

A Triumphant Advance in Ecuador

Popular Forces Sweep Constituent Assembly Elections

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Hugo Blanco was leader of the Quechua peasant uprising in the Cuzco region of Peru in the early 1960s. He was captured by the military and sentenced to 25 years in El Fronton Island prison for his activities, but an international defence campaign won his freedom. He continues to play an active role in Peru's indigenous, campesino, and environmental movements, and writes on Peruvian, indigenous, and Latin American issues.

He wrote this article for Socialist Voice on the eve of the sweeping victory of the Country Alliance Movement (Movimiento Alianza País) and President Rafael Correa's anti-imperialist government in the September 30 elections for Ecuador's new Constituent Assembly.

Mercopress reported October 2 that "Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa received a landslide support in the Sunday election for a Constitutional Assembly which will be tasked with reforming the country's constitution and leading it towards what he has defined as XXI Century Socialism." Alianza Pais will end up with somewhere between 76 and 80 seats of the Assembly's 130 members, enabling Correa "to work, in alliance with smaller groups with a comfortable majority."

Kintto Lucas, writing in Ecuador Rising, notes that "The victory in the Constituent Assembly is the result of years of agitation and struggle by Ecuador's indigenous and social movements along with an unorganized, largely middle-class movement of people known as the forajidos, an Ecuadoran term meaning outlaws or bandits who rebel against the established system. In March when the Congress and the right wing political parties tried to sabotage the elections for the Assembly, tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of Quito, blocking the entrances to Congress and backing the disbarment of the Congressional members who wanted to suppress the elections."

Phil Stuart Cournoyer

Today Ecuador is undergoing a triumphant advance. Of the three anti-imperialist governments in South America that are now pursuing a process of change, the regime in Ecuador has the broadest support.

Bolivia is advancing, but the Right, which holds office in four departments, has unfortunately been able to line up a sector of the middle class against change.

In Venezuela the Right achieved some success in its campaign of lies against the supposed violation of "freedom of the press" with regard to a company whose broadcast permit should have been lifted when it supported a coup d'état. Instead, it was permitted to

continue through to the end of the license term.

In Ecuador, as in Bolivia, victory in the presidential elections was no more than one successful step in a long process of massive popular struggles. This process had seen the repeated ouster of presidents who, obedient to the interests of the large corporations and the United States, had promoted the pillage of their countries and accelerated environmental degradation, driving their countries into poverty.

The previous Ecuadorian president, to gain the support needed to govern, had initially surrounded himself with some progressive ministers, a set-up that soon collapsed. One of these transitory ministers was Rafael Correa, and his fleeting presence as minister led him to be seen as someone who could direct the economy. He was elected president in 2006.

The people deeply despised parliament, the heart of reaction. They demanded a Constituent Assembly. Correa not only promised to convoke such an assembly, but refused to present candidates for parliament, convincing voters of his consistency.

After his election, Correa paid homage to the indigenous mass movement that was so crucial in his victory by going to the mountain village of Zumbahua to receive a staff of office from the indigenous peoples. Promising that his would be “an indigenous government,” he explained, “This is not an epoch of change; it is a change of epochs.”

Once elected, of course, he ran into the frontal opposition of the reactionary parliament. Not only did it stand in total opposition to convening the Constituent Assembly; it even had the nerve to vote a huge increase in deputies’ salaries.

The first great battle was to hold a referendum approving election of a Constituent Assembly. Parliament was dead against that, of course, but the highest electoral authority decided to go ahead with the vote. The deputies voted to fire that tribunal’s chairperson. But he responded that it was the deputies that should be ousted, for having moved against him in violation of the constitution.

This disagreement was resolved by the people through mass demonstrations that surrounded the parliament. Fortunately, Correa did not restrain the people as Juan Perón of Argentina and Salvador Allende of Chile did in the past, when they were threatened by a right-wing coup. Correa did the exact opposite. He said that the people had every right to mobilize peacefully and that this mobilization was the only guarantee that the needed changes could go forward.

In March 2007, the electoral authority removed 57 deputies for having obstructed convocation of the Constituent Assembly. The law provided for their replacement by alternates chosen by their parties. Of course the parties, which did not recognize the deputies’ removal, ordered the alternates to refuse to be sworn in. But such is the hunger for posts in these circles that many alternates quickly took the oath and voted approval for the referendum on convening a Constituent Assembly. This should not be taken as a sign that the present deputies are any less reactionary and corrupt than their predecessors.

The referendum was held on April 15, and 80% voted for convening the Assembly, with 10% opposed and 10% spoiling their ballots.

The Constituent Assembly elections will take place on September 30. In my opinion, this assembly will not have the rough ride experienced by its equivalent in Bolivia. It will be a

great triumph for the people, from which will emerge a constitution far different from the present one, which serves to exploit the country and subject its people to poverty. The new constitution will be a tool enabling the Ecuadorian people to manage their country in the interests of the population in a framework of respect for the environment.

That of course will not end the struggle. The process of liberation is lengthy. The Ecuadorian people have taken control of the government, but they do not have power, which remains in the hands of the large corporations. The election of the Constituent Assembly will be an important step in this struggle.

Greetings, brothers and sisters of Ecuador!

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