

Peru, full stop to a nation's cynicism

The oppressor's best weapon is the mind of the oppressed, said Steve Biko, the South African apartheid activist before he was assassinated. Nothing could be more certain.

The great victory of a power system is to make those who suffer believe that it is a "natural situation". When the unequal relationships of power and exchange are normal, the victims so deeply assimilate this type of relationship that they think it's the only way; the modus operandi of their environment, and therefore of their life.

This happened to the slaves, this has happened to many women, this happens to the poor. Resignation leaves many in the most inactive stupefaction. And this is what has happened to the Peruvians with respect to corruption: there is a hidden but powerful voice that wants to make us all believe that we are all corruptible.

Since we believe that "anything can be bought and anything can be sold" by the same measure we can consider acts of corruption as forgivable sins. To make everyone feel, think and believe that we are all corruptible is a way of destroying culture and softening the guilt. As Noam Chomsky, the North American intellectual, maintains in an article on the overcoming of orthodoxy: "A standard technique in the formation of beliefs is to do something in one's own interests and then to build a framework in which it is derived that it is correct".

It has to be said. It is a task at the moment to raise one's voice to record that not all journalists are shameless, nor are all the politicians corrupt, and it is not that they didn't sell out because they had never been tempted. Let's be critical of cynical reasoning with more arguments than ever and put a distance between what they want us to believe and reality.

Maybe it is true that reality has got so close to us that it has burnt our hands. Precisely now, with the wounds and scabs on raw flesh, it is the right moment to develop a reasoning to be installed deeper than the calming discourses of the aberrant and insane. To be critical like this is a way of

strengthening a national culture, a clear language of citizenship, a praxis of objection of freeing conscience.

Healing the wounds through critical deconstruction of our immediate past is, today, an obligatory and undelayable task.

by **Rocío Silva Santisteban**. Translated from: El Comercio, Peru. 13/2/2001

A central issue behind both corruption and reconciliation, the subject of the WACC Congress, is impunity. It shapes cultural mindsets and conduct that are unethical and anti-democratic. Extensive resources are provided for Journalists Against Corruption by International Private Enterprise: <http://www.cipe.org/pfc>