

JCAS

**Occasional
Paper**

Carlos CONTRERAS

no. **4** 2000

**Centralismo y Descentralismo
en la Historia
del Perú Independiente**

**Centralism and Decentralism
in the Modern History of Peru**

**JCAS-IEP
Series
ii**

JCAS-IEP
Series
ii

Carlos CONTRERAS

JCAS
Occasional
Paper

no. **4** 2000

Centralismo y Descentralismo
en la Historia
del Perú Independiente

Centralism and Decentralism
in the Modern History of Peru

Dimensión y naturaleza del centralismo en el Perú
Vaivenes entre centralismo y descentralismo
Reflexiones conclusivas

THE JAPAN CENTER FOR AREA STUDIES
NATIONAL MUSEUM OF ETHNOLOGY

SUITA, OSAKA 565-8511 JAPAN
PHONE : +81-(0)6-6878-8343
FAX : +81-(0)6-6878-8353

Centralism and Decentralism in the Modern History of Peru

Carlos CONTRERAS

Abstract

Centralism is a phenomenon which has been repeatedly denounced in contemporary Peruvian history as a vice that needs to be eliminated; consequently, its opposite-decentralization-has been a banner that has been frequently raised, especially in times of serious political crises. After presenting some quantitative data that illustrate the high degree of centralism in Peru, this article examines the historical basis for the persistence of the concentration of political and economic power in the capital of the country and raises questions about some of the current interpretations of this phenomenon. It then goes on to discuss some important historical milestones of centralization and decentralization during 19th and 20th century Peruvian history. Particular emphasis is given to the period between 1872 and 1919.

It is argued that extreme centralism was a logical response to the great weakness of the basic social and economic foundations necessary for the construction of a nation-state at the time that Peru became independent. In these circumstances, an elite emerged which achieved a certain level of consolidation in the apparatus of the state and in terms of national unity but at the cost of strong centralism. In addition, the fact that the economy was based on primary exports by foreign-owned companies as well as the lack of solid regional bourgeoisie during most of the modern history of Peru has made decentralization a desperately faraway goal.

Keywords: Centralism, Peru, Modern History