

Andean Report by Carlos Méndez and Sara Madueño

Fujimori defies the Catholic Church

The Peruvian President tries to make Malthusian policy a rallying cry for Ibero-American nations.

Speaking at the closing session of the United Nations Women's Conference in Beijing on Sept. 15, Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori announced that his government intends to make the issue of family planning "an important part of social development policy and the fight against poverty in Peru." In a direct attack on the Catholic Church, he added that his "courageous decision" has provoked the "sacred cow . . . of the ecclesiastical hierarchy to refer to me as the power of darkness."

Backtracking somewhat from what he had told the *New York Times* in a Sept. 13 interview, Fujimori said, "I don't seek a confrontation with the church, but I do maintain a firm position from which to deal with this matter."

The *Times* had reported that Fujimori hopes to persuade other South American heads of state to participate in a coalition to weaken "the influence the Vatican wields over 250 million Catholics, and create a bloc of nations against the Vatican's influence." The *Times* interviewer reported that this evaluation was based on Fujimori's assertion that while in Beijing, "I will contend that this issue is a priority for South America, and that it is important that we join forces. If we are successful in Peru, as I hope we will be, then it will be easier for other countries." In the interview, Fujimori affirmed that "the Catholic Church is quite strong and has a very large and influential network. This is one of the obstacles to achieving success in the family planning program."

In a declaration issued on Sept. 26, the Peruvian chapter of the Ibero-American Solidarity Movement (MSIA) stated that "by proposing to create a bloc of Ibero-American nations to challenge the pope on the issue of family planning, Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori has placed his prestige at the service of one-worldist forces run from London by the House of Windsor, which conspires to put an end to nation-states and to impose, by the end of the century, its utopia of a 'global village.' This conspiracy in Ibero-America demands the destruction of those institutions which are the pillars of our republic; that is, the Armed Forces and the Catholic Church."

But Fujimori's offensive is not merely verbal. Shortly before he traveled to Beijing, the Peruvian Congress, in which Fujimori holds a majority, approved by a vote of 70-23, a law which legalizes sterilization (tying of tubes in women and vasectomy in men) as a means of birth control.

Predictably, the passage of this law provoked a political earthquake in the country, 75% of whose population is Catholic. During debate on the law, Deputy Vargas Marín warned that its passage would open the way to "ethnic cleansing" in the country. Unfortunately, this statement is no metaphor. On Sept. 14, the daily *Gestión* published statements by Carlos Figueroa, president of the Andrés Bello Southern Region, who after visiting the communities of the Ashaninka Indians, said that now

that the sterilization law is in effect, "this can serve as an alternative to end the serious situation of malnutrition and extreme poverty affecting these people."

As the MSIA said in its statement, "sterilization as a policy of State is a despicable form of genocide, hardly different from the genocide committed by Shining Path against Peru. . . . You can't eliminate poverty by killing the poor. President Fujimori has launched his campaign in favor of sterilization and birth control with the false argument that this is a way to combat poverty. . . . This economic fallacy comes from liberal, monetarist theory, to which Fujimori unfortunately pays homage." As Pope Paul VI once said, rather than cut off heads, it's better to make more hats.

However, Fujimori has decided to cut off heads rather than confront the International Monetary Fund. Although he denies it, the truth is, as the bishop of Huanuco, Hermann Artale, charged on July 30, "there are foreign interests which are forcing [the government] to apply birth control, and the foreign debt will even have to be paid with human lives. . . . Behind all this is the International Monetary Fund. . . . It wasn't the President who spoke [on birth control policy], but the International Monetary Fund."

The confrontation which President Fujimori seeks with the church, occurs "coincidentally," the MSIA warns, at a time when Pope John Paul II "has reiterated his call for an end to the merciless looting to which peoples are subjected . . . by means of the usurious foreign debt. The pope himself has called for the year in which the next millennium begins to be named the 'year of Jubilee,' in which, in the spirit of Christianity, foreign debts which prevent development should be forgiven."