

LOCAL POLITICS AND THE PERUVIAN LEFT: The Case of El Agustino*

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Local politics in Latin America have been attracting a great deal of scholarly interest as of late (Fox 1994; Nickson 1995; Reilly 1995). This interest can be attributed in part to the simple fact that over the past two decades, the institutional weight of Latin American local governments has continued to grow, spurred as much by the popularity of decentralization policies as by the seminal crisis of the central states in the region. Faced with shrinking resources and painful structural adjustment programs, local governments were often left with no other choice but to divest themselves of responsibilities they could no longer meet.

Even more important, local governments in Latin America have aroused the curiosity of social scientists and other observers because they seemed to be situated at the confluence of two other seminal trends: the resurgence of civil society, particularly in the urban realm, and the democratization of formerly authoritarian regimes. When viewed from this angle, local governments appeared to provide a crucial meeting ground for the myriad social movements and groups that emerged during and after the transitions from authoritarian rule to focus on such issues as the improvement of urban services, women's rights, nutrition, and public health (Eckstein 1989; Escobar and Alvarez 1992) and the still feeble political institutions of the new democratic regimes. Some proponents writing on decentralization and on social movements were particularly enthusiastic, hoping that the coming together of these two trends would release important synergies whose repercussions potentially could transcend the local realm (see Slater 1985; Ballón 1986; Boisier 1987; Castells and Borja 1988). Most important, these authors believed that an increase in popular

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participation at the local level could improve the institutional performance of local governments, which would help demonstrate the viability of democratic institutions at other levels as well. Furthermore, increased popular participation would exert a democratizing impact on local political institutions, thereby promoting the consolidation of democracy as a whole.

In the meantime, however, it has become clear that many of these approaches were overly sanguine about the prospects of local democracy, often assuming that it would flourish if only the appropriate institutional preconditions could be put in place, namely the devolution of powers and resources to lower levels of government and adequate provisions for popular participation. These approaches, frequently prone to macro-level generalizations, paid little attention to the way in which local democracy was being implemented on the ground. They also tended to neglect some crucial issues, such as the autonomy of urban popular movements, their links to other actors, and the internal workings of political alliances and coalitions. In particular, the issue of movement autonomy was not sufficiently addressed. This kind of autonomy can be tested severely when urban popular movements participate in political institutions permeated by traditional patterns of clientelism and co-optation. Also glossed over at times were the often conflictive relations between such movements and other actors, particularly political parties, as well as the bargaining and deal-making inherent in any political alliance.

Without going to the opposite extreme of denying the viability of local-level democracy altogether, this article will attempt to address these shortcomings by taking an empirical case study as its starting point.¹ Drawing on the specific case of El Agustino, a low-income district in the Peruvian capital of Lima, my study seeks to shed light on the particular interactions among various local-level actors, institutions, and processes, paying particular attention to urban popular movements, local government, leftist political parties, and actors such as nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).² The present study, despite being limited to a single case

1. The main source of data for this article is a series of open-ended semi-structured interviews with representatives of urban popular movements, political parties, and local government. Contacts were made and interviews were conducted between November 1991 and February 1992 in El Agustino, a low-income district of Lima, and also in the neighboring district of Santa Anita. (Interviews were carried out in Santa Anita to complement those in El Agustino. Santa Anita was established as a district only in 1989, and much of its territory formerly belonged to El Agustino.) The purpose of the interviews was to elucidate the relations between the respective actors and also to obtain background information on their structure, composition, and development over time. I have also drawn on participant observation in a number of cases and on printed sources such as newsletters and material provided by the municipal administration, NGOs operating in the district, and others.

2. Peru is the only country in Latin America with a two-tier system of local government system in which both provinces and districts have municipal status. Districts can vary enor-

examined in some depth, is intended to provide a basis for meaningful generalizations, given the fact that the socioeconomic characteristics and the sociopolitical history of El Agustino exhibit significant similarities with low-income neighborhoods in urban areas elsewhere in Latin America.

While my analysis will focus on the interactions between locally based actors at several distinct levels, the relations between urban popular movements and leftist political parties occupy a privileged place in this context. As has been pointed out in the literature, urban popular movements typically rally around fairly specific concerns and are often poorly structured. They therefore need allies to integrate their concerns into a more universal program and project them into the political arena.³ Given certain programmatic affinities and a common history of past struggles, notably during the pro-democracy mobilizations to unseat authoritarian regimes, the political Left appears to be the actor most likely to perform this role.

From the perspective of the political Left, local-level alliances with popular movements appear equally attractive, especially when viewed against the backdrop of the challenges confronting it in the 1980s and early 1990s. At the national level, the Peruvian Left had been shut out of power and often relegated to the sidelines of political decision making after the return to democratic rule. But at the local level, the Left still commanded considerable popular support in the municipalities, due largely to a series of successful city administrations under mayors like Alfonso Barrantes in Metropolitan Lima, Luiza Erundina in São Paulo, and Tabaré Vázquez in Montevideo (Castañeda 1993; NACLA 1995). In this situation, it made eminent sense for the Left to try to build on its support at the grass roots and further strengthen its alliances with urban popular movements by using the municipalities as springboards to higher levels of the political system. In order to make this strategy work, however, the Left first needed to reevaluate its relations with urban popular movements and other actors in civil society. The Left also needed to sort out the long-term strategic implications of its involvement in local politics, which were intimately linked with its stance toward representative democracy as a whole.⁴ The dilemmas inherent in the strategic options that emerged, compounded

mously in size, from a few thousand inhabitants in rural areas to several hundred thousand in Metropolitan Lima (see Nickson 1995, 237).

3. Issues like these are now dominating the literature, in contrast to the earlier enthusiasm over the potential of popular movements to bring about political change (see Mainwaring 1987, Ballón 1990, and Cardoso 1992).

4. It would exceed the scope of this article to address these questions adequately. For more in-depth treatments, see Castañeda (1993), Carr and Ellner (1993), and Rénique (1995). Some brief remarks are in order nonetheless. In addition to the political conjuncture and the transitions to democracy in most Latin American countries, the Latin American Left's reexamination of representative democracy was also spurred by external causes. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the socialist bloc dramatically accelerated processes

by an image of disunity produced by the never-ending disputes among some protagonists, explain to some degree why this strategy has thus far failed to yield the expected results.

The first urgent task for the Peruvian Left was to redefine its relations with other political actors operating at the local level, especially those with urban popular movements. Despite past alliances during the mass mobilizations against authoritarian rule, the Left had often lost touch with the multitude of popular movements that had sprung up in urban shantytowns and some rural communities during and after the transitions to democracy. These movements, with their multiple identities and practices and their largely local concerns and demands, forced the Left to reevaluate its ties with civil society, which had changed fundamentally since the 1970s. Traditionalists within the Left continued to regard such movements as potential bases of mass support that needed to be “captured” and integrated into a political alliance that the Left could direct and control. Other leftists, in contrast, advocated a new kind of relationship characterized by a certain degree of ideological and theoretical pluralism as well as respect for the movements’ autonomy. Proponents of this second view often perceived in the “new ways of making politics” embodied by popular movements a democratizing and rejuvenating influence on the political Left itself.

No less important, the Left needed to clarify the long-term goals of its involvement in local politics and to sort out the strategic choices entailed. A number of different options emerged, each with its own inherent dilemmas. A more traditional view, which could be termed “the revolutionary approach” to local government, held that local governments should essentially serve as “sounding boards” for amplifying popular demands made on the central government, which were considered unfulfillable under the current system. Consequently, the main goal of such a strategy was to foster political opposition and ultimately construct an anti-system alliance from the base level. The primary challenge of this strategy was to maintain high levels of popular mobilization around a political project that did not profess to provide immediate solutions to pressing popular needs and whose ultimate realization was postponed to the distant future.

of ideological change underway within the Latin American Left since the 1970s. As a result, parts of the Left no longer viewed representative democracy exclusively in tactical terms, that is, as an arena for assembling forces for the revolutionary struggle. Instead, these factions began to acknowledge the inherent value of some of democracy’s core features, such as free elections, procedural guarantees, and civil rights. These same groups often advocated a reexamination of the relations between the Left and civil society. At the same time, considerable numbers of Peruvian leftists maintained their fundamental critique of representative democracy, believing it incapable of bringing about the socioeconomic changes necessary to solve the pressing problems of the popular majorities and therefore a meaningless formality. These programmatic and strategic debates within the Left fundamentally changed its stance toward local politics.

Proponents of an opposing view, which could be labeled a “radical-democratic perspective,” argued that the main purpose of leftist-led local governments was not to build a political movement capable of overturning the current political order. Rather, the Left’s involvement in local politics should serve to demonstrate its capacity to govern within the existing political institutions while opening them up to popular participation from below. In other words, the Left had to demonstrate that it could run an effective municipal administration capable of producing results, could compromise and strike alliances with other political actors if needed, and could provide solutions to at least some fundamental popular concerns. The main challenge of this approach was to show that social and political change in the interest of the popular majorities could indeed be realized from within the existing system, no easy task considering the extreme urgency of many popular concerns and the painfully slow speed at which such change was possible, if possible at all.

These challenges and dilemmas were confronting leftists all over Latin America in the 1980s and early 1990s, as they grappled to redefine their parties’ stances toward a transformed local political arena and the popular movements operating within it. It can be argued, however, that such pangs were felt most keenly in Peru. First of all, Peruvian popular movements were comparatively stronger and more varied than in most other Latin American countries and consequently brought more pressure to bear on the political Left to come to terms with a civil society that had changed drastically since the 1970s. In addition, the Peruvian Left managed to establish a stronger and more sustained presence in the municipalities than elsewhere, particularly during the tenure of a leftist administration in Metropolitan Lima from 1984 to 1986 (Allou 1988; Pease 1991; Rojas Julca 1989). During this short period, *Izquierda Unida* (IU) under Mayor Alfonso Barrantes earned a reputation as an efficient local administrator and also managed to employ the municipal apparatus in the interests of the popular majorities of the Peruvian capital. Examples were governmental acceleration of the distribution of land titles to urban squatters and improvement of the infrastructure of urban shantytowns. In addition, the municipal administration embarked on a series of highly innovative participatory policies, such as the Programa del Vaso de Leche, whose day-to-day management was largely turned over to urban popular movements.

Despite this fairly positive record, *Izquierda Unida* lost the subsequent municipal elections in Metropolitan Lima to APRA (*Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana*).⁵ This outcome resulted in a radically al-

5. The exact causes for the IU’s defeat cannot be treated in detail here, but some of them should at least be mentioned. For many observers, a determining factor was the personal intervention by the still-charismatic President Alan García, notably his controversial campaign speech in support of APRA candidate Jorge del Castillo from the balcony of the presidential

tered political environment for district-level municipalities in and around the capital that were still controlled by the Left. The new APRA administration brought the participatory policies of the preceding administration to an abrupt halt and drastically cut the resources previously being transferred to the districts. As a consequence, the operating budgets of leftist-controlled district administrations plummeted, and their capacity to implement participatory and other policies was greatly reduced.

At a different level, Izquierda Unida's defeat in 1986 fueled the ideological and strategic divisions within the Peruvian Left, which had widened since Alfonso Barrantes's loss in the 1985 presidential elections and his attempted rapprochement with the APRA party. Some sectors of the Left took the municipal defeat as additional proof of the inviability of a strategy that attempted to use democratic elections as the main road to power and stressed the Left's capacity to govern within the existing political institutions. Other sectors continued to defend this strategy, and as a consequence, the viability of the leftist alliance was increasingly questioned. Inevitably, this trend affected the Peruvian Left's stance toward local politics by intensifying the struggle between the two strategic options delineated previously.

Against this backdrop of widening rifts within the Peruvian Left and an increasingly bleak economic outlook, my article will examine the relations among leftist political parties, urban popular movements, local government, and other local actors in El Agustino. Some essential background information on the socioeconomic composition and the socio-political history of the district will be provided first. In the following section, I will analyze a specific experiment in popular participation attempted in El Agustino in the late 1980s, the Micro-Areas de Desarrollo or MIADES, in which certain responsibilities of the municipal administration were delegated to popular movements. It will be argued that the ultimate failure of this experiment can be attributed to a lack of resources on the part of the municipal administration, and especially to its being politicized and instrumentalized by competing leftist factions representing the two ideological and strategic currents just outlined. As a result, most popular movements withdrew from the MIADES program for fear of becoming embroiled in intra-leftist struggles, which they rightly perceived as a threat

palace (the so-called *balconazo*). At a more fundamental level, the election results showed that the IU had been unable to make decisive inroads into the middle-class electorate, despite its moderation in office and Mayor Alfonso Barrantes's overtures toward other parties, particularly APRA. Furthermore, although the IU did well in the low-income districts of the capital, the party did not manage to monopolize the popular-sector vote and prevent APRA from taking a sizable share. To some extent, this outcome may have been due to the IU's failure to satisfy the high expectations of some of its constituents, largely because of lack of resources. Most leftist local governments in Latin America face similar problems (see Castañeda 1993, 152, 368).

to their own autonomy. In the light of this experience, I will draw some tentative conclusions on the respective merits of the two competing political approaches to local politics and their potential for establishing a new relationship between the political Left and urban popular movements in Peru.

EL AGUSTINO: PORTRAIT OF A "TYPICAL" POPULAR DISTRICT

El Agustino is one of the oldest of Lima's popular districts. Bordering the Río Rímac on the north side, the districts of Santa Anita on the east, Ate-Vitarte on the south, and La Victoria and El Cercado on the west, El Agustino is situated only a few kilometers east of the Plaza de Armas, in the area known as the Cono Este of Metropolitan Lima. Although the district was formally constituted only in 1965, settlement of the area started in the 1940s. The invasion of the Cerro El Agustino in 1947, along with several other hills in the area, can be considered as a harbinger of the coming wave of land occupations by migrants from the Andean highlands around the Peruvian capital (Matos Mar 1977, 68). Since then, the district has continued to grow geographically as well as demographically and is running out of space for further expansion (Calderón and Valdeavellano 1991, 142; CENCA and SEA n.d., 18). In 1989 the population of El Agustino was estimated to be 235,000 inhabitants.

The poverty of its inhabitants has traditionally been a core characteristic of El Agustino. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, only 4 percent of the labor force of El Agustino was adequately employed (Calderón and Valdeavellano 1991, 142; CENCA and SEA n.d., 20; Tuesta 1989, 16–17). Only this tiny percentage received at least the minimum wage and enjoyed the protection of valid labor laws, while 80 percent of the inhabitants were underemployed and 16 percent were unemployed. Employment was overwhelmingly concentrated in services, with about a third of the labor force being self-employed workers in the informal sector. More than 53 percent of the dwellings in the district lacked access to drinking water and sewers, while 27 percent had no electricity (CTIC n.d., 2). The poverty of El Agustino was also reflected in the state of its municipal finances. For much of the 1980s, the budget of the municipal administration amounted to only two to five dollars (U.S.) per person per year (Allou 1989, 139–40).

Another basic characteristic of the district is its structural heterogeneity, stemming from a somewhat chaotic settlement pattern and the virtual absence of urban planning (Ruiz de Somocurcio et al. 1987, 13–24). Some neighborhoods in El Agustino are now fully consolidated, boasting paved roads, sidewalks, parks, and brick houses equipped with drinking water, sewers, and electricity. But large expanses of the district consist of desolate shantytowns perched precariously on the hillsides, lacking even the most basic amenities. Frequently, the level of urban development of the respective zones mirrors the social composition of their inhabitants,

which can range from middle-class in some parts to absolute poverty in the *cerros* (hills). The most recently erected shantytowns are usually the most desolate, but many of the older settlements in the *cerros* are also in a critical state. Often severely overcrowded, their location on the slopes of steep hills makes the provision of urban services extremely difficult and expensive, if not outright impossible.

What makes El Agustino a particularly interesting case in the context of this study is that it shares many similarities with other low-income districts in the Peruvian capital. As mentioned, settlement patterns and basic socioeconomic characteristics are comparable. More important, the sustained presence of urban popular movements and leftist political parties in El Agustino, which served as an impetus for developing participatory policies by the municipal government, has parallels elsewhere.⁶ Given these commonalities, the experience of El Agustino should not be considered an isolated case but rather an example of more universal trends in relations among urban popular movements, leftist political parties, local government, and other actors such as NGOs.

Urban popular movements in El Agustino look back on a long history of struggle, which began in the late 1940s with formation of the first neighborhood organizations that spearheaded occupation of the *cerros*. This history continued throughout the 1950s and 1960s, when new land occupations led to renewed and often violent confrontations with landowners and police (Calderón 1980; Fernández and Núñez 1986). In the 1970s, the committees that emerged in connection with restructuring the central *zona plana* challenged the traditional clientelist relationship between *pobladores* and state agencies like SINAMOS. Throughout the 1970s, El Agustino also witnessed the formation of neighborhood movement coalitions, the most noteworthy being the Federación Distrital de Pueblos Jóvenes y Urbanizaciones Populares de El Agustino (FEDEPJUP) (Calderón 1980, 95–110; Calderón and Valdeavellano 1991, 143; CENCA and SEA n.d., 20).

Women's movements likewise have a long tradition in El Agustino, dating back to the *clubes de madres* of the 1960s. During the crisis years in the late 1970s, new forms of women's movements emerged, the so-called *movimientos de sobrevivencia* that broke with the clientelist tradition represented by the earlier *clubes de madres* and stressed organizational autonomy as well as democratic forms of participation (CELATS 1983; Montes 1987). El Agustino was at the forefront of these developments. For example, the soup kitchen *Sembrando la Alegría* set up in 1979 may have been the first *comedor popular* in Lima.⁷ The crisis years of the 1980s witnessed

6. See, for instance, Calderón and Valdeavellano (1991) on San Martín de Porres and Comas as well as on El Agustino.

7. Taped interview with Carmen Cuadros, community worker for SEA, 8 Jan. 1992, Lima.

the explosive growth of comedores populares and the successive establishment of Vaso de Leche committees by the Barrantes administration of Metropolitan Lima. Both kinds of groups achieved impressive degrees of organizational consolidation, uniting in federations at the district level and forging links with other districts all over Metropolitan Lima.

The rise of urban popular movements in El Agustino was paralleled by the growing strength of leftist political parties, particularly those belonging to the "new Left" that emerged in the 1970s under the reformist military regime. To a large extent, the Left owed its influence among the pobladores of the district to its early involvement in neighborhood organizations and participation in the conflicts in which the settlers opposed the state, particularly the restructuring of the zona plana and other parts of El Agustino already mentioned. In the late 1970s, nationwide general strikes that helped end the military regime represented a further milestone in relations between the Peruvian Left and popular organizations. As in other low-income districts, neighborhood organizations in El Agustino participated alongside leftist groups and trade unions in organizing the strikes and were instrumental in ensuring a high turnout.

The Left's involvement in the struggles of the 1970s and its recruiting of activists among popular movements laid the foundations for the IU's subsequent strength as an electoral force in the district. Within Izquierda Unida, first the Unión de Izquierda Revolucionaria (UNIR) and later the Partido Unificado Mariateguista (PUM) succeeded best in translating popular backing into political influence at the district level. The continuing popular support for the Left in El Agustino was reflected in a share of more than half of the popular vote in the 1978 elections for the constituent assembly and subsequently in a string of electoral victories for the IU in successive municipal elections. In 1981 the IU formed the first democratically elected local government in El Agustino and went on to win the three following municipal elections in 1983, 1986, and 1989 (Allou 1989, 88–91; Roncagliolo 1989–1990, 16).⁸

Because of the long-standing cooperation between leftist political parties and urban popular movements in the district, the consecutive leftist administrations in El Agustino were fairly responsive to demands for

8. The IU obtained 33 percent of the popular vote in 1981, 53 percent in 1983 in the wake of Alfonso Barrantes's victory in Metropolitan Lima, 47 percent in 1986, but only 27 percent in 1989 shortly after its breakup (according to Peruvian electoral law, the party with the largest share of the popular vote was accorded the office of mayor and the majority of seats in the municipal council). Following this near defeat, the IU was finally swept from office in February 1993 by the independent OBRAS movement. Its resounding victory in twenty districts of the capital, as well as in the mayoral contest at the metropolitan level, represented not only a vote of no confidence in the Left but a clear indication of the electorate's growing dissatisfaction with all "traditional parties" and the increasing prominence of independents in Peruvian local politics.

more popular participation.⁹ In fact, the municipal government of El Agustino began to experiment with new forms of popular participation between 1981 and 1983 and actively supported the efforts undertaken in this regard by the city government of Metropolitan Lima between 1984 and 1986. By launching the MIADES project in 1987, the municipal administration tried to continue this legacy of cooperation between urban popular movements and leftist local governments, despite a political environment that had deteriorated significantly after APRA's victory in the 1986 municipal elections. In fact, the MIADES project went a step further than previous instances of popular participation, which were relatively sporadic and unconnected. Adopting an integrated approach, the MIADES created a forum where urban popular movements could cooperate with one another and with the municipal administration on a variety of issues. In the following section, I will examine the genesis and initial development of the MIADES project.

CONSTITUTION AND PARTIAL CONSOLIDATION OF THE MIADES IN EL AGUSTINO

The project of the Micro-Areas de Desarrollo (MIADES) in El Agustino originated from two studies of the feasibility of urban development in the district, both commissioned by the municipal government (Acosta 1986; Domenack 1987). Starting from the shared premise that the structural heterogeneity of the district constituted one of the main obstacles to its overall development, the studies recommended that the district be divided into several subzones sharing common characteristics. These subzones could then have policies tailored to meet their specific development needs.

The original MIADES proposal, adopted by the municipal council on 25 June 1987, embraced most of the technical considerations of the two

9. It should be noted that this kind of cooperation was viciously attacked by the armed guerrilla movement Sendero Luminoso, particularly during its campaign in the early 1990s to infiltrate and take over (or at least disable) the popular organizations operating in the districts surrounding the Peruvian capital (Morales 1991; Smith 1992). Sendero Luminoso regarded any cooperation with the institutions of the existing political system as counterrevolutionary and contrary to its own goals and thus considered its opponents as legitimate targets for violent attacks. Typically, Sendero would first spread rumors and launch slander campaigns to delegitimize leaders of popular movements in the eyes of their constituents, coupled with threats on their lives. If this approach did not ensure compliance, Sendero would assassinate targeted leaders, often in a gruesome fashion. The most infamous example of this tactic was the killing of María Elena Moyano, the deputy mayor and longtime organizer of women's groups in Villa El Salvador, on 15 Feb. 1992. But despite Sendero's presence in El Agustino dating back to the early 1980s and a series of attacks on individuals and public installations, the guerrilla movement did not seem to consider the district a priority and concentrated its activities elsewhere, for example in Ate-Vitarte or Villa El Salvador. As a result, Sendero did not succeed in severing the links between urban popular movements and the municipal administration in El Agustino or severely injure their functioning.

prior studies but also added an unmistakably political twist to the project. As Mayor Jorge Quintanilla described the project, "What we are proposing is a model within the framework of the official scenario—the state, the municipalities—that would allow the people to organize in small spaces, which we call micro-areas of development. In these spaces, we try to see to it that the people centralize, begin to make decisions, and exercise functions of government."¹⁰

As a first step, it was hoped, the MIADES would act as a catalyst for organizationally consolidating and unifying the district's urban popular movements, which were considered relatively weak and dispersed by the municipal administration despite their long history of struggle (Quintanilla n.d., 4).¹¹ The second stage was supposed to unite the individual MIADES in a federation of MIADES at the district level, which could then assume increasingly important decision-making powers, including deliberation over the municipal budget. Not unlike the Comunidad Urbana Autogestionaria de Villa El Salvador (CUAVES), this districtwide federation of MIADES would act as a sort of "popular parliament," with its decisions being enacted by the municipal administration. For the longer term, the mayor and his party had decidedly more ambitious plans for the MIADES project. As Quintanilla explained, "Of course, the project has a greater importance. It is a political project of self-government. Therefore, it cannot be implemented only in a district, it has to be national."¹²

It was hoped that the MIADES experience would spread to other districts, making it possible to establish regional alliances and federations of MIADES, which would then form the base for an *asamblea nacional popular* at the national level (Atúnca 1991, 6). Viewed from this angle, it could indeed be said that the purpose of the MIADES was to "gestar las bases de poder popular" (Quintanilla 1988, 6), meaning to lay the groundwork for popular self-government outside the established institutions of representative democracy.

In the initial phases of the MIADES, however, the radical political goals of the project and its hoped-for future role as the nucleus of an alternative political system were little more than theoretical pronouncements. They were clearly overshadowed by more immediate and pragmatic concerns for consolidating the MIADES. When municipal community workers or *promotores* explained the project to the population, they emphasized the public works (*obras*) that it was supposed to make possible.

In December 1987, municipal promoters fanned out to the individual settlements of the district and held a series of meetings, most of them with the leaders of neighborhood organizations, to explain and promote

10. According to my taped interview with Jorge Quintanilla, mayor of El Agustino for Izquierda Unida, 6 Nov. 1991, Lima. All translations in this article are mine.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

the MIADES project. Paralleling that effort but without the municipality being actively involved, *talleres de autodiagnóstico* took place in the proposed MIADES. These “workshops” were essentially general assemblies attended by leaders of urban popular movements and the population at large. The purposes of these workshops were to delineate the boundaries of the proposed MIADES, to decide which settlements should be included, to deliberate the common concerns of the respective settlements, to draft a list of public works accorded priority, and finally to elect a *junta directiva provisional* of each MIADE. By the end of this process, around November 1988, eight MIADES had been constituted.

Subsequently, women’s and survival organizations were integrated into the project. Again, municipal promoters held meetings with leaders of women’s and survival organizations, and independent workshops were organized. The integration of women’s organizations into the MIADES was completed when first the *comedores populares* (in March 1988) and then the *Vaso de Leche* committees (a year later in 1989) adapted their district-level organizations to the MIADES structure (see Calderón and Valdeavellano 1991, 158). Following the integration of women’s and survival organizations, a number of other organizations began to participate more actively in the MIADES, such as youth groups and associations of micro-entrepreneurs (CENCA and SEA n.d., 27).

Another significant event in the development of the MIADES project was the creation of the *Fondo de Desarrollo Comunal* (FODECO). This municipal fund served as the main source of funding for the public works previously identified in the *talleres de autodiagnóstico* by the individual MIADES. Given that the municipal administration initially considered public works to be the main factor motivating the population to participate in the MIADES, it is no exaggeration to consider FODECO as the centerpiece of the project. Essentially, FODECO consisted of funds taken from the municipal budget,¹³ which were deposited in separate bank accounts and put at the disposal of the individual MIADES. The legal status of the MIADES was unclear, however, and in order to avoid accusations of financial mismanagement, each payment had to be approved by the municipal council as well as by the municipal administration. In 1988 payments were made in installments of about eight hundred dollars (U.S.), which could be replenished after the funds had been used (Calderón and Valdeavellano 1991, 154).

Finally, greater involvement by nongovernmental organizations also shaped the development of the project. The NGOs, or *centros* as they were commonly called, helped organize the *talleres de autodiagnóstico* and provided crucial technical support for realizing some of the public

13. In 1988, FODECO amounted to 8 percent of the municipal budget, rising to 9 percent in 1989 (CENCA and SEA n.d., 26; Calderón and Valdeavellano 1991, 154).

works that the assemblies had agreed upon. More important, the NGOs drew up an integrated development plan for the district on behalf of the municipality, known as the Plan Integral de Desarrollo (CTIC n.d.). While stressing the importance of increased popular participation in urban development and building on the efforts undertaken by individual popular organizations and MIADES, this plan sought to coordinate these activities, infuse them with professional urbanist criteria, and link them to the urban, social, and economic development of the district as a whole. At the same time, the Plan Integral de Desarrollo emphasized the necessity for increased political decentralization, meaning the transfer of powers and resources from the central to local governments. The plan also linked the development of El Agustino with that of the Cono Este of Lima and with the entire metropolitan region.

By mid-1989, two years after the official announcement of the project, the MIADES in El Agustino had achieved a certain degree of consolidation. Eight micro-areas had been formally constituted in all parts of the district, following a lengthy process in which the population had reshaped their physical outlines, established their organizational structure, and defined the goals they hoped to reach. Most neighborhood organizations were represented in the MIADES, women's and survival organizations had been included, and other popular organizations had also begun to participate in the project. Moreover, the functioning of the FODECO had been formalized, and it had financed a number of projects in various MIADES. Finally, the three main NGOs active in El Agustino had agreed to work together on an integrated development plan for the district while continuing to lend organizational and technical support to the individual urban popular movements they had been working with all along.

Despite these achievements, the project was plagued by major shortcomings, particularly a critical shortage of resources on the part of the municipal administration.¹⁴ When it became clear that the funds provided by the FODECO, limited to begin with, were decreasing and often insufficient to realize even minor projects, a certain disenchantment with the MIADES began to set in, and the level of participation slowly began to decline. The municipal administration had known all along that its resources were insufficient to satisfy all the expectations it had raised. But municipal leaders apparently believed that they could redirect the expectations created around the MIADES project toward the APRA-controlled provincial and central governments and use them as part of a confronta-

14. Accounting for inflation, Guerrero (n.d.) has documented a drop of 52 percent in municipal spending between 1988 and 1989. In addition to the effects of the economic crisis in Peru during these years, another reason for the difficult financial situation of most district administrations was that after 1986, the new APRA-controlled government of Metropolitan Lima was much less willing than the previous IU administration to grant resources to the districts, particularly if they were controlled by the Left.

tional strategy for demanding increased financial resources for the district. If this was the strategy adopted by the municipal government, it clearly backfired. Moreover, disillusionment with the MIADES project contributed to a loss of popular support for the municipal government itself, a trend that became evident in the municipal elections of November 1989.

While these setbacks did not alter the main actors' conviction that the MIADES were essentially a political project and that material concerns would eventually make way for a more political outlook, they helped intensify the debates over exactly what such a political project would entail in practice. At the same time, the debates around this issue were fueled by political struggles within the Peruvian Left at the national level, which began to be felt in the district. At the heart of these debates lay the question of how the relations between the respective actors involved in the MIADES project should be structured and who was to be the project's protagonist. Put more precisely, disagreement was growing over the question of whether the MIADES and the urban popular movements composing them indeed needed to be "constructed" and led from above, as the municipal government seemed to believe, or whether autonomous urban popular movements should be the main driving force behind the project, albeit assisted by other actors. These disagreements radically altered the character of the MIADES project and fostered the emergence of a counterproposal, the *Comité de Gestión Distrital*, while slowly destroying the unity of the actors involved.

POLITICIZATION AND DECLINE OF THE MIADES

It would be impossible to understand the politicization and ultimate decline of the MIADES project in El Agustino without at least referring to the political and ideological struggles that ravaged the Peruvian Left at the end of the 1980s.¹⁵ After a period of relative calm and unity at the beginning of the decade, marked by the formation of the *Izquierda Unida* alliance in 1981 and a string of electoral successes, the Left looked for a while like a serious contender at the national level, not least due to Barrantes's record as mayor of Metropolitan Lima from 1984 to 1986. But *Izquierda Unida*'s defeat in the 1986 municipal elections reversed this upward trend and revived old internal tensions and contradictions. In July 1989, following protracted struggles among various leftist factions, *Izquierda Unida* finally split into two competing camps and presented two different candidates in the presidential elections of 1990, which were then won by independent candidate Alberto Fujimori. Weakened further by Fujimori's right-wing populist attacks on political institutions and "tradi-

15. For a more complete account of these struggles, see Taylor (1990), Rojas Samanez (1991, 403–56) and Haworth (1993).

tional" political parties, the Peruvian Left went through various alignments and realignments after 1990 and finally disintegrated into several competing factions and parties.

In El Agustino, three specific developments had a strong impact. First, in November 1988, a group of dissidents broke away from the Partido Unificado Mariateguista (PUM) and later formed the Partido Mariateguista Revolucionario (PMR). This split seriously weakened the PUM, the leftist party with the deepest roots and the strongest organizational structure in the district, by causing it to lose most of its cadres and much of its support among urban popular movement leaders.¹⁶ The PMR in El Agustino became the main intra-Left opposition to the municipal government, which remained in the hands of the PUM.

Intra-leftist tensions intensified when Izquierda Unida, for the first time in its history, held internal elections in June 1989 to determine its candidates for the 1989 municipal elections.¹⁷ In El Agustino, two competing lists of candidates were presented. One was supported by the PUM and two smaller parties, the Unión de Izquierda Revolucionaria (UNIR) and the Frente Obrero Campesino y Popular (FOCEP), as well as some independents. An alternate list was backed by the PMR, the Partido Comunista Peruano (PCP), and some unaffiliated supporters. In a close vote, the list presented by the PUM and its allies carried the day, amidst accusations of vote rigging and fraud. The municipal administration and the PUM were accused by their adversaries of using the municipal apparatus to hand out material benefits like food and building materials in exchange for political support and of ferrying their supporters in buses to the election sites.¹⁸ Izquierda Unida later went on to win the municipal elections for the third time in a row but garnered only 26.5 percent of the popular vote,¹⁹ less than the combined votes for the several independent candidates (Roncagliolo 1989–1990, 16). The price for this victory was high: the clashes during the internal elections had left deep wounds and made the rupture of the Left in El Agustino almost irreversible.

A third factor contributing to the escalation of conflict within the

16. According to my taped interviews with Víctor Abregú, neighborhood leader in El Agustino and member of the central committee of the Partido Mariateguista Revolucionario, interviewed 21 Jan. 1992 in Lima; and with Rosario Romero, researcher for the NGOs CENDIPP (Centro de Investigación y Promoción Popular) and CTIC (Comité Coordinador Técnico Intercentros) in El Agustino, interviewed 15 Jan. 1992 in Lima.

17. As Jorge Castañeda has pointed out, "holding primaries to select candidates for elective office . . . can be a terribly fratricidal affair, pitting factions, regions, and personalities against each other without the healing postprimary reconciliation of other latitudes" (Castañeda 1993, 361). Nevertheless, there is no substitute for this process if the Left is serious about internal democracy.

18. Taped interview with Enrique Mendoza, MAS district councilor in El Agustino, 22 Feb. 1992, Lima.

19. See footnote 8.

Peruvian Left was the withdrawal of the PUM in July 1990 from the national coordinating committee of Izquierda Unida, the Comité Directivo Nacional. The PUM's decision to suspend its membership in the committee, following Izquierda Unida's defeat in the presidential elections of 1990, indicated a shift in strategic calculations and ended the party's cooperation with other leftist forces representing more moderate positions. As a result of this strategic shift at the national level, the PUM in El Agustino became further isolated, while the PMR, the remaining leftist parties, and the considerable number of unaffiliated leftist militants were brought closer in their joint opposition to the PUM-led municipal government.

It is hardly surprising that the intra-leftist struggles in El Agustino would profoundly affect relations between the Left and urban popular movements. In destroying the previous relative unity of the various leftist parties and groups in the district, these struggles accentuated the competition over "capturing" bases of popular support. Frequently, such increased political competition was accompanied by the emergence of a different attitude toward urban popular movements, in which previous respect for the autonomy of these movements and the absence of manipulation were replaced by a desire to dominate and to use these movements as vehicles for amassing political support. Although this new attitude toward urban popular movements was not limited to any one actor in particular, it manifested itself most strongly in the new municipal government controlled by the PUM. After the local elections of November 1989, the new municipal administration clearly intended to impose its rule on urban popular movements and on the other leftist parties of the district as well.

The success of this new strategy hinged on two crucial preconditions: first, reconstruction of a sector within the municipal bureaucracy that would be loyal to the mayor and his party and could also be used as an effective administrative instrument for implementing new policies; and second, reestablishment of the ties between the municipal government and urban popular movements, which had suffered badly during the previous period. As a first step in meeting these preconditions, the new local government thoroughly restructured the municipal bureaucracy by creating a new unit to oversee relations with neighborhood and women's movements, the Oficina de Promoción y Desarrollo (PRODES). The new unit was staffed entirely by PUM supporters, most of whom had to be brought in from outside the district.

The influx of these activists profoundly affected the political dynamic of the district and changed the way in which the municipality conducted its relations with the population. Most of the new promotores had a long track record as PUM militants and often a university education, but relatively few were qualified professionals. Consequently, they brought a much harder-line ideological approach to the promotional work of the municipality, which they understood as political work in support of the

party. In the words of a prominent adversary of the municipal administration, "They are very special intermediaries. . . . they were party activists and now they have a different character. Logically, this creates great confusion on the part of the population."²⁰

Soon after its formation, PRODES developed into the main link between the municipal administration and the population. Apart from giving technical and sometimes legal advice, PRODES assigned several *promotores* to each MIADE to work individually with neighborhood, women's, and youth organizations.²¹ The *promotores* were usually the only local officials who actually visited the individual settlements. They informed the population about services and resources that could be obtained from the municipality but also collected information on behalf of the municipal administration, such as the level of public support for specific urban popular movement leaders. One member of a Vaso de Leche committee said of these activities: "The municipality has its *promotoras* in all the MIADES. They work with the women, and when they come [to us], they come with lies and unclear ideas. . . . in the settlement itself, they say that a *dirigente* is corrupt. Most of what the promoters do in the settlements is misinform."²²

With the help of PRODES, the municipal government set up tighter political controls over the MIADES program and reined in the leaders of the MIADES who had expressed opposition to the municipal government. In at least two cases (the José Carlos Mariátegui MIADE and the UPMIRR MIADE), the municipal administration cut off its financial support in order to discredit the MIADES leadership in the eyes of the population.²³ In addition, municipal *promotores* attempted to manipulate the general assemblies of these MIADES into replacing the existing *juntas directivas* with new ones more sympathetic to the municipal government. When these measures were not enough, the municipality went a step further and set up alternative organizations in opposition to the MIADES. Financial support from the municipality was channeled via these new groups in the hope of eroding the remaining legitimacy of the MIADES leaders. In several other cases, such as in the MIADE Zona Plana,²⁴ the municipal administration circumvented the MIADES structure altogether to work directly with individual *pueblos* (settlements).

20. According to my taped interview with Abregú in 1992.

21. According to my 1992 interview with Mendoza.

22. Taped interview with Yolanda Maraví, member of a Vaso de Leche committee in El Agustino, 27 Feb. 1992, Lima.

23. According to my taped interviews with Abregú and with Erasmo Cancho, independent district councilor in El Agustino, interviewed 23 Jan. 1992, Lima.

24. According to my taped interviews with Abregú and with Lorenzo Estrada, neighborhood leader and executive secretary of the Comité de Gestión in El Agustino, interviewed 27 Feb. 1992, Lima.

The fact that many MIADES were already debilitated by internal tensions facilitated these tactics on the part of the municipality. Friction could be rooted in the personal ambitions of some urban popular movement leaders but were more typically due to political differences or prior cleavages between different urban popular movements. These divergences were sometimes of long standing, going back to the very founding of the respective settlements. Such dissension made it easier to divide any particular MIADE by pitting one part of the population against another. Likewise, wrangling could render a MIADE inoperative and become a pretext for replacing it with an alternative organization.

In sum, after the municipal elections of November 1989, the municipality clearly abandoned its earlier policy of noninterference in the MIADES in the initial stages of the project. Instead, the municipality and the PUM as the main political force behind it adopted a much heavier-handed strategy, openly using the MIADES structure to garner political support and strengthen their own position in the intra-leftist struggles taking place in the district. The municipality did not hesitate to employ clientelist tactics to achieve these objectives, trying to co-opt the leaderships of certain MIADES and the urban popular movements supporting them. If these tactics failed, particularly in cases where the MIADES leadership opposed the municipality on political grounds, the municipality had no qualms about undermining the respective MIADES by cutting off their funding or employing other means to replace them with alternate organizations that it could hope to control. It is therefore fair to say that to a certain extent, the municipal administration undermined its own project for political expedience, but without ever officially abandoning it.

Beyond exacerbating the divisions among the various leftist factions of the district, the politicization of the MIADES debilitated the project itself. First, many popular organizations did not want to be drawn into the political struggles taking place in many MIADES and either abandoned the project altogether or minimized their participation. Thus the political struggles surrounding the MIADES further diminished the level of popular participation in the project, which had already tapered off due to the economic problems plaguing it. As will be shown, the political conflicts surrounding the MIADES accentuated latent conflicts between the municipality and other actors involved in the project. This was particularly true of the NGOs, which began to turn against the municipality, notwithstanding their continued collaboration in projects such as the Plan Integral de Desarrollo.

THE EMERGENCE OF A COUNTERPROPOSAL TO THE MIADES: THE COMITE DE GESTION DISTRICTAL

In August 1990, amid intense political infighting and growing penury, a new organization appeared in El Agustino, the Comité de Ges-

tión Distrital (CG), a district management committee. As in other municipalities, the CG in El Agustino was set up in response to the social emergency program announced by newly elected President Alberto Fujimori. This program was to be part of his overall economic adjustment package (Carbajo 1990). The CG was intended to organize and oversee the distribution of the emergency relief funds expected from this program and therefore attempted to unite the broadest possible spectrum of actors to assist in this task. These actors can be categorized into three groups. The first consisted of the local government and other organizations that had traditionally maintained relations with urban popular movements and could therefore help with distributing resources, particularly the NGOs and the Catholic Church. Second, urban popular movements were represented on the CG via their respective district-level organizations: the MIADES in the case of the neighborhood organizations, the coordinating committees of the Programa del Vaso de Leche, the comedores populares, and the clubes de madres and organizations representing street vendors, micro-entrepreneurs, and youth. Finally, central government agencies and other institutions from outside the district were invited to participate in order to coordinate their activities with those of the CG at the district level.

The CG in El Agustino soon began to be drawn into the political conflicts that were dominating the district. Shortly after it was constituted, a confrontation began to shape up over who would direct the new umbrella organization, pitting the municipality against the other organizations represented on the committee. The issue was highly significant because whoever presided over the CG and controlled the distribution of its resources would be likely to receive most of the political credit in the eyes of the public. The municipality insisted on its primacy as the local government of the district and refused to share authority over the CG with the other organizations. The other members of the committee, wary of past instances of what was perceived as political manipulation by the municipality, feared that the CG would be dominated and used for partisan ends. They therefore argued that the presidency of the committee should be shared and should rotate each month among all the organizations involved.

At a general meeting in September 1990, a rotating presidency was finally agreed on. Mayor Quintanilla assumed the presidency of the CG for the first one-month term. After his term ended, however, the municipality sent only minor-ranking functionaries to participate in committee meetings. Several conflicts ensued in the following months over the distribution of certain resources (Calderón and Valdeavellano 1991, 172). They confirmed the municipality's view that it was being marginalized within the CG and ultimately prompted it to leave the committee. Subsequently, the mayor accused the CG and the organizations supporting it, particularly the church, of promoting "*asistencialista*" attitudes among the population and fostering political opposition to the municipal govern-

ment by building a “reformist alternative” to the MIADES project.²⁵ Meanwhile, the municipality contributed to the growing rift between the two organizations by encouraging the establishment in January 1991 of the Central Autónoma de MIADES, a coordinating committee made up of representatives from the individual MIADES. It was hoped that the creation of such districtwide representation of the MIADES would enhance their legitimacy as the true representative of urban popular movements in El Agustino.

It might have been appropriate initially to characterize the CG as “asistencialista,” given its rather narrow preoccupation with providing material assistance to the district’s poor to alleviate the effects of Fujimori’s economic stabilization program. But the focus of the committee soon widened considerably. Shortly after it was founded, three separate commissions were formed to coordinate the activities of the member organizations in the fields of nutrition, health, and the generation of employment. These commissions also sought to develop specific policy proposals at the level of local government. Ultimately, it was hoped that these proposals would result in a coherent work plan that would address the problems related to urban development of the district in a comprehensive and integrated manner. The fact that the CG in El Agustino was able to make this transformation is significant and probably explains why the committee continued to exist rather than quickly losing its *raison d’être* when the resources promised by the central government failed to materialize, as did many other CGs elsewhere (Carbajo 1990, 12).²⁶

In addition to fostering policy proposals and functioning as a coordinating body for its participants, the CG allocated limited resources to fund particular projects directly. These resources were provided by the Catholic Church and were used to establish two separate funds of 14,000 dollars (U.S.) each: one to assist street vendors and another to support the economic activities of the district’s micro-entrepreneurs. Similar funds were planned to support the Vaso de Leche committees, the comedores populares, and the clubes de madres. The money was loaned on a rotating basis, meaning that it was to be used and repaid by the first recipient and then be loaned to a different organization.

The emergence of an alternative to the MIADES worsened existing political tensions in the district and also accentuated latent divisions between neighborhood movements and other urban popular movements. While popular organizations were generally represented in both the MIADES and the CG, they usually participated more actively in one or the other. Because the CG had a somewhat different focus than the MIADES and emphasized survival issues in the broadest sense of the term—nutri-

25. According to my 1991 interview with Quintanilla.

26. According to my 1992 interview with Abregú.

tion, health, and job creation—survival movements and popular organizations representing street vendors and micro-entrepreneurs were more strongly represented on the committee.

The participation of neighborhood organizations, in contrast, remained strongest in the MIADES. The interests of these organizations revolved chiefly around improving the urban infrastructure of the district, as in building roads and sidewalks or providing a safe water supply, sewers, and electricity. These issues were not a priority of the CG, and limited resources continued to be provided chiefly by the local government (plus those given by other public institutions and central government agencies). Many neighborhood organizations had also cooperated closely with the municipality in the past.

If the MIADES and the CG, despite certain discrepancies and differing appeals to individual popular movements, were essentially similar proposals targeting the same popular bases for support, what motivated the rivalry between the two? The obvious answer would be to attribute this rivalry to the political divergences between the supporters of the two organizations. This interpretation was advanced by many of those interviewed, who usually blamed the other side for fanning the flames. Such an interpretation has some basis in fact, given that political support for the two projects came mostly from opposite sides: from the municipal administration through the MIADES and from its political opponents through the CG.

Yet it would be too facile to reduce the conflict between the supporters of the MIADES and the CG to a dispute between political opponents over the capture of popular bases and to view the two projects as mere tools in this struggle.²⁷ Although the PUM-controlled municipal administration did try to use the MIADES project to build its own bases of political support among the urban popular movements of the district, the issue seems to be somewhat more complicated in the case of the backers of the CG. Some supporters of the CG, particularly the PMR and another leftist grouping, the *Movimiento de Afirmación Socialista* (MAS), advocated building a *frente amplio* based on the CG, the MIADES, and urban popular movements in general. Such a coalition would unite leftist opposition to the municipal administration with the urban popular movements of the district (Confluencia Socialista 1991). But the other supporters of the CG (most of whom considered themselves to be politically independent) and particularly the NGOs did not necessarily share these views. While

27. This seems to be the view taken by Calderón and Valdeavellano. They contend that the ideological discrepancies between the two adversaries are negligible in that they see eye to eye on fundamental questions such as democracy and popular self-government. Rather, their differences boil down to divergent “political styles”—one more radical and uncompromising, the other less aggressive but still trying to marginalize the municipality (Calderón and Valdeavellano 1991, 180–81).

several of those interviewed alleged that the NGOs were controlled by the political opposition and that some of their leading members secretly sought to succeed Jorge Quintanilla as mayor of El Agustino, these accusations seem exaggerated and are in any case difficult to substantiate.²⁸ Apart from the fact that the NGOs as such did not take sides in the political struggles in the district, the political orientations of their members appeared to vary, ranging from independent sympathizers with the Left to supporters of the PMR, MAS, and even the PUM. At the same time, the NGOs did not abstain completely from mobilizing the population against the municipal administration. According to Francisco Chamberlain, the parish priest of the Virgen de Nazareth parish and director of Servicios Educativos El Agustino (SEA), "I don't deny my intention to undercut the leading role of the municipality a little, given what has happened in the past. But undercutting its leading role and wanting to marginalize it are two different things."²⁹ On the whole, the supporters of the CG did not seem to possess a clearly defined political strategy, nor did they appear to unite around a single protagonist who could become a serious challenger to Mayor Quintanilla. It therefore makes little sense to view the CG merely as a tool in a struggle to win power in the district.

What appeared to unite the supporters of the CG was their shared antagonism to the municipal administration, seen as authoritarian and manipulative, and their common ideas about how relations between urban popular movements and other actors should be structured. They saw these principles expressed in the CG but no longer operative in the MIADES scheme. If this assessment is correct, then the disagreements between the supporters of the MIADES and those of the CG were rooted in the respective political projects underlying them rather than in the fact that both could be integrated in a tactical way into competing political strategies. The basic features of these two projects, which were already outlined in the introduction, can briefly be recapitulated as follows.

The MIADES scheme started out as a pragmatic policy proposal for enhancing participation by urban popular movements in the planning and execution of public works, but it soon began to resemble what was earlier labeled the "revolutionary approach" to local politics. Declining municipal resources made pragmatic solutions from within the system less and less feasible and were aggravated by intensifying political ten-

28. According to my taped interviews with three persons: Jorge Atúncar, PUM district councilor and head of the Oficina de Participación Vecinal of El Agustino, interviewed 14 Jan. 1992 in Lima; Julio Casanova, neighborhood leader and president of the Central Autónoma de MIADES in El Agustino, interviewed 26 Nov. 1991 in Lima; and Jhon de la Cruz, APRA district councilor in El Agustino, interviewed 20 Jan. 1992 in Lima.

29. Taped interview with Francisco Chamberlain, Catholic priest of the parish Virgen de Nazareth in El Agustino, head of the NGO Servicios Educativos El Agustino (SEA), 13 Feb. 1992, Lima.

sions within the Left in the district. As a result, the underlying political rationale of the project prevailed, and the MIADES were increasingly touted as the nucleus of an alternative political system of popular self-government.

The role of the PUM-led municipal administration as the main champion of the redefined MIADES scheme was twofold. First, in order to create a popular mass basis for the project (and its more far-reaching political ambitions), the urban popular movements of the district had to be strengthened. Increasingly, this goal implied interfering with their autonomy and trying to "construct them from above." Even more important, in order to maintain control over these movements, the municipal administration had to convince them to forgo other forms of centralization and accept the MIADES as the exclusive link between themselves and other actors, such as NGOs, other state institutions, and the like. As has been explained, the municipality went so far as to use clientelist methods in trying to achieve this goal. If successful, such a strategy would have secured the dependency of urban popular movements on the municipal administration in material as well as political terms, particularly because the MIADES had no official legal status and their continued existence depended entirely on the goodwill of the municipality.

The CG, in contrast, demonstrated a different emphasis than the MIADES and resembled the radical-democratic approach to local politics mentioned at the outset of this article. Instead of trying to lay the foundations for an alternative political project led by a revolutionary municipal administration and drawing its mass base from the urban popular movements of the district, the CG's main function was to serve as a *convocatoria* within the existing political system.³⁰ It was to serve as a coordinating body among various organizations of civil society and state institutions at different levels, uniting all relevant actors to find pragmatic solutions for the pressing needs of the popular sector. Consequently, the relations between urban popular movements and the other participants on the CG were much more open than those between the municipal administration and the MIADES. Most important, the NGOs, which had established the closest links to urban popular movements of all actors in the CG, generally abstained from political manipulation and clientelist tactics while providing organizational and material support.³¹ The CG also accepted the exist-

30. Not all CG backers unequivocally favored a system-immanent strategy. The PMR and MAS, for example, continued to express their support for the idea of popular self-government (Confluencia Socialista 1991). Unlike the municipal administration, however, they did not seem to be entirely clear on whether it would entail a complete break with the existing political system or merely the introduction of some mechanisms of direct democracy. This attitude reflects a more general ambivalence within the Peruvian Left toward representative democracy.

31. Members of the municipal administration and their sympathizers nevertheless accused the NGOs of politically motivated interference, but generally without providing concrete examples. These views were expressed during my taped interviews with several offi-

tence of parallel forms of centralization by urban popular movements as well as their establishing direct links with other actors. While the supporters of the MIADES scheme insisted on the MIADES being the exclusive representative of urban popular movements in the district, the backers of the CG saw no problem in sharing this role and regarded the MIADES and the CG as complementary rather than competing organizations.

CONCLUSION

The case study presented in this article highlights the main difficulties and dilemmas of the two approaches to local politics delineated previously. The inherent problems of what has been called here the revolutionary approach to local politics became most apparent in the case of the MIADES project, particularly its politicization after the breakup of Izquierda Unida and the ensuing intra-leftist struggles in El Agustino. It proved to be extremely difficult for the municipal administration, the main backer of the MIADES project, to reconcile what was essentially an anti-system stance with the fact that it was a part of this very system and thus shared responsibility for the results it produced, at least in the eyes of its constituents. For example, when the municipal government tried to blame the crippling lack of resources for the MIADES project on the provincial and central governments, it was held accountable for its own shortcomings and began losing popular support. Likewise, when the municipal administration attempted to distract attention from the more immediate shortcomings of the MIADES project by stressing the long-term character of the project as the core of a new form of popular self-government, most urban popular movements remained skeptical and were more concerned about tangible improvements in their dismal living conditions.

Another fundamental problem faced by the municipal administration concerned the way in which it handled relations with the urban popular movements of the district. After an initial phase of the MIADES project marked by noninterference and respect for the movements' autonomy, the municipal administration changed its tune and began to apply increasing pressure, sometimes trying to co-opt the movements' leaders and win their support. This strategy failed. Most urban popular movements took pains to preserve their autonomy and avoid involvement in intra-leftist

cials: Jorge Atúnkar, PUM district councilor and head of the Oficina de Participación Vecinal de El Agustino; Julio Casanova, neighborhood leader and president of the Central Autónoma de MIADES in El Agustino, 26 Nov. 1991, Lima; Yolanda Giraldo, independent district councilor responsible for the Programa del Vaso de Leche, and Josefina Berna, district coordinator of the Programa del Vaso de Leche in El Agustino, 8 Jan. 1992, Lima; and Jorge Quintanilla, mayor of El Agustino for Izquierda Unida, 6 Nov. 1991, Lima. Atúnkar stated that the president of the MIADE UPMIRR was offered a camera and a trip to Spain by SEA.

struggles, but without abandoning the MIADES project altogether or openly siding with the political opponents of the local government.

The Comité de Gestión, which can be considered an expression of the radical-democratic approach to local politics, did not face the same difficulties in its relations with urban popular movements. The CG adopted a much more open approach to urban popular movements, actively encouraging their participation in the committee and elsewhere in the local arena. The CG accepted the fact that some of them also had independent ties with other actors and with one another. In fact, the character of the CG as an open forum for all actors that could contribute to the economic and social development of the district and its adoption of the format of a rotating presidency prevented any one actor from asserting dominance over the others.

But while the CG had some success in uniting the relevant actors around a common platform for developing the district (with the important exception of the municipal government), it achieved few concrete results. Compounding the lack of cooperation from the municipal administration was the fact that CG members could provide little or no resources. Urban popular movements had few resources to contribute, being themselves in dire need of assistance. Representatives of the central government agencies did little more than participate in some meetings of the committee, and resources provided by the NGOs were barely enough to finance two modest rotating funds for street vendors and micro-entrepreneurs. Given these political and economic obstacles, the CG could do little more than serve as a coordinating body for its members and make proposals for the integrated development of the district. The fact that the CG managed to do so is an important achievement in itself. But it falls well short of the main objective of the radical-democratic approach to local politics: to show that solutions for the most pressing concerns of the popular sector can be found within the existing representative democratic system.

Three main conclusions follow from this analysis. First, leftist local governments cannot escape responsibility for governing, that is, they cannot forgo the difficult task of trying to find workable solutions for the urgent needs of the popular majorities within the framework of the existing political institutions. Attempts to use local governments as “Trojan horses” and to foster a revolutionary project from inside the political system are likely to fail, not only because of the unfavorable political climate for such projects but because popular constituencies would not tolerate neglect of their everyday concerns.

At the same time, it is clear that an institutional strategy also faces several major obstacles and may also fare poorly at the polls. This point was demonstrated by the dismal electoral showing by the CG’s political supporters in El Agustino. Like most other local governments, those controlled by the Left often face an acute shortage of resources that prevents

them from fulfilling even their most basic responsibilities. Most central governments are reluctant to rectify this situation and to devolve additional resources to local governments. They are especially hesitant with leftist-controlled municipalities for fear of enabling the Left to use a successful experience in local government to mount a challenge at higher levels. For similar reasons, leftist local governments are likely to encounter problems when trying to forge political alliances with other actors, which may be necessary to push through policies locally, or to pressure higher levels of government. Leftist local governments are also more likely than others to run into resistance from local elites, who will perceive any attempt to improve the living conditions of the urban poor as a threat to their own privileges. In short, while the imperative to govern is inescapable, it is not at all clear that leftist local governments following an institutional strategy will actually be able to achieve their objectives or manage to retain the support of their constituents on election day.

The second conclusion is that urban popular movements are willing to throw their support behind actors who promise to tend to their concerns—or to withdraw it from those who do not deliver on their promises. But these movements are reluctant to sacrifice their autonomy to powerful patrons in return for material rewards. On the one hand, these findings seem to confirm the existence of “pragmatist attitudes” on the part of urban popular movements, which have often been described in the literature as continually vulnerable to co-optation. The integration of urban popular movements into participatory schemes—even if it takes place in a nonhierarchical or “horizontal” context—may in fact accentuate co-optive pressures by bringing these movements into contact with other actors and by making them rely, at least in part, on outside resources. On the other hand, my findings also show that urban popular movements no longer succumb to co-optation almost automatically. On the contrary, the movements I studied were generally able to withstand such pressures. They often did so by striking several limited alliances with an array of other actors, gratefully accepting the resources offered but refusing to provide unconditional support to any single actor and give up their own autonomy. In adopting such a strategy, these movements were able to take advantage of the fact that several actors were vying for their support and thus did not have to commit themselves unconditionally to get their concerns addressed.

Finally, the case presented here shows that leftist local governments would be ill advised to take the support of urban popular movements for granted. These movements seem to have become more hesitant in recent years to back leftist political parties that promise to take up and defend their demands, and they seem especially reluctant to be drawn into intra-leftist struggles that could jeopardize their own autonomy. Thus if leftist local governments want to form stable alliances with urban popular move-

ments, they will have to take on some of these movements' concerns while respecting their independence and their right to establish links with other actors. That is to say, leftist local governments will have to accept some degree of ideological pluralism.

Yet it should not be forgotten that urban popular movements themselves have much to gain from an alliance with leftist political parties. The Left is presently the only actor that is likely to represent their concerns in the political arena, other than populists, who prefer to establish traditional clientelist relations with the popular sector.³² The Left also has a vital role to play in transcending the often limited and particularistic context in which such demands are made and integrating them into an overarching political project. Moreover, many urban popular movements would benefit from assistance by leftist political parties (or by other actors such as NGOs) for developing and consolidating their organizational structures. In short, mutual alliances appear to be beneficial for leftist political parties and for urban popular movements alike. If so, the challenge remains for the Left to construct a political alliance capable of integrating urban popular movements and their concerns in a nonmanipulative way, while addressing their impulses for democratizing political institutions and the political arena as a whole.

32. At the local level, this role could also be performed by independents, whose political influence seems to have grown considerably over the last few years.

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