

OTHER NATIONS

among parties." In 1970, the creation of 20 new regional authorities produced an instantaneous doubling of the bureaucratic structure.

The New Class dominates the communications media through control of the state broadcasting monopoly, which distributes millions of dollars worth of jobs and salaries under a rigid formula based on relative party strength. Education and culture are virtual fiefdoms of the New Class. If the Communists ever achieve power in Italy, says Lucentini, one can safely predict that they will become the "guarantors" of this comfortable elite and that "the corrupt, nepotistic aristocracy that has been formed in Italy would settle down to its final and undisturbed reward."

*Coca-Chewing:
Nature's Remedy*

"Andean Coca Chewing: A Metabolic Perspective" by Ralph Bolton, in *American Anthropologist* (Sept. 1976), 1730 New Hampshire Ave., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20009.

For years, outsiders have made repeated attempts to halt coca-leaf-chewing by the Indians of the Andes, despite the lack of convincing evidence that the habit is any more harmful than drinking coffee.

A body of mythology has grown up around coca use, says Bolton, an anthropologist at Pomona College. The Incas are said to have prohibited its use by any but priests and nobles. In modern days, it has been regarded as a serious medical and social problem because of its presumed psychological effects. But in the amounts ordinarily consumed by the Indians, coca produces no euphoric effects. "Indians do not chew coca to become stoned," he writes.

Native explanations for the coca habit are chiefly physiological. Habitual users almost invariably say that coca provides them with energy for work, while reducing their feelings of fatigue; it keeps them warm and helps alleviate their hunger.

Bolton argues that coca-chewing is a response to chronic low blood glucose concentrations among Andean Indians. In a manner not yet clearly understood, coca tends to impede lowering of blood glucose levels for several hours. With data collected from a small sample of moderately hypoglycemic (low blood sugar) subjects, he was able to show that they regularly consumed significantly more coca than subjects with normal blood sugar. Blood glucose levels are partially determined by nutritional factors, such as low protein, and Indians whose diets are high in carbohydrates and low in animal protein tend to chew more coca than those who eat eggs or meat every day.

While Indians chew coca for various reasons, the evidence suggests that coca may be critical for the adaptation and survival of some hypoglycemic Indians under conditions encountered at high altitude. Past campaigns by national and international agencies to abolish its use in Peru and Bolivia have failed. But if future efforts succeed, "the cultural and biologic consequences could be devastating."