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by JOE EMERSBERGER

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Guillaume Long on Ecuadorian President Moreno's betrayal of Assange and the Citizens Revolution

Guillaume Long held many posts under the government of Rafael Correa (2007-2017). He was Ecuador's Minister of Foreign Affairs during Correa's last year in office. Months into the administration of Lenin Moreno, Long resigned as Ecuador's representative to the UN citing Moreno's sharp turn to the right. Counterpunch has addressed that right turn in many other interviews and op-eds ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#) for example).

Joe Emersberger: Regarding the Assange case, if the courts are ever unpacked in Ecuador, it seems to me Moreno should face major legal problems for stripping Assange of his citizenship.

Guillaume Long: There are a number of violations of international and national law that Moreno engaged in by handing Assange over to the British authorities. I think that is why it took him so long. He wanted to do it earlier but he knew that by handing in Assange he would have to violate international asylum law. I was in the foreign ministry so I obviously have information that they were very worried. International law is very specific about non-refoulement – the technical term that means non-devolution. You cannot take away somebody's asylum once you've granted it. You can deny someone asylum on request. When it is requested you can say "no we will not give you asylum" and you don't have to give any reason. You can just say no, but once you've granted someone asylum there is a sacrosanct institution called non-refoulement which is a French word they use in international law. It applies unless the case for political persecution is not there anymore. Clearly there was no change because the major motivation for the asylum

was a US request for extradition. Whenever there has been any ambiguity the institution of non-refoulement has been strengthened.

For example, in 2018 the Inter-American Human Rights Court – which is quite a powerful institution for those who have ratified the San Jose pact including Ecuador – warned Ecuador not to violate non-refoulement. The Ecuadorians were nervous about that. That’s why they had to really prepare by trying to pathologize Assange, making him into a crazy man smearing feces on the walls and all these lies. They really had to work on that for several months to push their international law violation through.

As for what you mentioned about the naturalization of Assange, the Ecuadorian nationality, yes it is even more serious than what you mentioned because on the day Assange was handed over to British authorities Assange was still Ecuadorian. It is still not clear, because the Foreign Ministry hasn’t been transparent on this issue, if Assange is still Ecuadorian to this day. We know they’ve started the process of taking away his citizenship. Let’s say nationality. Citizenship in Ecuador is a bit different. There is a residency criteria but anyway they’ve started this process. We don’t know if it is yet concluded. Certainly on the day he was taken by British police from the Embassy he was still Ecuadorian. The Ecuadorian constitution prohibits extradition of Ecuadorians to other countries. It is very clear. So that is a really serious illegality committed by the Ecuadorian government which I think will have massive legal consequences.

I think Moreno has enough legal trouble as it is. It is probably not the first thing that he’ll be nailed on. I think his corruption case will end badly for Moreno. That’s my own belief, but certainly on the Assange issue there have been a number of illegalities. I think we’ll see a number of court cases in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights against the Ecuadorian state.

JE: What are the big lessons from Lenin Moreno’s amazing betrayal? How could he have ended up as Correa’s choice and his party’s choice?

GL: Certainly Moreno probably wouldn’t have been the first choice of everybody in Alianza Pais [Correa’s former party]. He was chosen by the polls really because we needed someone who would win in 2017. We were worried that our opponent Guillermo Lasso was a very hardline neoliberal. We now know of course that Moreno was a hardline neoliberal too, but he wasn’t showing his true colors at the time. We were very afraid that if the hard right won it would jeopardize all the hard fought rights and advances that we had managed to secure during that decade.

Let us not forget that after November 2014 the economy started to suffer a decline. The commodities bust hurt Ecuador. Ecuador handled the commodity price decline much better than other Latin American states – through countercyclical policies like public investment to beat the cycle. There was also some caution and sound economic management – so much so that by 2017 Moreno inherited an economy that was growing again. But both 2015 and 2016 were difficult years. In 2015 there was pretty much zero growth, and 2016 was the first year since Correa had come to power that was actually a year of negative growth, not anything like what Brazil and Venezuela went through with the commodities decline, but still like -1.5%. Half of that was the earthquake [a quake of magnitude 7.8 on the Richter scale that occurred in April of 2016] and the rest was the commodities price decline.

Moreno had been outside the country for a few years and perceived as distant from the commodities decline. He'd been hiding away in Geneva for a couple of years. When he had been in power as Vice President, he'd been associated with the very popular policies of social welfare and a special program for people with disabilities. He was still surfing that wave.

Even if we were fully aware that he would signify a move to the center, none of us really imagined how much of a betrayal he would orchestrate, how far right he would shift.

Correa's decision was not to run. He felt that only in his absence would his legacy be institutionalized. At the time I was impressed. Of course, now we know we were betrayed. But at the time I thought he was right, that the only way the Citizen's Revolution was going to be institutionalized, and all the laws we've passed and all the rights we had enshrined in public policy were going to be maintained. That's the test, the litmus test of real structural change, when you don't need the leader anymore.

In 2015 there were a lot of demonstrations in the street backed by the media, with a middle class presence, against taxes on inheritance and on capital gains from property. We had been radical all the way up until the end of Correa's mandate. There was a feeling that maybe this was a time to sort of move to the center, stabilize things for four years, and come back with a more radical agenda in riper circumstances, with higher commodity prices. That was the thought process but until the end Correa was uncomfortable with Moreno's candidacy and felt there was a risk. And very soon

onwards, within weeks of his presidency, many of us realized we were at risk of a major betrayal.

JE: Leftists out of power tend towards purism which poses no obvious risk if you are very from power anyway. But did Alianza Pais go too far in the other direction by striving for a “broad church”? Was it too relaxed about opportunists and people without firm convictions within its ranks?

GL: Yes I think there is some truth in what you are saying. Definitely the aim of the game was to create a “broad church”, a mass party along the lines of other mass parties in the region. PT [in Brazil] is a good example. Let’s not forget that, contrary to myth, Correa did not arrive because of a left wing alliance. If you look at the electoral results in 2006, the first and second round of the elections, it was the lowest vote for the left in decades in Ecuador. This is important because Correa won those elections. But the traditional left wing parties did very poorly, the indigenous movement did very poorly. This whole myth that Correismo was carried into power by the social movements and leftist political movements is simply not true. Historically, it may be, if you look at long term processes, resistance against neoliberalism by the indigenous movement and the social movements in the 90s was crucial. But as for the specifics of Correa’s election, it was Correa who won, Correa the outsider. It was Correa the leader. It wasn’t the left. So when Correa came to power in 2007, he realized he didn’t have a broad left wing alliance with which to govern. There were no consolidated left wing parties. The left historically has received 2%, and when it has done really well, 3%.

So Correa decided to create a new political party called Alianza Pais. This party did not exist before 2006. And a lot of us who come from the 2-3% left (including myself) decided to join this party. It was very successful. It got just under 50% of the parliamentary seats in 2009 and over two thirds in 2013-17. It had such a majority that it could actually change the constitution. It was the most successful leftist party in contemporary Ecuadorians history going way back. I would say the most successful leftist party in Ecuadorian history. There hadn’t been a parliamentary majority in Ecuador since 1991. That’s how bad the fragmentation of politics was in Ecuador. To have a two thirds majority wasn’t just a success for the left. It was just a political success full stop. But you are right. The decision to not just be this purist, sectarian left party meant that it did become a board church. One of the big problems with parties that are created from power is that, unlike parties that are created in times of hardship and political opposition,

they attract a lot of people who are not necessarily ideologically motivated. They are attracted to the fact that the party is in power and maybe they can get a jobs for themselves or family. I think Alianza Pais did become a magnet for all sorts of people who were in there for the wrong reasons. But to what extent was it a mistake and to what extent was it inevitable? I think that's a broader debate.

I don't think it was Correa's fault that in 2007 the left was so weak that he had to create a new structure. It was not like in Uruguay with the Frente Amplio which had been persecuted by the dictatorship, in opposition for decades. So most people who were in the party when it was finally elected were committed.

Also Correa, definitely a leftist academic, knew exactly what he wanted to do but wanted it to in a way that was economically successful. A good way of summarizing his vision – our vision because we shared it – was to try to do this transition from a primary agro-export economy – raw material commodities (oil and bananas and so on) to a much more sophisticated economy. I won't go into detail but it is about moving capital from one sector to another, convincing the bourgeoisie to move avoid away from where it has traditionally invested so as not to constantly reproduce the same thing generation after generation. In order to do that you need a kind of a pact. You need some sectors of the bourgeoisie on your side, not necessary all sectors. You can question it. How radical is that political project? That's a legitimate question. Is it not just some modernization of capitalism? I think that's a legitimate question, although I'd argue that being anti-neoliberal today is revolutionary. It's become such a hegemony that it is quite revolutionary in itself. We are seeing it all over the place in the US and Europe. Going back to macroeconomic policies of the 50s and 60s is amazingly revolutionary in today's world. It is just surreal.

So yes I accept your point. Within Alianza Pais we had a broad alliance that went from center (some would say center right) all the way to the communist party. You definitely had a non-leftist sector within the broad alliance, but there were many reasons for it.

JE: There is proposal by Robert McChesney, John Nicols and Dean Baker for media vouchers. The idea is to make the media independent of big private interests but also of the government of the day. It was so easy from Moreno to quickly make the public media into a copy of the private media –and thereby re-impose a media

monoculture. Seems to me all the left governments in Latin America failed create large scale and sustainable independent media.

GL: Yes I completely agree with you. In that sense the public media was a failure. The thing is the private media was so aggressive against Correa. There were two ways of fighting back. One of them was to diversify the media – public media, some community media and regional media. But the big corporate media were so hostile it was unbelievable. If Correa didn't have a strategy to counter that, I don't know how long the Citizens Revolution would have lasted. He needed to get his message out there. There were two ways. One was through public media, and the other was his Saturday show – called Enlace Ciudadano that he did his 3-4 hour show where he shared what he did during the week, and to fight back against what the media had been saying that week.

JE: His last two years in office I watched every one of his shows. They were great shows, and were not on every channel as many people lied. He definitely needed to fight back hard, but I think an institutionalized approach to media was needed so that a new president could not easily restore elite dominance. The media vouchers is one idea. Making heads of public media directly elected would be another.

GL: The public media, because of that polarization, it never really was independent enough. It was probably more balanced than the private media or maybe that's my own bias. I watched public media news and it wasn't completely "Correista" whereas you watched the private media news and it was really all about bashing Correa. But still, it wasn't autonomous enough. He could have taken steps earlier to gradually move it being "state media" to being public media. The kind of ideas you're giving now would have made it independent, less vulnerable to this kind of take over. I agree with you. I think that was a failure. It shouldn't have been managed through Ministries. It should have had its own independent law. There are lots of ways of doing that. It wasn't done.

But early on it was so asymmetrical a battle, if the public media been more independent then it would also have been less of a counterbalance.

Now the public media is the most aggressive media against Correa. Even the private media is more independent. And now every time a government changes the public media will become the official mouthpiece of that government. Something needs to be done fast.

JE: Moreno is doing badly in the polls despite all the media support. How much do you think the IMF loan can bail him out?

GL: That's interesting. I don't know yet to what extent the extra liquidity will help him have something to show for his presidency. What is unbelievable about Moreno is that there is nothing – no public policies, no construction of infrastructure – nothing. People in Ecuador have come to expect something, especially after Correa – to show some result of his presidency. Whether he has some extra liquidity and actually does something – I'm not sure that he will. They've been so incompetent. That's another characteristic of the Moreno government. It is not just the right wing aspect. It's the sheer incompetence.

The loan will give some breathing space, but it will also be counteracted by all the stuff the IMF is asking the Ecuadorian state to engineer, including all the structural adjustment: privatizations, reduction of the state apparatus and bureaucracy (so probably a huge rise in unemployment), cuts in social welfare. We are already seeing cuts in education. Moreno took away a universal policy we had of giving breakfast (and/or lunches depending if they were morning or afternoon cycles) for kids in state schools. They all got free lunch and free breakfast. It is a policy that has been applauded by everybody. One of the major problems in schools was malnutrition. It was major factor in academic failure for people in poor communities. Now he saying he is only keeping it for a small percentage of super poor kids. How is that going to work? Are you going to say "Pedro you queue up here. You're from a poor family. You can have lunch. Jose you are not from a poor family so you go in that queue." Typical IMF neoliberal policies – no universal policies.

Those kinds of things will be really unpopular. He might have a bit more cash in his pocket but either what the IMF recommends or this general neoliberal trend will hurt the Moreno government. And I think the Moreno government has sunk to a level where it will be very difficult for him to recuperate above 20% popularity. I can't see it happening and I don't think that is his aim. I think his aim is to be a transition government.

JE: The March regional elections were quite a blow for those who wanted to see Correa's movement buried. Torino Economics (no fan of Correa's at all) found that Correa's borrowed party – not able to officially register their own – was the second highest vote getter if you look at regions where is was able to run. It said "Correa's movement participated in 48% of the states, 11 out of 23; 22% of the mayor's offices and 10% for the parish councils." It concluded that the nationwide votes suggest that a Corraist candidate could come in second in the first round of a presidential election.

GL: Yes. You have to do exactly what you did and contextualize those elections. We actually decided not to run at all two months before the elections. They had not only stolen Alianza Pais from us, but they'd actually prohibited us from creating a new party. And it is just unbelievable. You should see the electoral authorities' answers to our request to create a new party. Correa is still the most popular politician in Ecuador. Even if he doesn't have a majority it would be very easy for Correa to create his own party. Authorities would say "Oh in the letter of intent to create your party you use the words 'Citizens Revolution' and there is another party called Alianza Pais which also refers to a 'Citizens Revolution' so your request is denied". Just surreal stuff like that. They put up these bureaucratic/administrative barriers. So until January we weren't running at all, but then we realized that even a bad result would be better than not running at all and being ostracized from Ecuadorian politics. So we managed, as you said, to sort of borrow a political party.

So we started campaigning really late. We really had to be strategic about where we ran because we didn't have money. The results have them panicked. The elites realize Correismo exists. It was read as a triumph for Correa and Correismo. The fact that we won Pichincha which is the province which the capital is in. We won the equivalent to governor of that province – Paola Pabon [the winner] is from our alliance, but also Manabi, the third biggest province. They really thought they would annihilate us, but they didn't.

That despite their attempt to get rid of us through the judicialization of politics, for all of us to be outside Ecuador. There is that ludicrous case against Correa, such bogus charges [see discussion of "Balda" case [here](#)]. The only purpose is to make sure he is outside Ecuador and not doing politics in Ecuador. The same with Ricardo Patiño. The same with a number of leaders who were very important to us. I don't have any legal case against me, but I'm not too keen on going to Ecuador. That's the kind of climate that they've created so that they don't have opposition in Ecuador.

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