

The auditing of debt in Ecuador: What to do when history is not on our side?

By Diego Almeida V. *

It is difficult to describe one of the more unpleasant chapters of Ecuadorian history without being taken over, at once, by indignation and impotence.

Who in their right mind can comprehend the fact that after having paid the enormous debt for liberation from the Spaniards, and in full oil boom, Ecuador has sold its sovereignty?

And I mean *sold* its sovereignty since because of a debt which grew from US\$ 585 million in 1975 to US\$ 17 billion in 2004, Ecuador has had to sign off 13 letters of intention to international bodies, which in plain language means the acceptance of economic impositions.

Where is a people's sovereignty if, from abroad, it is told that it cannot invest in health, education or infrastructure for its people, because it needs to honour a legitimate debt?

It is only mad men who imagine that in an oil producing country whose economy is based precisely on exports, oil is not the major product to leave the country. Since 1982 Ecuador has been an exporter of capital, having paid off US\$ 119.83 billions in debt repayments.

It could have set itself free of more than US\$ 7.5 billion in 1992, since, according to US law, the debt had expired; but in just a few days and without the power to do so and in the face of any concepts of transparency and honesty the Ecuadorian consul-general in New York signed a treaty in the name of 14 Ecuadorian public entities which resurrected the debt together with interests, penalties, and fresh credit for the payment of new obligations.

This being just the *aperitif* of the great treason by Ecuadorian civil servants to their country and their people, it is logical to believe that as the peoples of Latin America wake up, they too will simultaneously have to wake up the firm desire to re-write history and seek justice.

New winds blow in through the middle of the world and an honest government, perhaps for the first time in the republican history of Ecuador, has set up by decree and from within civil society organizations, a commission to audit the debt. This hitherto globally unheard-of initiative will provide the state with the necessary tools for the refutation of said debt.

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Ecuador wins another battle towards “another world is possible”

By Fidel Narvez*

Ecuadorian people have won another decisive battle towards their “citizens’ revolution”. A significant 64% of the population said YES towards the new road map for the country. Yet one more signal of support for President Correa, who in less than two years has won four consecutive election ballot results. A victory has been achieved once more, despite aggressive opposition from the economic groups who own and control the majority of the media outlets, this time with active participation of the catholic church.

The new constitution is without doubt the most democratic of Ecuadorian history. For the first time in the election of the *asambleistas* (Assembly members), all candidates were guaranteed equal coverage by the media. Almost 80% of the *asambleistas* were citizens who had never before participated in elections and come from social movements and NGOs. The Assembly received around 70000 visitors from 3000 organizations and, in marked contrast to the previous constitution, engendered by neoliberalism, the new constitution was this time subject to approval by referendum.

As a result of this process, Ecuador formalized its decision to abandon the neoliberal economic model and proceed to a social and solidarity economy which returns to the state the right to plan and control natural resources and strategic sectors of the economy, aspects which under no conditions will be allowed to be privatized. This includes water, which from now on will be considered a human right. The economy will furthermore be oriented to promote and guarantee food security and sovereignty.

Citizen’s participation will be one of the main axles in the new constitution. A new power has been created in parallel to the traditional executive, legislative and judicial powers. The Council for Civil Participation and Social Control made up of citizens from civil society will replace political parties in the selection of key authorities such as those of the Treasury, Attorney General, Election Tribunal, Constitutional Court, etc.....The selection of civil servants will be done by public competition and will also be open to all. This new body will in effect supervise and oversee the performance of these new authorities in the manner of an anticorruption commission. All state enterprises will always have an “empty seat” on their directories in order to allow the participation of civil society in management. The repeal by referendum of any popularly elected post, including that of the President, is another tool via which participatory democracy is strengthened in Ecuador.

Amongst the numerous social achievements are free education up to university level, universal health care with free medicine for terminal illnesses and cover for disabled people, social security for housewives and informal workers, the prohibition of employment agencies and agency work and paternity leave for men.

The most revolutionary achievements are perhaps those made on behalf of the environment. Ecuador has given birth to the first constitution in the world to accrue rights to nature. This means that anyone can take legal action on behalf of the environment and demand its’ rectification. Transgenics are prohibited. Biopiracy is penalized and it will not be possible to patent any product of biodiversity or those which form part of the ancient knowledge of the indigenous peoples.

Simultaneously, Ecuador is now the first country with “open doors” as it will not require visa from any other citizen in the world. This is a clear message that, in Latin America, we are constructing the “other world that is possible”.

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Ecuador and migrants rights: “Nobody is illegal”

By **Samuele Mazzolini***

While Europe is erecting greater barriers to impede the access of migrants from the developing world through the adoption of ever more restrictive laws, a small South American country, wounded by the phenomenon of massive migration in recent years, is undertaking a totally different path.

On one side the old continent seems to have forgotten its past as a net exporter of migrants, while on the other Ecuador is giving a valuable lesson in the name of those humanist ideals which have often been denied to its citizens living abroad.

The recent resolution of Ecuadorian President Rafael Correa which implemented an ‘open doors’ policy in his country with no visa requirements for tourism to any world citizen, has found further echo in the new Constitution, recently approved by a popular referendum. In the new Carta Magna, new principles regarding migration are established, in line with the different conception of politics put in place by the current government, which sees man as the primary purpose of all public action.

Instead of criminalizing people moving across the globe because of the growth of economic disparities, these dispositions try to focus on the question differently. The first element which is worth noting is the principle that nobody can be declared illegal, inspired by the value of universal citizenship, treating migration as a right, not as an offence. This is completely at odds with the recent norms adopted by the European Union, which dispose the detention of ‘illegal’ migrants up to 18 months.

In addition, a number of tutelages are provided both for foreigners living in Ecuador and Ecuadorians living abroad. As for the first group, humanitarian assistance and protection rights are granted to refugees, clearly directed to the thousands of Colombian ‘desplazados’ which reach Ecuador in search of a safe place. Moreover, people living regularly in Ecuador for five years are entitled to acquire political rights. As for the second group, the Constitution recognises transnational families, and the possibility for them to benefit from the Ecuadorian pension funds abroad.

Important political rights are also granted: 5% of the future National Assembly will be elected by the diaspora of Ecuadorians living out of the country, for whom governmental action has also created special programs to motivate them to come back live in Ecuador and alleviate the personal traumas lived by millions of people.

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