

L'influence des mouvements syndicaux sur la montée au pouvoir des présidents Lula et Correa au Brésil et en Équateur

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Résumé

Cet article offre un aperçu général des relations entre les mouvements ouvriers du Brésil et de l'Équateur, et leurs gouvernements respectifs. L'auteur soutient que si ces gouvernements ont mis en place des politiques qui consolident la protection institutionnelle des syndicats, ce fut dans le cadre de réalités institutionnelles divergentes. Le mouvement ouvrier a joué un rôle crucial au Brésil dans la formation et la consolidation du Parti des travailleurs (PT) dirigé par Lula, et lors de l'accession éventuelle au pouvoir par le PT, le mouvement syndical a été mieux placé pour faire pression de l'intérieur sur le gouvernement. En Équateur, la montée du Président Rafael Correa fut ancrée dans une campagne électorale basée sur la position anti-institutionnelle et anti-traditionnelle de son parti. Les syndicats appuyaient sa candidature présidentielle, mais n'avaient aucun lien structurel avec son gouvernement, ni avec ses programmes politiques ou économiques. Les mandats de gouvernance distincts obtenus par Lula et Correa ont assuré une différence notable dans l'ampleur de leur autonomie d'action en ce qui concerne la conception et la mise en vigueur de politiques. Les syndicats des deux pays ont conséquemment dû s'atteler à la tâche nécessaire d'élargir leurs alliances et de diversifier leurs positions politiques et économiques afin de pouvoir exercer des pressions sur les deux présidents et leurs gouvernements.

The Influence of Organized Labour in the Rise to Power of Lula in Brazil and Correa in Ecuador

Daniel Hawkins¹

Abstract

This paper offers a general overview of the relationships between the Brazilian and Ecuadorian labour movements and their respective national governments. The author contends that despite both governments enacting policies that strengthened organized labour's institutional protection, they did so from within diverging institutional realities. Brazil's labour movement was a pivotal actor in the formation and consolidation of the Workers' Party (PT) led by Lula, and when the PT eventually took power the union movement had more capacity to pressure the government from within. In Ecuador, the rise of President Rafael Correa was grounded in his electoral campaign based on an anti-institutional and an anti-traditional political party stance. Organized labour supported his presidential candidacy, yet it had no structural ties to his government or its political and economic programs. The distinct governance mandates obtained by Lula and Correa ensured there was a notable difference in terms of the extent of their autonomy of action in policy design and implementation. Therefore, organized labour in both countries faced the necessary task of broadening alliances and diversifying political-economic positions as a means of exercising pressure on both presidents and governments.

Introduction

Only a little more than a decade ago, roughly 60 million *Latinos* resided in a country with a leftist-leaning government, but today this number has ascended to more than 260 million (Stolowicz, 2008: 11). The notable leftist-turn in the region has taken place alongside the decline of traditional political parties, which were fervent supporters and instigators of the neoliberal policies that dominated the region during the 1980s and 1990s. This movement signals the possibility that the region is consolidating a "post neoliberal" process (Grimson, 2008) after the great failings of the neoliberal experiments of the last twenty or more years. In terms of the parties and political alliances governing the majority of countries

in the region, this change displays what some analysts have called a “leftist turn” (see: Alcantará, 2008; Arocena, 2005; Buono & Bell, 2006), which has generated a significant modification of the socio-political relations of force in the sub-continent.

Presently in the Americas there is a diverse array of leftist political parties directing, participating in or supporting national governments in Venezuela, Cuba, The Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Ecuador, Bolivia, Brazil, Uruguay, Paraguay, Argentina and more recently, Peru. All of these governments, except Cuba, came to power via democratic electoral victories (Pomar, 2011: 51).

In order to adequately understand the roots of this shift to the left, the region’s historical trajectory must be examined to illustrate the structural and contextual “limits of the possible” which confronted the progressive governments, the candidates of which won presidential elections in the region. After briefly sketching this regional trajectory, this paper will overview the specific historical paths taken in Brazil and Ecuador. It is contended that while the region has been home to a resurgence of the Left in recent years, there are considerable differences in terms of the paths taken by the respective governments. These differences can be evidenced through an examination of the political-economic development of both Brazil and Ecuador, specifically looking at their experiences with military rule and neoliberal policy, as well as their distinct socio-cultural perceptions of democracy and politics. Such factors played a significant role in determining the way in which both countries’ labour movements related to the state and its institutions.

The Historical Fluctuations in the Region’s Political Regimes

When examining the historical structural reconfigurations of South America, two crises periods come into view. First and foremost are the military dictatorships that almost entirely devoured the region from the 1960s until the 1990s. Secondly, is the destruction caused by the neoliberal turn that began in the 1970s in Chile’s case, and in the 1980s and 1990s in the remaining countries. The result was a crisis of state institutions, in which they failed to fulfill their role as connecting pipes that integrated diverse social demands within the state. This, in turn, generated a structural separation between the state and social movements (Laclau, 2006: 59).

The first crisis ruptured the gradual process that had brought

about the relative institutional integration of *el pueblo* (or the collective populace), which had been consecrated during the period of national domestic development (1930s-1960s). This period was based on a model that combined national-populist policies with economic policies that promoted import-substitution (O'Campo et al., 2007; Palacios, 2001; Portes & Hoffman, 2003; Portes, 2004). The second crisis reconfigured the manner in which social demands were incorporated into the state, prioritizing access for *individual* demands while closing the door to a wide array of *collective* demands (Laclau, 2006).

The region's dictatorial turn led to the development of a strong and autonomous state bureaucracy in the countries governed by military juntas (O'Donnell, 1988; Borón, 1979), a fact which led to the state's disaggregation vis-à-vis the national capitalist class. This opened up the possibility that the domestic bourgeois could gradually align itself with anti-state popular movements, even though structurally, these classes had very different core interests. Secondly, with respect to the neoliberal turn and its consolidation, there emerged a growing degree of socio-economic inequality and the fragmentation of the working class, as informal work spiraled while wages stagnated.² Taken together, the effects of these crises demonstrated the inherent failure of capitalist development without a degree of complementarity between the state and society, and between the economy and political sphere. It is here that the present phenomenon of progressive governments emerged, as a process which was propelled by national-local social and popular demands in each country, all of which attempted to pressure state institutions so that they would open up to collective demands after decades of widespread exclusion and repression.

Each particular expression of this process of state *opening* resulted in new opportunities, as well as problems, for respective national labour movements. In the countries where organized labour had adapted to state exclusion and repression to form broad social alliances and leftist-worker based political parties — as was the case particularly in Brazil and Uruguay — the return to formal democracy opened up the possibility of competing in electoral politics. For other countries where organized labour had gone from being a minor member of state development programs to becoming alienated and repressed by the state without attempting to reinvent itself — as was the case in Bolivia and Ecuador — the return to formal democracy

was met by a weakened and relatively directionless labour movement. To examine such developments more concretely, we shall move to the specific analysis of Brazil.

Brazil: The Ascendance of Lula and the Workers' Party (PT)

Brazil, the Latin American giant and one of the focal points of the emerging structures of multi-polarity in the global political economy,³ is exemplary of the regional political transformations of recent years. Being Latin America's biggest and most populous country, Brazil assumes a protagonist role like none of its neighbors. When the theme is progressive or alternative governments, Brazil, after the ascendance to the presidency of the long-term trade unionist, Inácio Lula da Silva, is accorded a privileged position.

Lula's presidential win contradicted the predictions of one of the world's most recognized financiers, George Soros. Soros affirmed only a few months before the elections that in the contemporary world presidential elections are determined by financial markets, and thus no leftist candidate could possibly win in Brazil⁴ (Lowy, 2003). Such confidence in the impossibility of Lula's task was found to be widely off mark, as 52 million Brazilians (61 per cent of votes counted) voted for the ex-president of Sao Bernardo's Metal Workers' Trade Union in the second round of the presidential elections in 2002. Nevertheless, the political triumph of Lula and his party, the *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (PT- Workers' Party), was not the result of a baseless movement, nor was it grounded in an emerging socio-political reconfiguration. On the contrary, Lula's rise to the presidency was the culmination of 23 years of institutional and organizational work, combined with many more years of trade union activity and social mobilizations.

The Creation of the PT: An Independent Party of Brazilian Workers

The military coup of 1964 dealt the deathblow to Brazil's classic reformist development model, which had been initiated under the mandate of the charismatic president Getulio Vargas (1930-1945; 1950-1954) (Sader, 2009: 25). This protectionist-corporatist type model propelled Brazil's industrialization and urbanization processes, converting the country into the "sleeping giant" of the South. However, the autocratic manner in which Vargas governed Brazil's state bureaucracies led to a gradual rise in social resistance

and the formation of opposition movements and organizations.

Throughout this period, the economic transformations in Brazil were generating major ruptures in terms of the configuration and geographic location of classes. An emerging trade union movement began to assert itself with massive strikes in 1979 and 1980, in protest against the draconian wage regime in existence. These protests culminated in a huge strike incorporating 250,000 Sao Bernardian metalworkers, led by their president, Lula, between April and May 1980 (Invernizzi, 2006; Sader, 1987, 2005). Trade union strength grew at a time when working class consciousness was being ignited in the industrial sector, and gradually leading figures in this movement came to the consensus that their collective interests should be articulated around an autonomous political project. This search for independence and class action was accompanied by a new agglomeration of leftist social forces, pushing for a democratic transition in the country. The labour movement at this time pursued a double strategy. Charismatic union leaders, such as Lula, accompanied the diverse democratic social movements while continuing their concrete struggle against exploitation.

The Democratic Transition and the Political Role of the PT

After the supposed “economic miracle” towards the end of the 1960s and beginning of the 1970s, the military regime began witnessing a period of economic stagnation, which was deepened by the astronomical levels of accumulated public debt. Meanwhile, social mobilizations were on the rise, demanding political opening and pressing for state action. In 1984, for a period of three months, popular organizations and elite economic groups participated in the campaign for direct elections (*Diretas Já!*), which brought together approximately 10 million Brazilians, demanding the right to directly elect the country’s president (Moreira, 1988: 51). The military junta decided that change was imminent and a democratic transition was “organized”, which expressly excluded the most radical oppositional groups and those that were not part of the institutional makeup of the state.

In the presidential elections of 1989, the PT and its sole candidate, Lula, almost achieved victory, losing only slightly to the neoliberal-affinitive candidate, Collor de Mello (1990-1992). De Mello implemented orthodox monetary policies in a bid to control inflation, as well as privatizing a number of state enterprises.

However, when he renounced his mandate in an effort to avoid further investigations into his part in state corruption scandals, the competition for the presidency was fought out between Fernando Cardoso and Lula. Although Lula was the favorite in the ensuing 1994 elections, Cardoso won in the first round. This defeat significantly destabilized both Lula and the PT, and left the path open to the implementation of market liberalizing policies (Paiva, 2006).

Lula Becomes President: A Victory Long in Waiting

The successive electoral defeats of Lula (1989, 1994, 1998) in times of economic crisis and massive social problems, led to the formulation of a new electoral strategy by Lula and his closest advisors. Putting aside his old discourses of class autonomy, Lula took the path towards moderate reform. The ex-trade unionist adopted the strategy of winning the confidence and appreciation of the dominant financial sectors. Not one economist from the PT or any other leftist organization was invited to be a member of the ministerial group of the first-term Lula PT-coalition government, a factor that led to a fragmentation of Lula's governing power as various elected officials of the PT declared themselves in opposition to the new government.⁵

The Lula government's centrist turn in monetary policy was made public during the presidential campaign in a speech by Lula concerning debt repayments; popularly known as the "Letter to Brazilians". The letter promised that if elected Lula would fulfill repayments, and continue with the monetary policies implemented under Cardoso. As part of its centrist stance, Lula's government also agreed to maintain the terms of the agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Paiva, 2006: 201).

In the first national budget, Lula's government exceeded the dictates of this agreement, producing a primary fiscal surplus of 4.3 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP),⁶ something that was achieved by tightening social spending. The search for high fiscal surpluses was characteristic of Lula's first period in office. Interest rates rose in the first two meetings of the Central Bank's board of directors in 2003, demonstrating the counter-inflationary effort of the new PT government.

In the productive realm, the first Lula government followed in Cardoso's footsteps, promoting the export of primary products (including trans-genetic soya) via major state support of Brazilian

private agro-industrial firms. While such a policy of state subsidies and the promotion of private firms has reaped hefty economic dividends, turning Brazil in less than three decades from an agricultural importer to one of the world's primary "bread baskets" (Cremaq, 2010), it has also brought about massive ecological destruction as well as increasing the controversial Brazilian agro-capitalist incursion into neighbouring countries, especially Paraguay and Bolivia.

Lula's Second Presidential Period: Less Economic Orthodoxy, More Social Spending

The great scare that befell both Lula and the PT when they were left on the edge of defeat in the first round of electoral voting in 2006⁷ led to a call for "less of the same". In other words, there was a need for significant policy change as well as change in terms of who would be part of Lula's government. Finally, in the second round, on 30 October 2006, Lula da Silva won by a comfortable margin, defeating the Social Democratic Party of Brazil's (PSDB) candidate, Geraldo Alckmin.

Alongside a moderate centrist macroeconomic policy, the PT government promoted a number of ambitious social programs, focused on lowering poverty and improving the quality of life of the most vulnerable sectors of Brazil. Zero Hunger (*Fome Zero*) was a food security policy that was elaborated by the Citizen Institute in 2001. It combined income and employment generating policies with food subsidies, health coverage, educational subsidies as well as assistance to small-scale farmers. While the projections for this program were enormous, its implementation suffered major problems in terms of design, budget, and ambiguity in terms of its focus.

Alongside the unfulfilled *Fome Zero* program stood another social project, *La Bolsa Familia* (Family Basket). This was a project that was widely promoted throughout the Latin American region, which looked to attack socio-economic misery and social exclusion by directing state subsidies to some of the poorest households.⁸ Politically, this program was an enormous success. By the end of Lula's first period in office, the *Bolsa Familia* had been applied in 11 million households, with a subsidy of up to \$95 reales per month.

With Lula's eventual triumph in 2006, the program was extended further. In terms of instituting a wide-ranging redistribution of wealth, the *Bolsa* was the policy champion of the administration,

leading to a notable reconfiguration in the socio-economic structure of Brazil, reducing the size of the poor working class. As illustrated in table one (below), there was also a marked reduction in the rates of poverty and extreme poverty during the first six years of Lula's presidency. Nevertheless, such a poverty-centred assistance program, while opening up the consumer market to millions of the Brazilian poor, did so on the basis of state patronage and as such it can be seen as a temporal mechanism for alleviating poverty rather than combating the structural reasons for this poverty.

Table 1. Rates of Poverty & Extreme Poverty in Brazil

| Year | Poverty | Extreme Poverty |
|------|---------|-----------------|
| 2002 | 37.5 | 13.2 |
| 2003 | 38.7 | 13.9 |
| 2004 | 37.7 | 12.1 |
| 2005 | 36.3 | 10.6 |
| 2006 | 33.3 | 9.0 |
| 2007 | 30.3 | 8.5 |
| 2008 | 25.8 | 7.3 |

Source: CEPAL, Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe: División de Desarrollo Económico

Labour and Trade Union Reforms Under Lula: Between Division, Pacification and Progress

Perhaps the reform that generated most conflict during Lula's first government was the Pension Reform, sanctioned in 2003 and implemented in 2004. The objectives of this law was to ease the brakes on an enormous and growing fiscal deficit in the public sector, due in part to the large debts acquired as a means of benefitting retired workers and attending to the passive funds of public functionaries. (Radermacher & Melleiro, 2007: 9).

Although the reform achieved its objectives of reducing fiscal pressure, it did so by provoking sizeable division within the PT coalition government. Four parliamentary representatives voted against the bill, and were expelled from the PT. Afterwards, these same representatives created their own party, the Socialism and Freedom Party (P-SOL). The reform also produced a significant division within the Unitary Confederation of Workers (CUT) (Brazil's largest union confederation and the one with most historical affinity with the PT). After the reform's ratification, the CUT was divided

into two blocks. The first block supported the Lula government and consisted of the Trade Union Articulation (Artsind), the Socialist and Democratic CUT (CSD), and the Trade Union Class Current (CSC). The other block opted for a more critical position vis-à-vis the government and was made up of The Movement of Socialist Workers (MTS), The Alternative Socialist Trade Unionists (ASS) and Work. This division and the respective members' subsequent confrontations profoundly destabilized CUT's internal structure, up to the point that in March 2004, one of the groups decided to "break" with CUT and form the National Coordination of Struggles (Conlutas) (Ibid: 10).

The Law 199 of 2007 (Trade Union Organization) advanced the terms of the democratization of trade unions. The manner of organizing trade unions was modified with the category of "professional" being substituted for "economic sector", a factor which enhanced efforts to strengthen industry-wide unions, as this would ensure a much easier path in terms of organizing along sectorial lines. Another positive point being that, after the tension associated with the pension reform, the PT government included collective bargaining in the public sector as well as maintaining the right to strike, despite strong resistance from the business sector.

Finally, this law opened up a Pandora's Box in terms of impelling the proliferation of trade union confederations, generating more democracy but greater conflict within the trade union movement. In the National Work Forum's (FNT) conclusions, there was a proposal to create a National Council for Workplace Relations (CNRT), which would have a tripartite structure and propose directives for public policies in the area of workplace relations (Ibid: 12).⁹ According to a CUT delegate, one of the practical consequences of the law was that by granting formal recognition to trade union confederations, they could thereby receive obligatory worker-affiliated union dues. The breakaway of particular unions from the CUT to form new confederations could be seen less as an ideological fissure and more as a means of "managing their part of the newly available recourses."¹⁰

The eruption of the biggest corruption scandal in the history of Brazil in 2005, involving high level government officials and sectors of the trade union movement, led to the freezing of the reform process and it was not until after Lula's second-term began that the government could reinitiate it. The now fractured law created union

division, affecting the two biggest union confederations, the CUT and Union Force (FS – *Forza Sindical*), especially with the creation of the New Confederation of Trade Union Workers (NCST) in 2005, which brought together the most conservative and archaic union movement in Brazil.¹¹

The CUT was politically weakened after the PT corruption scandal. With the creation of the new confederates: Conlutas, Intersindical and the Confederation of Brazilian Workers (CTB), the CUT lost significant union political actors. Sectors associated with political parties such as the P-SOL and the Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) left CUT, resulting in a political depletion as a result of the CUT's reduced political plurality and ideology. But more than this dissipation of plurality within CUT, the formation of these new left-oriented confederations brought about a new scenario in terms of union strategy and action in the CUT. In the words of Ana Paula Melli, the CUT “has never faced the experience of cohabiting with union confederations that identify with left-oriented social projects. As such, today a wider arc of political positions exists within the Brazilian trade union movement”.¹²

This union spread illustrates the rather ambiguous impact the Lula coalition governments have had on organized labour. Diverse policies influenced both union fragmentation and union expansion, factors that complicate any decisive evaluation of how labour fared under Lula. Perhaps one of the key points missing in terms of offering an evaluation of the labour agenda of Lula's two terms as president concerns the failure to ratify the International Labour Organization's Convention 87 (Freedom of Association), leaving Brazil as the only Latin American country not to have ratified such a core aspect of worker's rights.¹³ Nevertheless, Lula's poverty-focused social policy was also backed up by a general expansion of collective labour rights. Indeed, the rate of unionization in Brazil has noticeably risen since Lula attained the presidency¹⁴ as has collective bargaining coverage, combined with a noticeable increase in female union participation and real wage raises throughout the economy.¹⁵ Trade unionism during the Lula period lessened the inclination for social mobilizations and resulted in greater internal divisions, but it also cultivated a brighter paradigm in terms of its institutional capacity to guarantee collective labour rights.

Table 2. Representation and political position of confederations

| Confederation | N° of entities | Percentage | Dominant political spectrum |
|---|----------------|------------|--|
| General Confederation of Brazilian Workers (CGTB) | 81 | 5% | Centre-left |
| Sole Worker Confederation (CUT) | 1.571 | 38.2% | Centre-left |
| Union Force (FS) | 633 | 13.7% | Business unionism |
| New Union Confederation of Workers (NCST) | 526 | 6.7% | Centre-right |
| General Workers' Union (UGT) | 313 | 7.2% | Former communists combined with no unions with no clear political position |
| Non-affiliated unions | 15 | 21.6% | ----- |
| Confederation of Brazilian Workers (CTB) | N.A | 7.6% | Communist ideology, agmatically Centre-left |
| Total | 3.139 | 100% | ----- |

Source: N° of entities: Radermacher & Malleiro (2007:15); representativeness of each confederation: Ministry of Work and Employment, 31 December 2009; political spectrum of confederations: direct comments to the author by Brazilian unionists and alumni of the Global Labour University, February 2012.

Final Points of Evaluation of the Lula Government: Progressive to What Extent?

Perhaps the greatest challenge in offering a political balance to Lula's governments is the distinct nature (both in terms of focus and political content) of his two presidential periods. One could argue that Lula the trade unionist and metalworker disappeared well before Lula the president arrived. However, the political and ideological shift of Lula and many of his PT advisors should not be seen as a spontaneous makeover. Rather, this ideological shift should be perceived as part of a long redirection of position, combined with the need for compromises in the face of a mandate grounded on a coalition government with members of parties from diverse political sectors.

Under Lula's government the state partly reassumed its old development role, this time via an implicit pact with the national agro-industrial capitalist sector. Nevertheless, the numerous crises within the PT negatively impacted not so much Lula's personal standing, as much as the institutionalism and cohesion of the party. In terms of the governments' relations with numerous social movements, there were both highs and lows. The proposed agrarian reform did not produce any clear advances in terms of its implementation. On the labour front, Lula's two periods of government brought with them a relative organizational transformation and fragmentation of union confederations even while they expanded in number. Nevertheless, particularly in his second term, distributive income policies and proactive efforts to expand labour formalization and employment helped to turn around the decade-long trend of growing informality and heightened levels of unprotected working conditions (i.e. no social security coverage) in the Brazilian labour market. These policies had been at the core of a broad union alliance based on an agenda of a development model that distributes income and valorizes work (De Andrade Baltar et al, 2010: 36).

Ecuador: The Fall of the Neoliberal Consensus and the Rise of Social Protests

Ecuador spiraled into the murky waters of political change that swept to power Rafael Correa as president. Indeed, the rise of Correa and his political platform, Country Alliance (*Alianza País*), expressed one of the most recent of the "leftist" turns in South America. Correa won the presidential elections in the second round, on 26 November 2006, obtaining a notable majority (56.67 per cent of all votes) in front of his rival, the banana magnate Alvaro Noboa, who obtained 43.33 per cent of the votes; such a marked difference had not occurred in the country since the elections of 1992. In terms of Correa's geographic electoral base, his win evidenced a high degree of national support, winning the vote count in 19 of Ecuador's 22 provinces.

Before delving deeper into the theme of the state policies implemented in the years after Correa's election, it is pertinent to situate this political turn in the recent history of this Andean country. This will assist us in better understanding and capturing the existing structures and tensions that confronted Correa the moment he assumed the presidency.

The choice of Ecuador as the second example of a progressive government in South America to be examined is based on two general factors. Firstly, Ecuador is one of the most recent cases of the ascendance to presidential office of a leftist-inclined leader, Rafael Correa, following in the footsteps of Venezuela, Brazil, Uruguay and Bolivia. Secondly, in contrast to the Brazilian and Uruguayan experiences that witnessed the rise of presidential candidates from within well-structured, official and institutionalized political parties, the arrival of Correa to the presidency was fundamentally based on an anti-political party format. It is in this format in which Correa launched his candidacy in a climate similar to Argentina in 2001 in which the masses demanded “*que se vayan todos*” (that all the politicians leave) (Ramirez, 2010). Whereas the political ascendance of Lula and the PT was a long drawn out process of electoral postulation and repeated losses before final triumph, in Ecuador the path towards political change was propelled by massive social uprisings that brought about the forced resignation of three presidents in only eight years.

Furthermore, many scholars have described the experiences of the progressive government in Ecuador, alongside its Andean neighbors, Venezuela and Bolivia, as the deepest and most vigorous processes of political change in the region (Stefanoni, 2011), even though or perhaps because of, their association with more populist¹⁶ policies. The rigorous nature of these three political projects has been far removed from the institutional reform projects undertaken by the Lula-Dilma and Vásquez-Mujica governments in Brazil and Uruguay. The progressive governments of Ecuador, Venezuela and Bolivia have all adopted the term “revolution” to describe their government mandates¹⁷ and all three involved the election of a constituent assembly and the formulation of new constitutions. Finally, while the Brazilian case of political change involved an institutional participation of the labour movement within a political party, in Ecuador, although the trade union movement was a notable force of support for the Correa presidential campaign, it was not and is not structurally integrated into his government.¹⁸

The Past Tracks of Authoritarian-Neoliberal Rule in Ecuador

Following the regional tendency, Ecuador has also suffered its own authoritarian process under two military dictatorships, divided into three stages (1963-1966; 1972-1976; 1976-1979). The

first military government promoted a model of state-led capitalist development as a means of pushing forth the modernization of the economy's productive sectors. Alongside the promotion of large infrastructure projects, this military government initiated the first agrarian reform in Ecuador's history (Martín-Mayoral, 2009: 122-123). After a brief return to formal democracy, Ecuador returned to military rule, first with the nationalist-revolutionary government of General Rodríguez Lara (1972-1976) and later, with the military triumvirate (1976-1979), both of which maintained, at least partially, the model of national development that had been initiated the previous decade.

After two decades of relative growth in terms of Ecuador's industrialization (during the 1950s and 1960s) the country's economic path about-turned markedly with the beginnings of oil exportation in 1972. In this same year the Ecuadorian state Petroleum Corporation (CEPE) was founded and the government sanctioned the Hydrocarbon Law that opened the possibility of renegotiating previous oil contracts with the US companies, Texaco and Gulf. The resulting changes in this sector, together with the significant rise in the international oil price during the 1970s, gave the state space and legitimacy to continue with its macroeconomic agenda, especially in terms of its handling of the country's agro-industrial sector. Nevertheless, during the second part of the dictatorship, the government reformed the Hydrocarbon Law in 1978 just one year after the state Emerald Refinery began to function.

The 1990s brought about a significant degree of social fragmentation in Ecuador. This period was associated with high unemployment levels, the precarization of labour, and massive privatizations of state firms as well as an active shift towards financial market deregulation. During this period there was a notable rise in public protests and widespread social discontent. Alongside the social malaise, the country's economy was in crisis, although this did not seem to warrant a change in the state's macroeconomic management. Indeed, as private sector debt skyrocketed, the state initiated another national process involving the "socialization of private sector losses."¹⁹ In this process the government assumed 72 per cent of the debts of credit entities, a policy that cost the equivalent of 20 per cent of GDP in 1998 (Ibid: 130). The apparent leftist-oriented, Lucio Gutiérrez, who won the second round of voting in the presidential elections of 2002, was supported by a group of opposition forces

brought together behind the mantle “Patriotic Society.” However, once in office, he dramatically changed track. Far from fulfilling his rhetoric as a nationalist-styled political transformer, this career military-turned politician displayed his affinities with the US and continued to prioritize debt repayment and macroeconomic fiscal prudence.

Gutiérrez was forced to resign on 21 April 2005 and in his place, Alfredo Palacios offered little different apart from progressing in certain bilateral themes: suspending the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) with the US and modifying the unconditional support that Ecuador previously upheld vis-à-vis US imperialism. Rafael Correa, the Minister for the Economy, who had published a long list of articles critiquing the orthodox politics promoted by many multilateral organizations, decided to resign from Palacio’s government. After receiving strong social support, he launched his candidacy for the presidency and once inaugurated in office he set about his plan to rebuild Ecuador.

Rafael Correa: Anti - Political Parties, Pro Indigenous and Tie-Wearing Populist

In his electoral campaign Rafael Correa presented himself as a leader of the “Country Alliance” platform which was a new citizen movement well removed from the traditional party structures of Ecuador. Correa refused to present candidates for congress as a means of turning his back on the existing system (Stefanoni, 2011: 86). Such a strategy proved successful and once in office Correa pushed forth a referendum for a new constituent assembly, which was passed with a wide margin (his proposal obtained 83 per cent of votes).

Social Policy Under Correa’s Government

As president Correa had to begin by designing a new constitution in order to implement many of the policies he promised during the election campaign. Popular approval for this project opened up the possibility of initiating policies focused on increasing social investment, expanding state protection for the country’s most vulnerable citizens, and widening the scope for citizen participation in state politics.

In October 2008, Correa ratified the Reform of the Law of Hydrocarbons. This reform set out new conditions for the extraction

and exportation of petroleum, one of these being that the state received a 70 per cent participation stake in any projects signed in this sector. Such measures, together with more responsible management of the Servicing of Internal Rents and the consolidation of the role of the National Secretary for Planning (Senplades), assured a notable increase in the fiscal take during the first two years of Correa's mandate (Paz & Cepeda, 2009: 74).

With an increase in fiscal resources, the Correa government created new social programs that attended to the basic needs of the most vulnerable sectors of society. It also made significant changes in terms of the priorities of the transfer of state funds. While previous administrations had prioritized the payment of public debt to the detriment of social spending, in 2008 Correa's government invested more resources in social programs than it did in debt repayment (31 per cent of GDP for social programs compared to 20 per cent of GDP for debt repayment) (Martín-Mayoral, 2009: 133). Indeed, the presidential strategy of lowering the country's debt burden went beyond a simple readjustment of debt repayment levels over time. In line with the concept of questioning "odious debts"²⁰ in 2007 Correa created a Commission for the Full Audit of Public Debt charged with the task of "establishing the legitimacy, legality and adequacy of Ecuador's loan negotiations and renegotiations since 1976" (Blackburn, 2011: 54). The Commission found numerous irregularities in various debt negotiation processes and Correa's government thereby succeeded in reducing debts owed to US banks totaling US\$3.2 billion down to less than US\$1 billion (Ibid.).

This change in the country's debt-servicing strategy was much more than an economic victory for the government, as it also marked a more concerted approach to tackling the structures of mainstream economic thinking and governance action regarding the debt chains. Correa's refusal to subsume his government's social programs to the dictates of financial capital was perhaps the only case, since Argentina's debt default in 2001,²¹ in which a South American nation has stood up to financial imperialism.

With new fiscal revenue sources, the Correa government unleashed a wide array of social programs as a means of assisting the poorest members of society. These ranged from abolishing user fees for primary medical care to vastly increasing social housing. However, these social programs, combined with a general increase in social spending did not significantly help to reduce the country's

poverty rates,²² although the level of socio-economic inequality did see a reduction over the first four years of Correa's presidential period.

Labour and Trade Union Policy Under the Correa Government

In the framework of the political and social restructuring of Ecuador, changes in the labour and union environment were integrated into the new constitution, which offered a renovated vision of labour rights. First and foremost, the Correa administration, via the new national charter declared labour subcontracting to be "illegal", as was done for the practice of labour "intermediation" and "hourly-paid" work (Constitucion Politica del Ecuador, art.3). The new constitution also placed stronger emphasis on a worker's right to social security. Secondly, the constitution gave special protection to employees who worked in complementary activities such as security, vigilance, maintenance and food provision, as well as other jobs associated with non-productive work processes. In article one, paragraph one; Keynesianism displayed its markings, as it was declared that the state would "promote full employment and the elimination of sub-employment and unemployment" (Constitucion, Politica del Ecudaor, art. 1, par. 1.) Article one also included jobs associated with self-sustenance and domestic workers within the national labour legislation, offering protection to these workers who historically had been excluded from formal labour relation regulation.

After the inauguration of Correa's second presidential term (on 10 August 2009), his government created a new Ministry of Labour Relations. He emphasized his new government's labour policy, declaring that: "it would make sure that no firm considers itself to be profitable until each one of its workers receives a truly decent wage" (*El Diario*, 13 August 2009). Part of this policy was based on the gradual transformation of the figure of the minimum wage, changing it to become "the fair wage" (or fair remuneration, see article four of the constitution). This change came alongside an increase in the minimum wage of 17.6 per cent in 2007 and a further 9 per cent more in 2008. Nevertheless, the United Workers' Front (FUT) declared the 2008 increase as being insufficient.

With respect to union policy, the new constitution promoted the protection of trade union freedom without previous authorization (article 2, paragraph 7); in the public sector, workers

would be represented by only one organization (article 2, paragraph 9); and the right to strike would be protected (article 2, paragraph 5). However, one must not confuse formal protections with actual practices in terms of the respect for these norms, both on the part of firms and the state. In addition, these measures did not result in unanimous union satisfaction with the government's labour policy and pressure from unions continued for a revision of public sector collective bargaining agreements.

Despite the achievements in terms of labour legislative material, there remain significant structural problems regarding the regulation of labour relations in Ecuador. For example, in the petroleum sector the government has confronted significant union opposition due to its lack of compliance with the constitutional ruling upholding the right to strike. Perhaps the most problematic issue facing Ecuador's labour market has been the lack of success in generating productive employment of decent quality (Stefanoni, 2011). While constitutional mechanisms can help protect workers from maltreatment at the workplace, if the economy's capacity to offer more industrial and productive employment is insufficient, precarious and informal work relations will generally prevail.

The government has also been accused of adopting economic policies based on sectorial and geographical favouritism. Along this line, the Correa government granted monopolies to certain private firms in the telecommunications sector, actions that contradict the official rhetoric promoting state sovereignty and the protection of national interests in key economic sectors. Also in his rush to promote oil exploration as a means of improving fiscal resources, Correa refused to negotiate with indigenous communities in the Amazonian and Andian regions of the country. In what may perhaps be regarded as the most questionable government stance, the state occupied indigenous and peasant farmer lands in zones of petroleum exploitation. These ethnic communities have been staunch opponents of the government's extractive model of development. Correa attacked them, together with ecologists, terming them "backward elements", without taking into account events such as the huge Texaco oil spill in the country, which has been denounced in US courts. Of course, this stance does not denote that Correa's government has been totally aligned with extractivism as the only pertinent economic development model. Indeed, in Ecuador, a strong post-extractivist movement has emerged and even challenged the

hegemony of extractivist development in key state ministries.²³

Nevertheless, such spheres of influence have been slow to open and there has been no formal integration of Ecuadorian unions in this emerging social movement of post-extractivism, something closely associated with the newly formed policy which aims at achieving a “good life” (*el buen vivir*) for Ecuadorian citizens. Indeed, as in most countries of South America, irrespective of their national governments’ political-ideological positioning, Ecuadorian trade unions, following the structural tendency of the economy, are generally stronger in the extractive-energy industries; as such they remain aligned with the extractive model irrespective of its vast socio-ecological destruction.

The Role of the Trade Union Movement in Correa’s Governments

Ecuador’s trade union movement offered significant political and electoral support to Correa’s presidential campaign.²⁴ From the period of Correa’s electoral campaign, many trade unions came together to offer their backing to the ex-Economic Minister. According to Enrique Vaca, the entirety of left-oriented social sectors identified themselves with Correa’s electoral campaign, and it was not until after the AC process that a number of these sectors began the process of distancing themselves from the government and its political program.²⁵ The Ecuadorian Communist, Marxist and Leninist Party withdrew its support for Correa and was followed by the Popular Democratic Movement (MPD), the General Union of Ecuadorian Workers (UGTE) as well as the Revolutionary Leftist Movement (MIR).

The movement away from the Correa government came about due to criticisms of the overly *personalistic* style of his government and the lack of possibilities of direct dialogue for many labour and social organizations. Part of this movement was based on the perception that Ecuadorian unions and many social movement organizations had become too detached from popular, grassroots mandates. Indeed, in the words of Enrique Vaca, “the old union confederations had achieved their initial objectives, but in recent decades they had fallen asleep at the wheel... the traditional union confederations have lost their political content and they no longer represent workers; they are shells with no substance”.²⁶ Many unions had lost democratic or representative ties, with leaders having

perpetuated themselves within these organizations.²⁷

The lack of direct incidence in government policy of union organizations has not translated into the complete alienation of union interests within the Correa government. Indeed, the progressive nature of the new constitution in terms of its labour norms was attained in much part due to the pressure placed on the government by the country's union confederations. However, perhaps the most important trade union development during the years of Correa's presidency has been its gradual restructuring. For example, as a means of reinvigorating the antiquated leadership styles and organizational structures of the labour movement, in November 2011 the Confederation of Public Sector Workers of Ecuador (CTSPE) was created. This confederation has 70,000 members and brings together workers from diverse economic sectors such as the petroleum industry, telephone, health, electricity, education, and public tax worker sectors. Most of the members of this new confederation broke away from the old confederations and have joined together in the broader, pro-government Social Movement Coordination for the Defense of Democracy and Socialism.

However, such a move marks a process of formal disaggregation within the country's union movement: between unionists and leaders committed to supporting Correa's Citizen Revolution and those unionists that fear that a widening of his government's political platform will result in a further weakening of their organizations and standing as leaders. The CTSPE aspires to broaden its membership base and diversify its industry representation, but this is a medium-term objective. In the meantime, Ecuador's trade union movement remains only tangentially tied to the Correa government. Its diminished organizational capacity and the very reduced rates of unionization in Ecuador²⁸ structurally impact the possibility it has of pressuring the state. Unlike Brazil, in Ecuador progressive labour policy has hedged more towards individual normative guarantees, with more moderate progressions in terms of collective labour guarantees during Correa's periods as president.

Conclusion

A close examination of the political turn that resulted in the election of Lula in Brazil and Correa in Ecuador illustrates the different styles and political programs of progressive governments in South America. These differences are partly grounded in the

historical divergences between both countries, in terms of their politico-economic development and the mark this left on their institutional configurations. Their respective experiences with military rule and neoliberal policy, together with their different socio-cultural perspectives regarding politics and democracy, overdetermined the degree to which social and labour movements related to the state and its institutions. A large section of Brazilian labour chose to push for change in the nation's political and economic path via the creation and consolidation of a political party that would rise to power electorally.

In Ecuador organized labour did not come together, except on sporadic occasions, to attempt to institutionalize its struggles within the state. Its lack of a consolidated political-institutional movement left it more open to state repression/exclusion during military-neoliberal rule than its Brazilian counterpart. With the return to democracy, the dilapidated Ecuadorian labour movement lacked the means of effectively engaging with the state regarding labour policy. For this reason, as the political context transformed rapidly in favour of the figure of Rafael Correa, support by the labour movement was wide but mostly personal rather than institutional. Consequently, labour in Ecuador has not had an institutional role in designing, debating and promoting collective labour laws. Instead it has pressured for change but it has not managed to instigate or impel that change.

In terms of labour policy, both governments strengthened institutional protection for organized labour, promoting the right to union association and the right to strike for nearly all workers. The Lula government went further in terms of expanding the spheres open to collective bargaining and the institutionalization of social dialogue structures in government forums of deliberation. Meanwhile Correa made explicit his government's refusal to allow for the continued precarization of labour contracts, declaring labour subcontracting and intermediation illegal. Both governments increased the minimum wage and have retained significant support from their respective countries' organized labour movements, although union support in Brazil is more institutional and therefore has more possibility of interceding in government policy discussion forums.

While the Correa government was blessed with resounding initial support from the country's union movement, this has gradually waned as various confederations and political factions

within the union movement have changed their stance vis-à-vis the government. The nature of Lula's coalition government, which combined parliamentary representatives from diverse party and ideological positions, ensured that union support would be unstable, depending on the issue in play.

On the macroeconomic front, Correa proposed and implemented radically different policies with respect to debt-servicing and monetary policy while Brazil adopted a more orthodox monetary policy, tightening fiscal policy and responding to the debt-servicing demands of multilateral entities. Of course, the fact that Lula presided over coalition governments from a wide consortium of political factions ensured that his ability to redirect government economic policy was far more constrained than it was for Correa. It was via an anti-institutional and political party stance and its attractiveness to the electorate, that Correa managed to attain much more autonomy of action in terms of his style of governance and his relative autonomy with respect to previously dominant political and economic factions within the country.

The similarities and differences in terms of the rise to power of the Lula and Correa governments as well as their social, labour and macroeconomic policy programs offer many lessons for labour movements in the region and beyond. First and foremost stands the question of the quest to formulate and participate in worker-based parties that seek to conquer the electorate so as to attain executive power. According to the renowned Italian political strategist, Antonio Gramsci (1971), true social transformation is obtained through long struggles not through the mere conquest of national government. Analyzing the Brazilian and Ecuadorian cases demonstrates that, in the present conjuncture labour *alone* cannot hope to wield decisive political force within a modern-day political party. The need to build broad leftist alliances is key to winning presidential elections and ensuring that progressive policies are designed and implemented.

Initially in Brazil the PT was broadly structured around working-class interests and ideology, but over time it changed into a mass and plural political party in which electoral interests ensured the gradual movement away from policies geared to promote worker and union interests first-and-foremost. On the other hand, Ecuador saw a process of mass and decisive public uprisings and frustrations at the broad political class and the wider organizational status quo of the country. The leftist candidate Correa arose outside of the

shackles of trade union organizations and while they supported him, this support has not managed to frame itself with a decisive form of institutional backing.

Today, with Lula taking the constitutional line and stepping aside after a hectic two-period presidential term, Dilma's government, with an enhanced party mandate, has taken the reigns and a more materially prosperous but organizationally disperse labour movement is faced with the complicated task of finding union consensus on key collective issues as a means of ensuring that labour's position in Brazil's "new era" is accorded the decisive role it deserves. For its part Ecuador is faced with a state widely associated with the personalism of Correa rather than a well-structured, statute-based political party. Labour stands hesitatingly alongside but from the outside looking in. Until the Ecuadorian union movement can assert a newfound autonomy and broad degree of collective representation, it will remain but one of many vocal yet fragmented voices on the spheres of state politics.

Undoubtedly in the South America of today the authoritarian and neoliberal tides have turned in a heartening manner towards a new era of party diversity and a heterogeneous process of organized labour's reassertion on the political plain. The examples of Brazil and Ecuador help delineate many of the ambiguities and problems as well as promises of such reconfigurations. However, much remains to consolidate and refocus this leftist turn and the upcoming decisions of the region's labour movement will no doubt be key factors in deciding its fate.

Endnotes

1. Researcher at the ENS (National Trade Union School), Colombia, multinacionales@ens.org.co
2. For detailed, empirical examination of the regional and country-specific effects of neoliberalism, see: (Portes & Hoffman, 2003).
3. One element of this new multi-polarity, which is said to integrate the South, brings four of the most populace and economically significant countries of the South together under the label of so-called BRICS member countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa).
4. Lula's presidential candidate faced fervent opposition from some of the biggest factions of global capital, including: the Wall Street Journal, The Economist, The IMF and the Federal Reserve Bank of the USA, as well as nearly all business groups in Brazil.
5. It is estimated that, after only a few months of Lula's first period as

- president, 32 of the 91 parliamentary members and 4 of the 14 petista Senators (from the PT) declared themselves as being against the government's agenda.
6. The IMF had specified a primary surplus of 3.87% of GDP.
 7. In the first round of the 2006 elections, Lula obtained 48.6% of the vote, while in second place sat Alckmin, who obtained 41.6%, and Heloisa Helena, of the Left Front, - a political alliance of three leftist parties: the PSOL (Partido Socialismo e Liberdade), the PSTU (Partido Socialista de los Trabajadores Unificado) and the PCB -, who obtained a little less than 7%.
 8. In fact, the Calderón government in Mexico had its "Programa Progreso" (Progress Program); Correa's government in Ecuador had the "Bono de Desarrollo Humano" (Human Development Credit); and in Colombia the rightwing government of Uribe expanded the "Familias en Acción" (Families in Action) project. All of the above remain loyal to the governance discourses of various multilateral institutes, which promote the implementation of specific policies that attack the worst forms of socio-economic misery, grounded in government assistance.
 9. Despite the search for consensus in these negotiations, there were major disagreements between the trade unions involved, a factor that led to the creation of the Trade Union Forum of Workers (FST) as a counterpart to the FNT. The FST was composed by the officially structured union confederations and it defended the system of single unions (sindicato único), the confederation system, representation based on professional category and obligatory union contributions.
 10. Interview with Ana Paula Melli, Advisor to the Secretary for Trade Union Education of the CUT, 4 February 2012.
 11. According to one longtime CUT member, Cesar Araujo of the banking sector, the NCST brought together mainly bureaucratic unions that are distant from their shop floor members. Comments made to the author on 20 February 2012.
 12. Interview with Ana Paula Melli, op cit.
 13. The only other country of the Americas that has not ratified this core ILO convention is the United States of America.
 14. Unionization rates have increased from a low of roughly 4% of the occupied workforce before Lula to roughly 20% for 2010.
 15. These points were emphasized in an institutional encounter with the ex-Colombian CUT president and present member of the ILO's Southern Cone Office for Decent Work, Carlos Arturo Rodríguez in Medellín, Colombia, January 2012.
 16. In line with Oxhorn (1998: 224), populism is used here to refer to a form of interest mediation grounded on "the ability to appeal to lower class needs, frustrations and even aspirations".

17. In reference to: Ecuador (the Citizen Revolution), Venezuela (the Bolivarian Revolution); and Bolivia (the Democratic and Cultural Revolution).
18. This point was confirmed during an interview with Enrique Vaca, Secretary for Organization of the Committee of Quito's Electric Enterprise, Medellín, 6 February 2012.
19. The first process of debt socialization took place in 1983 with what was termed the "sucretization" of private debt in which private sector debt held in dollars was converted to sucres and the government of the time agreed to assume this debt in dollars, an act which, in effect, amounted to a State subsidy of the massive losses of the country's capital class (see: Martín-Mayoral: 128).
20. In a recent article Robin Blackburn defines odious debts as: "... those contracted by a regime without the citizens' consent and for objectives that are against their interests, with the creditors being aware of these conditions" (Blackburn, 2011: 53).
21. Faced with mass economic destruction and debt strangulation, in 2001 Argentina repudiated debts totaling US\$81 billion dollars.
22. According to INEC data, the national urban-rural poverty rate went from 37.6% in December 2006 to 36.74% in December 2007, it then fell to 33% for mid-2010. Extreme poverty rates fell moderately from 16.89% in December 2006 to 15.49% in June 2008. See: (Martín-Mayoral, 2009: 133).
23. This point was made by one of the region's most renowned post-extractivist thinkers, the Uruguayan Eduardo Gudynas, from CLAES, during a conversation with the author. Also, refer to the novel policy offer designed by the Minister for Oil, Alberto Acosta, who, when confronted with the astounding oil reserves of one of the world's most biologically diverse areas on the edges of the Amazon, Yasuni, pushed forth a State-backed proposal to leave the area untouched and protected if the international community agreed to pay compensation for the lost oil funds. (See: Vidal, 2011).
24. This point was reiterated in an interview made by Diana Cardenas (ENS, Colombia) with Guillermo Elías Touma, unionist from the National Federation of Agro-industrial Workers, Peasants and Free Indigenous Peoples of Ecuador (FENACLE), in November 2009.
25. Interview with Enrique Vaca, *op. cit.*,
26. Interview with Enrique Vaca, *op. cit.*,
27. Eduardo Paredes, ex Sub-Secretary of the Correa Government and former unionist and social movement leader, in: (Harnecker, 2011, p.166).
28. According to the ILO, in Ecuador the rate of unionization in 2009 was only 3.0%, calculated by dividing the economically active population by the unionized population.

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