in the province of Huanta, cost what it may.”⁹² Even individuals unaffiliated with political parties were vulnerable to Aprista violence. Apristas attacked Manuel Zuñiga Gamarra’s home in December 1946, throwing a stick of dynamite at the house.⁹³ According to Zuñiga, Apristas carried out this “terrorist act” in order to stop him from distributing the anti-Aprista newspapers *Combate*, *Hogüera*, *Cascabel*, *Vanguardia* and others in his store. Zuñiga relayed that on several previous occasions, members of APRA had jokingly warned him, “Be careful, Zuñiga. We’re going to kill you because these papers hurt the Party.”⁹⁴

⁸⁹ *Trabajo*, 24 October 1945, 6.

⁹⁰ Interview with Edgar Romero (pseudonym) (Huanta, 24 May 2005).

⁹¹ *Revolución: Órgano quincenario del Grupo Obrero Marxista*, 15 May 1947, 3.

⁹² *Vanguardia*, 14 June 1946, 1.

⁹³ AGN, MDI, Paq. 482, Oficio 370 (6 December 1946).

⁹⁴ AGN, MDI, Paq. 482, Unnumbered oficio (5 December 1946).

We can also temper Aprista anti-Communism by recognizing that members of the PCP returned Aprista slander and violence in kind. Phrased differently, inside Ayacucho, Communist anti-Aprismo was just as strong as Aprista anti-Communism. The PCP periodical *Labor*, for example, described Apristas as terrorists and fascists, and sensationalized mild scuffles as deadly attacks.⁹⁵ Ayacucho Communists also stressed their right to engage in violence against Apristas, under the rubric of self-defense. A 1947 letter to the Ayacucho Prefect from members of the PCP stated as much. “We, the Communists, will not be responsible for subsequent actions that might have dangerous developments. We are disposed *in our legitimate defense* to reject violence with violence.”⁹⁶ Combined with participants’ passionate political convictions, this rejection of “violence with violence” often generated grossly discrepant accounts of Aprista/Communist conflict. To take just one example, consider the case of Huanta Communist Francisco Gamboa and several young Aprista militants. One June 1946 afternoon, Gamboa was heading home when he noticed four teenage boys defacing his home’s outer walls with Aprista posters and graffiti. When Gamboa yelled at the boys to stop, the teenagers insulted and swore at him. Gamboa then tried to grab one of the boys to drag him to the police station, but the teenagers punched him in the mouth, knocking Gamboa to the ground, and then beat him while he was down.⁹⁷ Or so Gamboa testified. Another witness in the case offered a strikingly different version of these events, a portrayal decidedly more sympathetic to Apristas. Alberto López Pineda testified that a commotion drew him from his storefront that same June afternoon, and once outside, he saw Gamboa beating a young boy with a metal bar. When the boy escaped and ran toward López, Gamboa struck López in the head with the metal bar. As López explained it, “Gamboa’s attack owes to the fact that the Communist Group has ordered him to provoke scandals and attack Apristas.”⁹⁸ These discrepant accounts—and the many others linked to similar conflicts—have no easy historiographical

⁹⁵ *Labor*, 16 March 1946, 1.

⁹⁶ ARA, Pref. Leg. 104, Oficio 169 (5 June 1947).

⁹⁷ ARA, CSJ Huanta, Leg. 1672, Cuad. 4, fol. 5. (Case initiated 26 June 1946).

⁹⁸ ARA, CSJ Huanta, Leg. 1672, Cuad. 4, fol. 2. (Case initiated 26 June 1946).

resolution, but they do strongly suggest that Ayacucho's Apristas and Communists alike both instigated and responded to political violence.

Conclusions

Chronicling Aprista anti-Communism inside trienio-era Ayacucho reveals that APRA did not easily transition into legality. While the party enjoyed unprecedented political legitimacy during Bustamante's presidency, it still depended upon extra-legal methods. Trienio-era Apristas prioritized thuggery as their political method, infusing their anti-Communist efforts with violent actions like beatings, fistfights, and even small-scale bombings. Apristas could not—or would not—restrict their political battles to elections and legislative efforts. Aprista thuggery was not limited to Ayacucho; in mid-1946, Apristas attacked opposition newspapers throughout the country and targeted the minister of government and the editor of *La Prensa* for assassination in late 1946 and early 1947 respectively, successfully killing the editor.⁹⁹ Decades before the PCP-Sendero Luminoso unleashed its devastating campaign of terror upon Ayacucho, department Apristas helped create an environment where violence became a crucial political tool.

In some respects, anti-Communism served Ayacucho Apristas well. Anti-Communist words and actions helped Ayacucho Apristas define themselves and allowed them to retain their claims to anti-imperialism, albeit in modified form. Anti-Communism also aided Ayacucho Apristas in their effort to retain political prominence in the department and to defend their landed interests against campesino challengers. But Aprista anti-Communism failed to ingratiate the party to either the Peruvian State or the Peruvian military. Bustamante ousted Apristas from his cabinet in January 1947 and a July 1947 directive from the Minister of Government urged authorities to “denounce all agitators of public order” while subsequent directives instructed Ayacucho authorities to prohibit political inscriptions and anonymous flyers.¹⁰⁰ Those orders applied to both the Communist Party and APRA. The political repression only worsened after the October 1948

⁹⁹ Haworth, “Peru,” 182-183; Monge, “If The People Are Sovereign,” 268-269, 370-371.

¹⁰⁰ ARA, Pref. Leg. 9, Oficio 994 (22 July 1947); ARA, Pref. Leg. 9, Oficio 1238 (3 October 1947); ARA, Pref. Leg. 9, Oficio 1251 (9 October 1947).

coup ousted Bustamante from the presidency. The new government under Manuel Odría officially outlawed both the PCP and APRA on 1 November 1948.¹⁰¹ That prohibition had painful repercussions. Within Ayacucho, numerous authorities and government employees lost their jobs, fired as a consequence of their political affiliations and sympathies.¹⁰² And following instructions received from the Director of Government in Lima, Huanta's Subprefect ordered a series of arrests in February 1949. Aprista hacendados Santiago and César Aibar faced arrest, as did seven other Apristas and five alleged Communists.¹⁰³ The ensuing detentions were not short lived; the detainees remained in prison for several months, even launching a hunger strike in protest.¹⁰⁴ As different as Apristas and Communists seemed to one another, the Odría government judged them subversives of the same ilk.

¹⁰¹ *Sierra*, 1 and 2 Quincena November 1948, 2.

¹⁰² ARA, Pref. Leg. 15, Oficio 781 (4 November 1947); ARA, Pref. Leg. 9, Oficio 835 (15 September 1948); ARA, Pref. Leg. 15, Oficio 511 (5 September 1949).

¹⁰³ ARA, Pref. Leg. 15, Oficio 64 (2 February 1949); ARA, Pref. Leg. 15, Oficio 225 (8 May 1949). For national context, see Klarén, *Peru*, 298-299.

¹⁰⁴ ARA, Pref. Leg. 104, Oficio 19 (7 February 1949); ARA, Pref. Leg. 15, Oficio 225 (8 May 1949).

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