During a recent assignment in Peru, I had the opportunity to observe and interact with Peruvian municipal planners in their own working environment. This assignment coincided with the turmoil involving the Fujimori government.

The World Bank, the IAF and other funding agencies have become quite concerned that aid intended for impoverished municipalities was being siphoned off by decro, certain regulations designed to satisfy its own political agenda. Here is a sampling of a few such regulations:

- Mill rates are set arbitrarily by the central government for the whole country. Certain citizens, such as pensioners, have been exempted from property tax. Smallholdings are exempt from property sales tax.
- Annual business licenses have been replaced by a single opening license valid for the life of the business, thus effectively precluding automatic health and sanitary control, other than through the courts. Considering that a city like Arequipa, with its population of over a million, has only ten health inspectors, the situation is dire.
- The cadastral system: one comprehensive, but cumbersome system to take care of surveys, property records, land titles, assessment and tax rolls. In theory, it is a very good system, in practice, it is a nightmare. It is common for the central government to impose on municipal government functions to local governments under the terms of bilateral agreements.
- It is a cheap way ofPid to perpetuate squatter settlements, and much more expedient than designing special subdivisions for migrants. A number of planners have expressed their frustr-ation in dealing with this body, which has the statutory power to supersede plans.
- A number of planners have expressed their frustration in dealing with this body, which has the statutory power to supersede plans.

The central government has also appropriated many other traditional sources of municipal revenue. The income of some municipalities has decreased by up to 80 per cent. To be fair, some of these moneys were redistributed "equitably" among all municipalities, presumably for the benefit of the poorer ones. However, some of it is retained by a "presidential fund" used to finance projects of "national importance." Despite their own priorities, a municipal planner has explained that, more often than not, these priority projects pre-empt existing plans, with negative effects on future urban development.

In response to the cities' complaint of eroded revenues, the central government enjoined them to collect taxes more efficiently. Easier said than done: the system, as it now stands, hardly makes it possible. All land and assessment records are tied to their cadastral system: one comprehensive system to take care of surveys, property records, land titles, assessment and tax rolls. In theory, it is a very good sys-tem, rational and orderly. However it doesn't seem to work in practice (see Plan Canada vol. 41, no. 2, page 13). The best-kept secret is the existence of cadastral lack of expertise, it is not adequate to their needs. Many properties have not been surveyed and their records, for taxation purposes, are based on self-assessment by the owner. In smaller cities, migrants from the mountains have not paid taxes on their stone huts: it is simply not in their nature. Consequently, once in the city, they refuse to pay municipal taxes, and the taxation departments have to resort to educational programs to explain that taxes pay for the services they receive. Add to this the problem that many cities do not have accurate maps or surveys, and that many areas are not in fact where they are shown to be on the maps. In these cases, subdivision development can be very creative and challenging.

A constant problem faced by both planners and administrators is the existence of squatter settlements. In nearly every town I visited there were horror stories of squatters taking possession of lands set aside for future development. Even historic monuments are not spared. While I was there, the army had to be called in to clear squatters from an important historic Inca site near Cuzco. In another instance, a squatter town had been built downhill from a sewage lagoon, in an area prone to flash floods. The squatters wouldn't believe the engineers and planners who tried to explain the situation to them. In another instance, two thousand squatters were pre-fab houses, were all wearing T-shirts with the logo "Peru 2000" (Fujimori's election campaign logo), occupying university's agricultural grounds, killing two guards. Fujimori denied any foreknowledge of the occurrence and called it a spontaneous event. This was one of the scandals that contributed to Fujimori's demise.

There is a government agency whose pur-pose is the legalization of informal settle-ments. The latter often becomes a political tool for perpetuating squatter settlements, and much more expedient than designing special subdivisions for migrants. A number of planners have expressed their frustr-ation in dealing with this body, which has the statutory power to supersede plans.

From this very cursory overview, the reader can get a feel for the difficulty the Peruvian front-line planner faces in his or her everyday work. No matter how dedicated they may be, the system seems to frustrate their efforts. Rules and regulations are being changed at the whim of senior politicians. Thus, many planners just go through the motions of finding the in-place to settle down. This is not to say that planning doesn’t exist in Peru. Unfortunately, it is mostly devoted to prestige buildings and high-profile urban design projects. With the newly elected president, Alejandro Toledo, at the helm, many hope that things will improve, and that inequities will be redressed. But municipal administration is only one of the government functions that was tampered with under Fujimori. Toledo has much work to do. Let’s hope that munici-plal administration is at the top of his priorities, and that our Peruvian col­leagues can at least be free to do that for which they were trained, and be happy planners.

1 Peru lacks sufficient trained personnel and resources to respond to all the needs of municipal government. They are receiving small, if any, Canadian technical assistance programs.
2 There is a thriving business of importing Japanese cars that no longer pass Japanese emission regulations. The handful of Japanese cars still being sold in Peru have a "Japanese" interior, and a "Japanese" logo. They are sold at Japan’s old-time dealers with the logo “Peru 2000” (Fujimori’s election campaign logo). 3 Since his retirement in 1992, he has actively pursued his interests in planning, taking on volunteer assignments through CEGO in Latin America and Ukraine.

Plan

Peruvian Experience:

by Basil M. Rotoff, MCIP AICP

A Planner's Lot Is Not a Happy One

The author and friend is barefoot in front of the Cathedral Basilica of Santiago in Chile.
Summary
Not long before the fall of the Fujimori government and the fateful earthquakes that shook southern Peru, the author was sent there by CESO (the Canadian Executive Services Organization) in order to study the region's municipal systems, assess the impact of the central government on municipal administrations, and establish the type of technical assistance Canada could provide. International agencies make their aid contingent upon democratization of local governments, so that the grants and loans intended for these governments are not hijacked. In the process of making this survey, the author couldn't fail to notice the difficult situation in which Peruvian municipal planners find themselves, especially in the face of the central government's arbitrary decrees, many of which are at odds with the nation's constitution. The government was diverting funds that legally belonged to the revenue of the municipalities, to great detriment of the quality of life. Let's hope that, under the new government of Alejandro Toledo, the situation will improve, and that our Peruvian colleagues will be free to practice planning as it should be.

Sommaire
Peu de temps avant la chute du gouvernement de Fujimori et les tremblements de terre fatidiques qui ont secoué les villes du sud du Pérou, l'auteur avait été envoyé par la SACO dans ces mêmes villes dans le but d'étudier leur système municipal, d'évaluer l'impact du gouvernement central sur les gouvernements municipaux, et d'examiner le type d'aide technique que le Canada pourrait rendre aux municipalités. Les agences financières internationales insistent sur la démocratisation du pouvoir local afin de s'assurer que les prêts et octrois destinés aux gouvernements locaux ne soient escamotés avant d'atteindre leurs destinataires. Au cours de cette enquête, l'auteur a observé la situation difficile, sinon impossible, dans laquelle se trouvent les urbanistes municipaux face aux règlements et décrets arbitraires, contraires même à la Constitution du Pays, que leur impose le gouvernement central. Le gouvernement souffrait de plus en plus de fonds qui, de manière légitime, devaient revenir aux municipalités. La qualité de vie dans ces villes en souffrait énormément. Il faut espérer qu'avec le nouveau gouvernement de Alexandre Toledo, la situation va s'améliorer, et que nos collègues péruviens pourront de nouveau poursuivre leur travail tel qu'il devrait être exercé.