

*Reviewed by James Petras*

HUGO BLANCO WAS ONE OF THE GREAT PEASANT LEADERS of PCTU. A member of a generation of revolutionary leaders who emerged in the early sixties throughout Latin America, Blanco must be considered alongside Camilo Torres, Fabricio Ojeda, Luis de la Puente, Guillermo Lobaton, Carlos Marighela, Raul Sendic and others. The value of this book is not in its theoretical pronouncements, which are frequently notions derived from the Trotskyist liturgy, in some cases blatantly in conflict with Blanco's own rich experiences, but in the detailed description of his revolutionary activities. Blanco was an outstanding mass leader whose experiences—both successes as well as failures—need careful study.

Blanco's focus on "inclusive" peasant union organization, including tenant farmers, laborers, sub-tenants, small-holders, on a regional level advanced the practice of mass mobilization politics beyond the urban confines of Lima-Callao and the urban unionized workers. It is interesting to note that, as Blanco describes it, this move was not dictated by previous Trotskyist doctrine but by a series of circumstances: under the heat of repression Blanco had to abandon his political work in a Lima factory, abandon his ten Trotskyist comrades and go to Cuzco. In Cuzco upon entering the trade union movement he discovered that the most militant sector was a group of peasant unionists. Blanco's virtue was his ability to recognize the potential for revolutionary mobilization in the peasant unions. He admits that the "Transitional Program" of the Trotskyist group (conceived in 1938 but still considered the fount of all wisdom by the orthodox) had little to say about political work among peasants in semi-colonial countries. His revolutionary praxis followed an interrelated sequence that proceeded from local to regional organization, from local demands (particular abuses) to global demands (agrarian reform without compensation), from mass social and political struggle to military struggle.

Developing and applying with considerable success the concepts of self-reliance, direct action and mass mobilization, a significant peasant movement emerged which grew in number as it de-legitimized the existing structure of authority. Within this process of mobilization and de-legitimization, Blanco creatively applied Trotsky's concept of "dual power" (the emergence of two sets of authorities within the same political unit), to analyze the emerging political *coyuntura* (conjuncture). His greatest strength flowed from his ability to analyze critical political conjunctures in the course of political action. His greatest weakness was his inability to "theorize," to integrate the political and military "phases" of revolutionary action, to relate the peasants' militant demands for land and their conservative propensities after obtaining land; to understand the relationship between his role as a revolutionary leader linked to a mass struggle and the long-term isolation of his political sect.

BLANCO'S DISCUSSION OF THE REVOLUTIONARY PROCESS was largely based on a discrete set of actions, a sequential pattern which clearly separated mass political

activity from military action: mass political organization was to be followed by military action. The revolutionary "moment" would define the point of military action. In practice (as well as in his polemics with the Fidelistas) Blanco's account reveals almost a total concentration on mass trade union organization and activities with occasional caveats ("self-criticism" and the like) reminding the reader of the need for a revolutionary Bolshevik party. Blanco adapted the Trotskyist version of the Bolshevik revolution to the Peruvian countryside: the revolutionary unions are substituted for the soviets. But unlike the Bolshevik experience, the Peruvian army and police were intact; there were no soldier soviets to be influenced by the peasants in Cuzco.

Blanco's premise that open revolutionary political organization would lead to military insurrection without the massive intervention of the armed forces is false; despite his protestations, the basically unarmed peasant mobilization was crushed not because there was a lack of a revolutionary party (it would have been crushed also) but because the masses were not prepared beyond dynamite, World War II Mausers, sling-shots and bare fists. At no point does Blanco adequately deal with the dilemma facing revolutionary political movements in the repressive climate of Latin America: clandestine guerrilla groups have great difficulty reaching the masses, and while with the proper organization they are capable of resisting repression they are extremely vulnerable to violent assaults by the gendarmes. When Blanco decided to form a guerrilla unit it was not a calculated decision in which the military component is inserted into political struggle but a desperate last resort, after the open mass movement was under attack. That Blanco belatedly recognized the need for a military ingredient in the revolutionary formula is to his credit: his fellow Trotskyists, in their splendid isolation, split from the MIR in Chile and from the PRT-ERP in Argentina precisely over the question of combining an underground military organization with mass struggle. Unfortunately, Blanco joined these sects in their public denunciations of revolutionary struggle, learning nothing from his previous failure to combine military and political action.

CURIOUSLY ENOUGH, WHILE BLANCO WAS ABLE TO OVERCOME dogmatic Trotskyist insistence on urban proletarian trade union activities and develop a mass rural movement, his concept of the mass inclusive peasant union blurred important class differences within the radicalized peasantry: the tenant farmers, as Blanco later recognized, formed the core of a new exploiting class in the countryside, once they obtained land. The amorphous nature of the turbulent peasant mass in motion clearly undermined the possibility of the peasant unions playing a consistent revolutionary role in a sustained struggle for a socialist transformation. Only those rural classes with no stake in the land as landowners, the landless laborers, could have played that role in combination with sectors of the impoverished urban masses. The repression and co-optation process functioned to accentuate the class cleavages which already existed in the peasant movement—it didn't create them.

It is perhaps in reaction to the aftermath of the internal disintegration of the peasant movement in Cuzco that Blanco turned back to the urban milieu and Trotskyist sect politics upon his release from jail. His return was a tragedy because Blanco, the caudillo (in the good sense of the term: a personal leader

who commands support because of his intense activity on behalf of the oppressed), was one of the few examples of a Latin American revolutionary leader who was able to transcend the bizarre environment of sectarian struggles based on imported ideologies and develop revolutionary praxis in accordance with the national realities of Peru.

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