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Ecuador

Indigenous Struggles and the Ambiguities of Electoral Power

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ON SEPTEMBER 27, 2009, THE CONFEDERACIÓN de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador, CONAIE), an umbrella group of Indigenous organizations, led a mobilization against a proposed water bill in Congress that would allow transnational mining corporations to appropriate water reserves in violation of the 2008 constitution that outlawed the privatization of water. The water bill was part of what activists interpreted as broader governmental moves to privatize the country's natural resources, with a particular focus on oil extraction and large-scale mining projects that were located largely on Indigenous lands. The protests included marches and demonstrations as well as blocking roads with rocks, tree trunks, and burning tires. The demonstrations grew intense in the eastern Amazon as the Shuar and Achuar blocked highways with barbed wire. Seemingly in an echo of protests in June 2009 in the Peruvian Amazon that left dozens dead, the Ecuadorian demonstration also grew deadly with the shooting of Shuar schoolteacher Bosco Wisum (Rénique, 2009).

Rather than confronting a conservative and neoliberal government, as had repeatedly been the case over the previous two decades, the target of this mobilization was Rafael Correa, Ecuador's president, whom many saw as part of a red tide sweeping across Latin America. In response to the demonstrations, Correa denounced Indigenous movements as infantile environmentalists and for being in alliance with political conservatives who sought to undermine his leftist government. "We are not allied with the Right," Humberto Gholango (CONAIE, 2009), a longtime Indigenous activist elected president of CONAIE in April 2011, retorted. "Our struggle has always been loyal to

and consistent with the Ecuadorian people, with the organizations, and with the most poor and humble sectors of our country.” Rather than seeking to undermine democracy, Indigenous peoples and nationalities in Ecuador “want to bring the neoliberal oligarchical model to an end, to terminate the injustice under which we have been living.” Cholango demanded instead a “true agrarian reform,” one that would redistribute land as well as “recuperate and renationalize natural resources.” The Indigenous leader denied that social movements had a hidden agenda; rather, “our aspirations and struggles are authentic, and in favor of Ecuador recuperating its dignity.” Cholango pledged to keep fighting until the neoliberal model was destroyed. “We will not allow this process of change to be truncated, stopped, or remain half completed,” he declared.

Correa emerged as the president of Ecuador at a point at which popular movements had created a new correlation of forces in Latin America. Supporters greeted Correa’s election as “a revolution from below, a popular awakening that is challenging the traditional political parties and demanding a new system of governance that responds to the interests and needs of the popular classes” (Burbach, 2007: 9). Correa, however, did not emerge out of popular organizing efforts (he was an economist and college professor before becoming president). Social-movement leaders questioned whether Correa was ideologically committed to their leftist political agenda. Was he, activists worried, merely a populist who would opportunistically exploit social-movement rhetoric to gain election only to rule in favor of the oligarchy once in office? Given Ecuador’s long history of populist leaders from José María Velasco Ibarra to Abdalá Bucaram, this was a very real and serious concern. Or could his populism, as Ernesto Laclau (1977) posited, create a critical juncture that would open up the political system and move society in a more radical and leftist direction, as arguably happened in Venezuela under Hugo Chávez? Was Correa part of what the radical Argentine economist Claudio Katz (2007: 37) caustically termed the “modern and civilized left” as symbolized by the governments of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil or Michelle Bachelet in Chile, or a “left nationalist or radical reformist” trend led by Chávez and Evo Morales in Bolivia?

Ecuador’s radicalized Indigenous movements celebrated the ascendancy of Chávez and Morales, but challenged the inclusion of Correa as a part of a move away from political and economic exclusion and toward social justice. At the end of January 2009, Correa joined Chávez, Morales, and Paraguayan president Fernando Lugo in a conversation with social movements at the World Social Forum in Belém, Brazil. Correa contrasted capitalism with socialism and appealed to what has become a common Indigenous call to “vivir bien, no mejor,” to live well, not better. “We are in times of change,” Correa

concluded. “An alternative model already exists, and it is the socialism of the twenty-first century” (Becker, 2009). Three days later, however, at the closing of the space where Indigenous peoples debated their agenda, longtime leader Blanca Chancoso asked the forum to join her in condemning Correa for pursuing resource-extractive enterprises that violated the rights of rural communities.

While Correa may be part of an emergent *izquierda permitida* that divides and co-opts leftist challenges to power, social movements with Indigenous organizations in the lead proffered a more radical vision of fundamental structural challenges to empire, neoliberalism, and free-trade agreements. While both Correa and competing Indigenous organizations opposed imperialism and capitalism, social movements were more aggressive than the president in supporting the oppressed and exploited classes, not merely through redistributive mechanisms but also by encouraging the popular capacity to self-organize, to enhance their collective social power from below. Organized social movements often found themselves in positions significantly more radical than those Correa was willing to embrace. Growing struggles between Correa and social movements pointed to important underlying issues. What was the role for state power in leftist political projects? Were these political projects better achieved through street mobilizations or electoral participation? What obstacles existed in building counter-hegemonic movements? Would Correa’s left-populist proposals cater to the needs and desires of popular movements that had placed him in power, or were they merely ploys to maintain his power?

Historical Context

Ecuador is one of the most politically unstable countries in Latin America, undergoing frequent and often extra-constitutional changes of power during its almost two hundred years of republican history. During the twentieth century, Ecuador only experienced three periods during which a sequence of presidents peacefully passed power to an opposing politician. All three occurred in the midst of the expansion of export booms, the first with cacao at the beginning of the century, the second with bananas at midcentury, and finally the longest in the aftermath of a 1970s oil boom. Neoliberal reforms in the 1990s, including raising transportation and cooking gas prices and replacing the local currency with the United States dollar, reintroduced extreme political instability, with social movements competing with their counterparts in Bolivia for the record of the number of neoliberal presidents removed from office. Sociologist Leon Zamosc (2004: 131) blames elite attempts to impose

a neoliberal agenda for making Ecuador “one of the most, if not *the* most, unstable country in Latin America.” During the decade from 1997 to 2007, ten different chief executives held power.

Popular movements in Ecuador became quite adept at pulling down governments that ruled against their interests, but they faced a much more difficult task in constructing positive alternatives. This was a consistent problem throughout the twentieth century. For example, in 1938, at what was perhaps the height of the Left’s strength in Ecuador, socialists handed power back to the liberals from whom they had just wrestled control when they could not agree on a consensus candidate for president. Several years later, socialists once again largely controlled the 1944–1945 constituent assembly that wrote what up to that point was the most progressive constitution in Ecuador’s history. Rather than placing someone from their own ranks into the presidency, they handed power back to the perennial populist president José María Velasco Ibarra, who abrogated their work and in 1946 rewrote the constitution into a much more conservative form. It is not without reason that popular movements have a learned distrust of charismatic leaders such as Correa who come from outside their ranks.

Ecuador’s experience with populist leaders reveals that, because of the strong power of social movements, conservative candidates cloak themselves in a progressive discourse in order to win elections. Once in office, however, they reveal their true colors and rule on behalf of the oligarchy. Abdalá Bucaram (1996–1997), Jamil Mahuad (1998–2000), and Lucio Gutiérrez (2003–2005) all campaigned with the support of grassroots movements before turning on their bases after they won an election. Indigenous militants feared that Correa would similarly co-opt and monopolize their initiatives as other populist leaders had done before him. Rather than a revolutionary like Chávez, Correa appeared to radicalized social movements to be a reformer who represented a continuity of the problems that Ecuador historically had faced. Social movements needed to mobilize to defend their interests in the face of government policies.

Rafael Correa

Correa first gained national attention during a short-lived stint in 2005 as finance minister under his predecessor, President Alfredo Palacio. Correa, who has a PhD in economics from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and wrote a dissertation attacking the Washington Consensus from a Keynesian perspective, was a strong opponent of free-trade agreements with the United States. As finance minister, he advocated poverty-reduction programs

and closer relations with Chávez’s government in Venezuela. After four months Correa resigned under pressure from the United States, but he left office with the highest approval ratings of any official in the administration.

Once out of Palacio’s government, Correa’s name became commonly forwarded as a prospective candidate for the 2006 presidential elections. His candidacy raised questions among social-movement activists as to whether they should support someone from within their ranks or ally with someone with broader popular visibility and appeal. Particularly for the strong and well-organized Indigenous movements that had played leading roles in toppling several presidents over the previous decade, Correa was a controversial and divisive candidate. A devout Catholic, he had worked for a year in a Salesian mission in Zumbahua, Cotopaxi, and spoke the Indigenous Kichwa language. But he was not an Indigenous person nor had he been involved in their social movements. In particular, the Indigenous-led Movimiento Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik (Pluri-national Pachakutik United Movement, MUPP, commonly known as Pachakutik) felt leery of entering into an alliance with someone who had not emerged out of a social movement. This was a learned response. On January 21, 2000, Indigenous activists had collaborated with dissident junior military officers, including Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez, to remove Mahuad from power after he had implemented unpopular and damaging neoliberal economic policies. After the failed coup, Gutiérrez successfully campaigned for the presidency with Pachakutik. Once in office, Gutiérrez turned his back on his former allies and ruled in favor of the elite. Pachakutik paid dearly for joining his government. Even more damaging, the former colonel exploited clientelistic networks to gain strong support in rural communities. Gutiérrez had deeply divided Indigenous movements, and activists feared that working with Correa would have similarly negative consequences for their bases (Mijeski and Beck, 2011).

Leading up to the 2006 elections, Correa and Pachakutik discussed forming an alliance. Some observers dreamt of a shared ticket between Correa and a historic Indigenous leader such as Luis Macas. Indigenous activists wanted to put their leader in the presidential slot, but Correa refused to consider running as vice president. Some grassroots activists argued in favor of joining a ticket, even as a junior partner, that had strong popular appeal and stood a strong chance of winning. They thought it would be a serious strategic mistake to pass on this opportunity. Others questioned whether Correa was ideologically committed to Pachakutik’s center-left agenda of creating a more inclusive and participatory democracy based on ethical, socioeconomic, educational, and ecological changes. They compared Correa to Gutiérrez, complaining that his actions were dividing Indigenous communities, repeatedly reminding Correa “that any revolution and change in Latin America will never

be able to be carried out without the participation of Indigenous nationalities and peoples" (CONAIE, 2008: 5). They urged Correa to set aside his arrogance and to foster harmonious relationships with Indigenous and other social movements. Otherwise, the historical opportunity "to carry out a true change and revolution" in Ecuador would be lost.

In response to Indigenous criticisms, Correa closed off dialogues with Pachakutik and subsequently would harbor a certain amount of resentment toward organized Indigenous movements for refusing to support his candidacy. Pachakutik, in turn, ran Macas as its candidate, although he only polled in the low single digits. His dismal showing led Correa to denigrate CONAIE as an insignificant political force. According to an analysis by Kenneth Mijeski and Scott Beck (2008: 53), only about a quarter of the Indigenous population voted for Macas, whereas almost half voted for Gilmar Gutiérrez, who was running in place of his brother Lucio with the centrist Partido Sociedad Patriótica (Patriotic Society Party, PSP), largely because of his skill in using patronage in rural communities to garner votes. Correa polled even worse in Indigenous communities (which comprised about a third of the population) but gained much more support among the majority *mestizo* (people of mixed Indigenous and European heritage) population, which gave him the margin necessary to become a competitive candidate. Correa's strongest base of support was the urban, middle-class academic, and nongovernmental organizational world from which he emerged, rather than the working classes or rural Indigenous communities.

In the first round in the 2006 presidential elections, Correa came in second place to the conservative banana magnate Álvaro Noboa, Ecuador's richest man. Fearing a conservative Noboa government, Pachakutik cast their support to Correa in the second round, thereby helping him win by a comfortable margin. Militant Indigenous activists cheered Correa's victory, embracing his triumph as a blow against neoliberalism. They hoped that it would open up possibilities for a more participatory democracy. "Correa coincides with our struggles," Cholango (2007: 2) stated. "We ask him to deliver on the changes he promised in his campaign." Despite earlier hesitations, it initially appeared that their political interests would coincide.

In his January 15, 2007, inaugural address, Correa denounced "neoliberal globalization that would turn countries into markets, not nations," and called for an end to "the culture of indebtedness" (*Latin American Weekly Report*, 2007a: 4). Correa emphasized that his government would fight against corruption, oppose neoliberal economic policies, and promote regional integration. He refused to sign agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and resisted free-trade pacts with the United States. He repeatedly attacked the business oligarchy, pledged reforms that would benefit the coun-

try's poor, and promised to work to create a more just society. He promised to leave the "long neoliberal night" behind and replace a market with a solidarity economy that empowered the grassroots and responded to local needs rather than distant, wealthy corporations (León, 2008: 31). His government, Correa assured supporters, would be "of the exploited, not the exploiters" (*Andean Group Report*, 2008b: 14). His rhetoric seemed to be in line with that of popular movements.

With traditional political parties discredited and the opposition in disarray, Correa proceeded to consolidate his political control over the country. Contentious divisions within Correa's coalition, however, indicated that a new correlation of forces was emerging, not as a conservative opposition but as an expression of popular movements, Indigenous peoples, and other leftists who felt marginalized by Correa's political project. Indigenous leader and former Correa communication secretary Mónica Chuji (2008) complained of the antidemocratic tendencies in Correa's party and Correa's insistence on following old-style politics that included an emphasis on extractive enterprises that threatened the environment. She accused Correa of presenting "a rehashed neoliberalism with a progressive face" and questioned whether a leader with authoritarian tendencies could lead a participatory revolution moving toward twenty-first-century socialism. Economist Alberto Acosta, a former energy minister, similarly broke from Correa and became highly critical of the president's policies for not being sufficiently radical and for his critical attitudes toward social-movement activists. A series of high-profile defections and repeated challenges from social movements and leftist political parties took the shine off of the apparent value of Correa's victory.

Correa's electoral success was due in part to his ability to consolidate power in the hands of the executive through constitutional and other reforms. But a key question was what he would do with that power. George Ciccariello-Maher (2007: 42) argues in favor of a revised version of Lenin's concept of "dual power" in which "the revolutionary transformation of existing repressive structures" of the state occurs simultaneously through the actions of a centralized state power from above and through the popular initiatives of people from below. Ciccariello-Maher points to the emergence of communal councils in Venezuela as a positive example of the possibilities of autonomous, alternative power structures and the checks they provide against top-down manifestations of power. While Chávez welcomed and embraced these popular initiatives, Correa felt threatened by them and tried to squash them or bring them under his control. Indigenous movements distanced themselves from Correa's government, and it appeared that these divisions would never be bridged.

While some Ecuadorians believed that the country needed a stronger executive to solve continual problems of instability, many activists were concerned that this would be a dangerous move. They feared that heightened state power handed to a sympathetic president could just as easily be used against them if conservatives regained power. Correa, they worried, may have unwittingly laid the ground for a new round of authoritarian governments that would lead to disastrous results for popular movements. Broad executive mandates were not necessarily in the best interests of social movements. Pachakutik congressional delegate Ramssés Torres complained that Correa wanted a "submissive and obsequious congress that would not monitor his government" (*Andean Group Report*, 2007: 6). They threatened to launch another uprising if Correa continued to pursue his extractive policies. "Rafael Correa does not want to see us united," Macas declared. "If you think just because he is tall and has green eyes he will be our leader, you are mistaken" (Meléndez, 2008). Even though Correa denied that he was engaging in a cult of personality, from the perspective of social movements the consolidation of power in the hands of a strong and seemingly egotistical executive meant that they would lose access to the spaces necessary to press their own agendas (Lucas, 2007b: 232). Correa's personal charisma and left-populist discourse demobilized the Left, leaving popular movements in a worse situation than before he took power.

Neoliberalism

Indigenous movements in Ecuador had long played a major role in leading opposition to neoliberal economic policies. CONAIE called for "recuperation of popular sovereignty in the running of the economy." This was necessary because Ecuador had "lived for twenty-five years with an economic model that much more than concentrating wealth also promotes dispossession, inequality, and the handing of sovereignty to large foreign monopolies." The goal of the economic system, CONAIE argued, should not be profit but human welfare, the *sumak kawsay*. Bolivia's foreign minister David Choquehuanca pressed *sumak kawsay* as a Quechua concept of living well, not just living better (CONAIE, 2007: 2). It included an explicit critique of traditional development strategies that increased the use of resources rather than seeking to live in harmony with others and with nature. Economist Pablo Dávalos (2008) terms *sumak kawsay* as "the only alternative to neoliberal discourse of development and economic growth." It builds on "a vision of respect" and provides an "opportunity to return ethics to human activities." It was a new way of thinking about human relations that was not based on exploitation.

Despite CONAIE's lead on economic issues, it is a mistake to assume that ethnic-based movements would be necessarily opposed to the neoliberal capitalist system. In fact, neoliberalism is highly capable of accepting and integrating ethnic expressions into its agenda. If Indigenous movements do not extend beyond ethnic demands, they threaten to enable a neoliberal system. "The ethnicization of the indigenous movement," anthropologist Víctor Bretón Solo de Zaldívar (2008: 610) observes, "has prioritized culture and identity politics at the expense of the class-based peasant agenda still very much alive in the mid-1990s, thus hindering the formation of alliances between indigenous groups and other sectors of society." Indigenous intellectual Floresmilo Simbaña (2007) is also critical of those who press ethnic demands to the exclusion of class concerns and thereby inadvertently empower a neoliberal agenda. To be successful, critics argued, activists would have to move well beyond expressions of multiculturalism.

Some scholars have criticized identity-based politics for focusing on limited issues such as ethnic rights while ignoring much larger and arguably more important issues of neoliberalism and economic exploitation. From this perspective, multiculturalism reinforces neoliberalism by misdiagnosing problems facing marginalized peoples. If the problem is an issue of racism rather than class divisions, then the solution is to embrace cultural differences rather than addressing issues of economic exclusion. "As a state-sponsored ideology," José Almeida (2005: 93) notes, multiculturalism "obscures its economic roots and issues of power." As a result, this "neoliberal multiculturalism" reinforces existing inequalities. "Far from opening spaces for generalized empowerment of indigenous peoples," Charles Hale (2004: 16) argues, "these reforms tend to empower some while marginalizing the majority." Hale continues, "far from eliminating racial inequity, as the rhetoric of multiculturalism seems to promise," specific and tokenistic multicultural reforms such as extending language recognition without accompanying structural reforms "reconstitute racial hierarchies in more entrenched forms." Hale terms this phenomenon that of the *indio permitido* (authorized Indian), a term he borrows from Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, who used it "to talk about how governments are using cultural rights to divide and domesticate indigenous movements." The dominant culture grants certain cultural rights (including to specific individuals) that pose no threat to the dominant neoliberal economic model with the understanding or hope that marginalized peoples will not then make additional anti-neoliberal demands that link these cultural rights to the material interests of the rural and urban poor and dispossessed.

In Ecuador, Indigenous leader Nina Pacari received a good deal of criticism for accepting the position of second vice president in the 1998 congressional

assembly. While supporters cheered placing an Indigenous woman in such a high legislative position, leftists complained that this came at the cost of entering into an alliance with a conservative, neoliberal governing coalition. An advance for a single person, even though that person comes from a (doubly or even triply) historically marginalized group, does not alter the exclusionary structures that originally placed them in a marginalized position. Simply placing individuals in high positions of power was meaningless if it was not accompanied by deep, fundamental socioeconomic and political changes. Otherwise, the result would be growing individual Indigenous presences in the public sphere but without an increased empowerment of marginalized and excluded peoples in material terms. The socioeconomic structures that reproduce the economic exploitation and dispossession of the Indigenous poor are left intact under neoliberal multiculturalism. Hale argues that the issue becomes not a struggle between individual and collective rights, nor between cultural and economic demands, but rather over how this creates structural limitations to Indigenous empowerment. "Neoliberal multiculturalism permits indigenous organization," Hale (2004: 16) states, "as long as it does not amass enough power to call basic state prerogatives into question." Neoliberalism, then, embraces multiculturalism while limiting the possibilities of it as a political project.

Donna Lee Van Cott (2006), however, argues quite convincingly that while multiculturalism may facilitate neoliberalism in areas of weak social mobilization (such as in the Guatemalan context against which Hale writes), in countries like Ecuador with strong histories of Indigenous mobilizations the opposite is true. Instead, movements for Indigenous rights can provide an effective vehicle for building left-wing coalitions that challenge neoliberalism. Keith G. Banting and Will Kymlicka (2006: 19) contend that confronting oppression is not a zero-sum game, and increased attention to race and culture do not necessarily translate into diminished concern for class and economic interests. Rather, an enhanced sensitivity to one social injustice can lead to more sensitivity to others.

Despite these academic arguments, Indigenous activists in Ecuador continued to agitate against multicultural neoliberalism. For example, the Indigenous think tank Instituto Científico de Culturas Indígenas (Institute for Indigenous Sciences and Cultures, ICCI) (2001) strongly criticized the World Bank's work with the Proyecto de Desarrollo para los Pueblos Indígenas y Negros del Ecuador (Development Project for Indigenous and Black Peoples of Ecuador, PRODEPINE), which embraced the government's neoliberal policies while dividing, fragmenting, weakening, and ultimately neutralizing an alternative Indigenous project. Robert Andolina, Nina Laurie, and Sarah Radcliffe (2009) termed its approach one of "social neoliberalism," providing

market-oriented solutions to poverty. Rather than multiculturalism, ICCI argued for fundamentally refounding the state based on the principles of pluri-nationalism. For CONAIE's highland affiliate Ecuarrunari (2007: 4), "pluri-nationalism means building a strong and sovereign state that recognizes and makes possible the full exercise of collective and individual rights, and promotes equal development for all of Ecuador and not only for certain regions or sectors." It represented "a democratic rupture that permits the organization and social control over public goods and the state, and in this way surpassing the neocolonial system that marginalizes and subjects people." Pluri-nationalism would "strengthen a new state through the consolidation of unity, destroying racism and regionalism as a necessary prerequisite for social and political equality, economic justice, direct and participatory democracy, communitarianism, and interculturality" (Ecuarrunari and CONAIE, 2007: 5). Indigenous ally Alberto Acosta (2009: 17–18, 15) notes that "the challenge is to see pluri-nationalism as an exercise of inclusive democracy," as something that opens the door to the process of a continually deepening democratic tradition. "The construction of a pluri-national state," he argues, "is not only a challenge but a necessity." Many Indigenous militants share his perspective.

Correa's Social and Economic Policies

On many key issues, Correa's policies corresponded with those of social movement activists. For years, activists campaigned against the United States' presence at the Manta air base, complaining that it was a violation of national sovereignty and needlessly dragged Ecuador into social conflicts in neighboring Colombia. In office Correa announced that he would not renew the ten-year lease when it expired in 2009. This provision was written directly into the new 2008 constitution with the declaration in Article 5 that "Ecuador is a land of peace" and would not permit the establishment of foreign military bases in its territory (Republic of Ecuador, 2008). As a result, in September 2009 the United States withdrew its troops from the base. "The capitalist elites no longer set the entire region's agenda with impunity," Katz (2007: 29, 30) writes in reference to political developments in Latin America over the last decade. "The dominant classes can no longer rely on their strategic neoliberal compass; the popular movement has recovered its street presence; and U.S. imperialism has forfeited its capacity to intervene." The new constitution also codified much of what popular movements had long demanded, including reasserting governmental control over oil, mining, transport, telecommunications, and other economic sectors that previous governments had privatized. Whether the government complied with its promises would in large part

depend on the abilities of social movements to press for the implementation of these commitments.

Given Correa's background as an economist, logically some of his most concrete proposals emphasized financial reforms. For example, Correa blamed the Central Bank for subjugating the country to foreign and neoliberal interests, and he sought to eliminate its autonomy. He also pledged to raise taxes on the wealthy and create mechanisms for more effective revenue collection in order to increase funding for education and health services. Correa forwarded a nationalistic economic platform and criticized foreign oil corporations for extracting the majority of petroleum rents out of the country. As he consolidated control over power, he pushed through congressional reforms that increased taxes on windfall oil profits, and he used these funds to provide subsidies to poor people to lower their utility costs, expand access to credit, and improve social services (Conaghan, 2008: 55). "Now the oil is everyone's," Correa declared (Saavedra, 2007: 1). He stopped short, however, of nationalizing natural resources. With the industry still largely in private and foreign hands, much of the value of petroleum production would not accrue to the development of the country.

Echoing Chávez's rhetoric in Venezuela, Correa spoke of introducing socialism for the twenty-first century into Ecuador. Nevertheless, like Chávez, Correa remained vague on the details of what this socialism would look like. Often both Chávez and Correa defined it in terms of what it is not. This new form of socialism "differs totally from the idea of state control over the means of production and traditional socialism," Correa said (*Latin American Weekly Report*, 2007b: 4). Other than ambiguous comments about curtailing the power of Congress, depoliticizing the judiciary, expanding government control of natural resources, and democratizing the media, this type of socialism generally lacked concrete proposals as to what it would do. Furthermore, Correa opportunistically allied himself with Chávez when it seemed to serve his purposes but distanced himself when the association might prove to be a political liability. One example was Correa's initial refusal to join Chávez's *Alternativa Bolivariana para América Latina y El Caribe* (Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, ALBA). Even when he finally joined in June 2009, analysts wondered whether he finally felt he had the domestic support to radicalize his domestic policies, or whether he was seeking to solidify support from regional allies in case he needed their assistance later.

Over time, Correa began to curtail his incendiary rhetoric, positioning himself as a moderate. The *Andean Group Report* (2008a: 14–15), a business-oriented monthly newsletter, observes "that although Correa is radical and often overreacts to criticism, he is probably not dogmatically leftwing." During a January 2009 trip to Cuba, Correa said, "we cannot continue to sustain

dogmas history has defeated." These "dogmas" included "the class struggle, dialectical materialism, the nationalization of all property, the refusal to recognize the market" (*Latin American Weekly Report*, 2009: 3). Discarding key elements traditionally associated with socialism while failing to identify alternative visions further underscored doubts as to whether Correa could legitimately lay claim to leftist credentials. Although he did not directly speak of a "third way" between capitalism and communism as some populist leaders did in the 1960s, his emphasis on "the people" while continuing to embrace elements of capitalism led him in a similarly conservative direction. Indigenous activists complained that his social policies were neither revolutionary nor socialistic (ICCI, 2007: 6). "Any policy that indefinitely postpones the anti-capitalist goal ends up reinforcing oppression," Katz (2007: 38) argues. "Socialism requires preparing and consummating anti-capitalist ruptures." Correa's handouts to the poor did not alter the structures of society, and critics suspected that they were merely designed to shore up his political base of support.

Given the realities and traditions of the Ecuadorian political system, it remained an open question as to whether Correa would implement fundamental social changes without resorting to clientelistic practices of using public funds to garner popular support. "Correa is a little better compared to other presidents," Federación Indígena y Campesina de Imbabura (Indigenous and Peasant Federation of Imbabura, FICI) president Maria Tamberla said. "But we're not convinced that he will defend the people, especially the indigenous people" (Riofrancos, 2008). Even while appearing to drift rightward, Correa's government took some steps that gained him broader popular support. On July 8, 2008, for example, he expropriated 195 companies belonging to the Isaías Group in order to recover some of the assets their customers had lost when their bank, Filanbanco, collapsed in 1998 due to corporate corruption. Conservative opponents complained about the attacks on private property, but Correa's supporters applauded the subjugation of private property to the public good. His actions were similar to what Morales had done in Bolivia in nationalizing natural gas and seizing large land holdings, increasing his level of support by distancing himself from the conservative opposition, even though at best the actions represented little more than tepid reforms of a capitalist system (Webber, 2009).

At the same time, Correa has often taken positions that placed him at odds with others on the left. Correa came out of a Catholic socialist tradition, which, for example, meant that his position on topics such as abortion were not the same as those of leftist feminists. Environmentalists opposed his state-centered development projects, which led to significant tensions over mining and petroleum concerns. His agrarian policies favored large-scale

agro-industrial development, providing minimal support for small farmers. Much of Correa's base came out of the white, urban, middle-class *forajido*, or "outlaw," movement that had played a key role in the April 20, 2005, street mobilizations that removed Gutiérrez from power, rather than rural the Indigenous community activists who had removed previous presidents. Many of those who took positions in Correa's government were from the world of academia and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) (*Comercio*, 2008: 7). When a September 30, 2010, police protest threatened to remove Correa from power, it was this urban, professional middle class that came to his defense rather than militant social movements (Torre, 2011). Social movements had been largely excluded from the centers of power, and they mounted growing criticisms of the (negative) influences of NGOs and the depoliticization of their social struggles. Correa's government only deepened those tensions.

ICCI (2008) published an editorial in its newsletter *Boletín ICCI-Rimay* criticizing Correa for not being a true leftist. It contrasted a "social Left" with an "electoral Left." Correa's government, ICCI charged, was not of the Left because instead of governing with and for popular movements, he filled his government with his personal friends, family members, colleagues, opportunists, those expelled from the Indigenous movement, and other confused people. What was missing were representatives of the social Left, those who emerged out of organized social, popular, and Indigenous movements. Correa's government had more in common with twentieth-century social democracies than the ideals of twenty-first-century socialism. Rather than empowering people and popular movements, Correa grotesquely criticized the historical importance of Indigenous and other social movements. Furthermore, he did not provide viable solutions to key problems such as unemployment and low salaries. Correa did not deliver on the fundamental changes for which people in this "deep Ecuador" (*Ecuador profundo*), who were "from below and to the left," had long dreamed.¹ Nevertheless, ICCI's editorial concluded, the Left had elected the government, and the Left needed to engage in the serious task of orienting and pressuring Correa so that he would implement the projects that the social Left desired.

Activists repeatedly found themselves walking a fine line between defending Correa from conservative attacks and pressing him to take more radical positions. Displaying the significant ability of Indigenous movements to mobilize their bases, twenty thousand people joined a March 2008 demonstration in support of Correa's plans to revise the constitution. Journalist Kintto Lucas (2007a: 7) pointed to street mobilization as evidence of CONAIE's continuing relevance. It remained "the social organization with the greatest ability and capacity to mobilize people." The march and a subsequent gather-

ing with officials from Correa's party concluded with a promise to continue meetings between the executive branch and Indigenous representatives to study their demands and proposals. CONAIE also sent Correa a lengthy letter in which they emphasized that Indigenous movements had been in the lead in organizing against neoliberal economic policies that impoverished the majority of Ecuadorians and criminalized social struggles. But rather than just articulating what they opposed, CONAIE emphasized that they also had concrete proposals to move toward a better world. The letter presented a list of twenty-three demands, ranging through issues of opposition to resource extraction and militarism to support for Indigenous rights and institutions. They challenged Correa to embrace their vision for a better world.

Social Movements and Electoral Paths to Power

Sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009: 22–23) points to the paradox that social movements face. Confronting the ecological and financial collapse of capitalism that threatens the obliteration of life on this planet, an urgent need exists to act immediately to head off this crisis. On the other hand, Sousa Santos argues, "the transformations that we need are of a long-term nature" that requires altering the fundamental structures of civilization. At first this appears to be part of a long debate on the left between reform and revolution. But, Sousa Santos contends, strategies such as the electoral process that typically have been seen as reformist now, as was apparent in Venezuela, have produced "profound, almost revolutionary, changes," while political ruptures that would typically be perceived as revolutionary end up only proposing tepid reforms. It is as if social movements face the challenge of socialist president Salvador Allende in Chile in the early 1970s to "make haste—slowly," that poverty and inequality require immediate action but the solution requires much deeper changes.

Indigenous movement positioning in the face of Correa's government illustrates the problematic and complicated nature of social-movement engagements with state power. Marta Harnecker (2005: 149) argues that mobilized people will be at the center of political transformations. She writes "that no real change will be achieved without a well organized and politicized popular sector that exerts pressures to advance the process and that is capable of learning from errors and deviations." Some on the anarchist left argue that Pachakutik used a fundamentally flawed strategy in pursuing electoral paths to power. Perhaps most famously, in *Change the World without Taking Power* John Holloway (2002: 19–20) proposes that the world cannot be changed through taking control over state structures. Instead,

the revolutionary challenge facing the twenty-first century is to change the world without taking power.

James Petras (2005: 154) favors a revolutionary conquest of power, but he remains very critical of electoral paths to political change. "Direct action class-based sociopolitical movements have been the only political forces capable of resisting, reversing or overthrowing neoliberal regimes and policies," he writes. "There is no evidence that any electoral regime in which the national bourgeoisie plays an essential role has challenged neoliberalism." Petras and Henry Veltmeyer (2005: 216, 137, 174) argue that "electoral politics is a game that the popular movement cannot win, governed as it is by rules designed by and that favor the dominant class, and that compel the movement to settle for very limited change and the illusion of power." It is only a trap designed to demobilize revolutionary movements. "Every single advance of the popular movement," they write, "has been through a strategy of mass mobilizations." Petras and Veltmeyer advise avoiding "electoral politics, the path preferred by the 'political class' because it is predicated on limited political reforms." They condemn Pachakutik for their "serious political mistake to seek state power from within the system."² From their perspective, social movements ultimately are more effective at making lasting change.

D. L. Raby (2006: 3, 57, 228) states that this "insistence on direct, unmediated popular protagonism is admirable" but ultimately evades "questions of representation, leadership, organisation and structure which are crucial to the success of any alternative movement." The result, Raby argues, is a "romantic but ultimately defeatist approach," and she terms Holloway's attitude as "the ultimate theoretical formulation of negativism." She argues that while history has shown "that revolutionary state power has all too often lost its popular democratic foundations," it is a mistake to assume that it is not possible to construct "a non-capitalist power structure based on social justice." The problem is not an "emphasis on popular autonomy and protagonism" but a "refusal to consider the need for organisation and leadership." Indeed, Raby contends, to rely only on social movements and to fail to engage state power condemns "people to an endless cycle of circumscribed struggles, frustration and disillusionment." Eventually, social movements will need to enter the electoral realm to achieve their objectives.

Katz (2007: 41) confronts the Holloway thesis even more directly. "Not even the most basic democratic changes that we currently see in Latin America are conceivable without the state," Katz writes. "This instrument is necessary to implement social reforms, create constituent assemblies, and nationalize basic resources." Advocates often present Chávez's Venezuela as an example of how harnessing the instruments of state power can lead to successful and deep-seated revolutionary changes. Building on the Venezuelan example, Ciccariello-Maher

(2007: 54) contends that the debate over whether to change the world with or without taking power asks the wrong question. Rather, we need to look at whether forces attempt to perpetuate or dissolve existing exploitative state structures. Indigenous movements in Ecuador, together with much of the political Left in Latin America, no longer see electoral and extra-constitutional paths to power as mutually exclusive. They largely agree with Katz (2007: 39) that "in the face of the false dilemma of accepting or ignoring the rules of constitutionalism, there is a third viable path: to combine direct action with electoral participation." Activists in Ecuador continue to struggle with how to merge electoral and social movement paths to power as appears to be happening in Venezuela.

Correa's relations with social movements point to the complications, limitations, and deep tensions inherent in pursuing revolutionary changes within a constitutional framework. "A regime that limits and at the same time consolidates the power of the oppressors entails a great challenge for the left," Katz (2007: 37) argues, "especially when this structure is seen by the majority as the natural *modus operandi* of any modern society." This new constitutional framework changes the context in which the Left operates and requires rethinking strategies. Katz concludes, "The battle within the current system is not simple because the current institutionalism renews bourgeois domination in multiple disguises." This remained the challenge for Indigenous movements in Ecuador and for social movements in general. The dance between street politics and electoral participation always remains a complicated undertaking, as do ongoing discussions over how and whether to build alliances with popular populist leaders who do not always have Indigenous concerns at heart. Radicalized Indigenous movements, however, remain determined on one point. They are not willing to concede their demands for far-reaching structural changes in exchange for tokenistic recognition or representation. While Correa's government may embody aspects of an *izquierda permitida*, Indigenous activists are not willing to join him on that path.

Notes

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1. The reference to *Ecuador profundo* draws on Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's (1996) argument for the importance of the Indigenous roots of a country's culture.

2. Petras (2009) subsequently backed off from these assertions in the face of changes happening in Venezuela. "Venezuela represents the most exemplary case of a sustained effort to democratize electoral politics," he writes. Chávez "represents a unique case of an effort to combine the democratization of electoral politics with the socialization of the economy, deepening and extending democratic politics into the sphere of the economy."

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