

**Mainstreaming the Indigenous Movement in Ecuador:
The Electoral Strategy**

by

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Abstract

The contemporary indigenous movement in Ecuador, especially since the creation of the pan-Ecuadorian Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE) in 1986, pursued a political strategy of popular mobilization and direct negotiations with government leaders to achieve its goals. The mobilization strategy included tactics such as uprisings, takeovers of government buildings, cross-country marches and blockages of major commercial highways. CONAIE explicitly shunned electoral politics until a dramatic shift in 1995 which included the CONAIE-initiated creation of the Pachakutik/Nuevo País political movement. This paper describes and critically analyzes the successes and failures of this electoral strategy by examining the 1996 and 1998 elections as well as the politics surrounding the deliberations of the National Constituent Assembly which was charged with wholesale revision of the country's political constitution before the 1998 elections. The authors point out the promises and pitfalls of such an electoral strategy, concluding that such an approach does not inexorably advance the goals of the indigenous movement.

Introduction

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Ecuador's contemporary indigenous movement opted for a strategy of popular mobilization of civil society, making demands to the state for the recuperation of lands, recognition of specific cultural identities, and the institution of specific laws and policies. This mass mobilization of indigenous peoples signalled a distancing of the indigenous movement from earlier alliances with non-indigenous popular organizations such as worker unions. It also included an explicit rejection of an electoral strategy. This renunciation of electoral politics included the refusal of the country's national indigenous organization, the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (CONAIE), to give its support to candidates sponsored by the traditional political parties and its unwillingness to sponsor its own candidates for office. In the early months of 1996, there was a sudden public reversal of both the distancing of the indigenous movement from forming close alliances with other popular movements and its long-held spurning of participation in the country's elections. This reversal manifested itself when CONAIE initiated the formation of Pachakutik/Nuevo País, a self-proclaimed political movement constituted by indigenous and non-indigenous organizations which sponsored its own candidates for public office.

In this paper, our aim is to describe, analyze and offer critical commentary on whether this recently adopted electoral strategy has been effective in furthering the interests of Ecuador's indigenous peoples. One central point to be elaborated in this essay is that there appears to be considerable diversity in what "indigenous interests" are and who really represents them.

The Contemporary Indigenous Movement: Popular Mobilization Strategy

The seeds of the modern indigenous movement, according to Bebbington et al. (1992), were planted with the application of national laws that authorized the formation of community organizations that can receive funds from the state for various development projects. Bebbington et al. report that from 1974 to 1990 the number of registered indigenous communities, associations, cooperatives and centros increased from 1,530 to 2,236. Usually with the assistance of other organizations, especially NGOs, groupings of these communities and cooperatives were formed into federations, usually within provinces. In some cases these community organizations and federations were indigenous-specific while in other cases they were representing campesinos or agricultural families. During this period, an important development was the formation of the Shuar Federation in the southern Oriente. Spreading through other areas of the Amazonian region and into the Sierra, the new direction was toward indigenous-based, indigenous-organized and indigenous-controlled local, regional and eventually national confederations.

As the regional organizations in the Oriente (CONFENIAE) and the Sierra (ECUARUNARI) formed and coalesced, it was apparent that though many of their demands or goals were similar to campesino/syndicalist organizations (land tenure and access, resource allocation from the state, protectionist policies, etc.) they were also pursuing a direct ethnic agenda: recognition of and respect for distinct indígena identities and nationalities. With the formation of the umbrella national confederation of indigenous peoples (CONAIE) in 1986, dual and perhaps conflicting agendas emerged in that there continued to be rhetoric regarding distinct nationalities (the number varies between 9 and 12 depending on the source) but also an effort at "pan-Indian" identity, at least in oppositional terms to the blanco-mestizo controlled state. Thus, it seems that through much of its development in the 1960s and 1970s, the indigenous movement

was very similar to, and in fact tied to, class-based leftist movements. The “new” aspect, clearly coming into focus by the early 1980s, was the ethnic agenda of reviving, and in some respects creating, a positive indigenous identity (for discussions of the formation of indigenous organizations see Becker: 1992, 1995; Salazar: 1981; Meisch: 1994; Zamosc: 1994; Guerrero: 1993; Candial: 1995).

With a strong base at the local levels, CONAIE was able to mobilize indígenas throughout the country with an apparent strategy of confronting the state and non-indigenous civil society with demands for the recuperation of indígena lands, culture, language, and collective or community rights. A major demand by indigenous organizations dating from the 1970's was for bilingual literacy. The battles for bilingual literacy climaxed successfully in 1989 during the presidency of Rodrigo Borja when direct negotiations between CONAIE's leadership and the Ministry of Culture and Education resulted in the establishment of bilingual education programs throughout the country (see Zamosc: 1994 and Selverston: 1997).

Beginning in 1990 with the CONAIE-led levantamiento by indigenous peoples from both the Oriente and the Sierra, CONAIE and its regional and base organizations relied heavily on a popular mobilization strategy whose tactics included mass demonstrations, the blocking of major highways with boulders and burning tires, the taking over, sometimes by force, of provincial and municipal seats of government, and paros, usually in the form of boycotting agricultural markets. These tactics also included a mass march in 1992 commemorating five hundred years of indigenous resistance which began in Puyo in the Oriente province of Pastaza, collecting along the way to Quito indígenas from dozens of communities in both the Oriente and the Sierra. The march culminated in an encampment in one of the major parks in Quito.

Mass demonstrations were again organized by CONAIE in response to a new, neo-liberal, export-oriented Agrarian Development Law proposed by President Sixto Durán Belén to the National Congress in 1993 which most indígenas perceived to be against their interests. While the law was eventually pushed through the back door, CONAIE organized more mass demonstrations and uprisings in 1994, claiming that the law was enacted unconstitutionally. The Supreme Court upheld CONAIE's claim regarding the unconstitutionality of the law, and CONAIE was ultimately successful in negotiating amendments to the law which incorporated many indigenous demands (Selverston: 1997).

Arguably, CONAIE's and other indigenous organizations' mass mobilization and direct negotiation strategy has been marked by noted successes. The indigenous movement -- free from the control over its identity, needs and destiny previously exercised by non-indigenous allies in an earlier period -- moved independently and aggressively to press its demands upon mestizo civil society and the state alike.

On the other hand, CONAIE's leadership shunned traditional political parties and elections, claiming that the parties neither understood nor had ever acted on behalf of indígena concerns. CONAIE also withheld support from all candidates for public office, going so far as to pass a 1995 resolution forbidding even its own leaders from holding public office (Becker: 1996). Luis Macas, at that time CONAIE's president, was approached as a possible vice-presidential candidate by several political parties prior to the 1996 elections. Spurning all such proposals, Macas announced in the fall of 1995 that he was a leader of the country's indígenas, not a politician (Becker: 1996).

In what has to be perceived as a sea change in CONAIE's position, Macas, at the end of January 1996, announced that he would be a candidate in the upcoming May elections for the office of national deputy in Ecuador's Congreso Nacional. His candidacy would be under the banner of a newly-created political movement called Pachakutik/Nuevo País, a coalition of indigenous and non-indigenous movements and organizations, including CONAIE.¹ According to several sources, the plans to create Pachakutik/Nuevo País were initiated by Oriente-based indígena organizations and had been underway for at least a year (Tamayo: 1995)²

Why this about face in regards to pursuing an electoral strategy?³ Though apparently met with resistance from the Sierra contingents of CONAIE, the Oriente indígena organizations, with Rafael Pandam and Valerio Grefa of CONFENIAE playing important leadership roles, pointed out that Ecuadorian law recognizes voting as a citizen's obligation rather than a right. Since, therefore, indígenas are compelled to vote, why should they cast their votes for traditional party candidates who have no interest in supporting indigenous aspirations? Moreover, other progressive social and political movements are equally ignored by the country's traditional parties. With CONAIE leading the way, Pachakutik/Nuevo País could become a powerful electoral vehicle for both indigenous and non-indigenous progressive causes, offering voters a credible alternative that could truly lead to a "nuevo país."⁴ In short, it seems that there were forceful arguments made during CONAIE meetings held in Pujilí, Cotopaxi, that convinced the majority of CONAIE's leadership that indigenous causes and aims could be furthered substantially by joining forces with non-indigenous progressive organizations and in pursuit of an electoral strategy.

¹ According to Milton Cáceres, a sociologist and director of the Escuela de Educación y Cultura Andina (part of the Universidad Estatal de Bolívar in Guaranda) whose mission is indígena empowerment through the bilingual training of both indígena and mestizo educators, Pachakutik is a mythic symbol based on the Inca Pachacutik. "Pacha" in quichua refers to time and space and their circular relationship. "kutik" implies change, often rapid and violent. Pachacutik, then, symbolizes indigenous hopes for significant change, quite loosely conceived in the Spanish, "nuevo país."

² According to one source, indígena groups from the Oriente had been urging the creation of an indigenous political movement/party since the 1990 Levantamiento, only to be overruled by the CONAIE's Sierra factions (Interview with Lcda. Virginia Alta, Secretaria General, Universidad Andina Simón Bolívar, Quito, Ecuador, August 12, 1998). There was consensus among the activists we interviewed regarding the central role played by the Oriente confederations in Pachakutik/Nuevo País's creation.

³ The following discussion relies heavily on interviews conducted by the authors in Ecuador between August 3 and August 13, 1998.

⁴ The divergent views held by the Oriente and Sierra indigenous organizations regarding the wisdom of an electoral strategy perhaps reflects one of many differences between indígenas of the two regions. Unlike the indígenas of the Sierra whose ancestors were colonized and oppressed by the Spanish and neo-colonized during the republican era, the Oriente indígenas have always claimed they were never colonized and have always been free peoples. Such a position may account for the willingness of the Oriente groups to jump into the electoral game. On the other hand, the colonial and neocolonial history of the Sierra indígenas makes them averse to embracing a strategy historically dominated by the oppressors of their forebearers.

The Electoral Strategy: Advancing Indigenous Causes?

Three short months after Luis Macas' stunning announcement, he and seven other Pachakutik/Nuevo País candidates won office as either national or provincial deputies in the Congreso Nacional. Although that number of deputies constituted slightly less than 10% of the total seats, it nonetheless represented the fourth largest bloc in the Congress and should be seen as a real accomplishment in light of the short time span between the official founding of Pachakutik/Nuevo País and the May elections, not to mention the sparse resources available for campaigning.⁵

But this electoral success must be viewed from the standpoint of the effectiveness of this strategy in achieving the goals of indigenous folk. For years, CONAIE has been enunciating various indígena "demands" to the state, claiming that indígenas have needs and aspirations that distinguish them from other groups in Ecuadorian society. These demands -- some basically cultural, some economic, others political (Meisch: 1994; Selverston: 1994) -- also carried with them the assumption that there existed a fundamental solidarity of identity and purpose among Ecuador's seemingly disparate indigenous peoples.⁶ Based on recent interviews by the authors with both Pachakutik and CONAIE activists and leaders, Pachakutik/Nuevo País was, from the outset, not simply the political arm of CONAIE. It was a political movement which was, itself, a disparate coalition of indigenous and non-indigenous social movements under the umbrella of La Coordinadora de Movimientos Sociales.

We will first address the issue of the problematic status of indígena solidarity in terms of the actions of Pachakutik/Nuevo País during the period of the 1996 and 1998 elections. In the 1996 elections indígenas competed for and won seats in the Congreso Nacional under the new Pachakutik/Nuevo País banner, and a non-indígena -- television personality Freddy Ehlers -- was the movement's presidential candidate.⁷ Ehlers failed to garner a sufficient number of votes in the May comicios to make the run-off, finishing third to Jaime Nebot of the Social Christian Party (PSC) and Abdalá Bucaram, former Guayaquil mayor and leader of the Ecuadorian Roldocista Party (PRE). The rightist PSC was never seen as a friend to the indígena cause. Bucaram, long accused of corruption during his stint as Guayaquil's mayor, ran a populist campaign, venturing out into the hinterlands. Characterized as "El Loco" by the press and the intelligentsia, Bucaram

⁵ According to one newspaper account, Pachakutik/Nuevo País was successful in electing 76 candidates to the Congress and as mayors and councilmen, winning seven of every ten races it entered (Escobar: 1996).

⁶ Previous research by the present authors raised questions about how solid this solidarity really is (Mijeski and Beck: 1997).

⁷ Valerio Grefa, a leader of the Coordinating Committee of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin and a participant in the creation of Pachakutik, said that the movement would not sponsor indigenous candidates for the presidency and vice-presidency but would seek alliances with political forces that "accept and share our ideological principles and governmental program." (Tamayo: 1995)

nevertheless easily defeated Nebot, winning lopsided victories in provinces purportedly heavily populated by indígenas.⁸

Ehlers' failure to reach the runoffs led to the first major split within the indigenous movement since CONAIE decided to pursue an electoral strategy. And this division occurred a scant four months after that decision was publicly disclosed. After Ehler's defeat in the May elections, Pachakutik/Nuevo País refused to endorse either Bucaram or Nebot (*Hoy*, June 12, 1996). In June, Valerio Grefa, supposedly speaking for Oriente indigenous organizations, unilaterally announced that Pachakutik was supporting Abdalá Bucaram's bid for the presidency, which elicited harsh criticism from both Ehlers and CONAIE. In apparent retaliation to that criticism, Grefa further announced that Pachakutik was severing relations with Nuevo País, that part of the movement's coalition comprised of non-indigenous popular sectors and organizations. Moreover, according to one newspaper account, Grefa dissolved Pachakutik's relations with CONAIE (*Hoy*, June 13, 1996).⁹

The rupture between the Oriente factions and CONAIE continued after Bucaram's victory in July. Luis Macas' resignation from CONAIE's presidency in order to run for the congress left a vacant leadership seat and opened the door to a power struggle within CONAIE. According to one report, Rafael Pandam, a Shuar affiliated with CONFENIAE and one of the original proponents of Pachakutik/Nuevo País, and Valerio Grefa pressed President Bucaram to create a new ministry of ethnic affairs (González: 1996). Bucaram moved quickly to create it, appointing Pandam as minister and Grefa as Subsecretary. CONAIE strongly opposed the creation of the ministry, seeing it as a move by Bucaram to consolidate his popularity and divide the indigenous movement. CONAIE's Nina Pacari also accused Grefa and Pandam of ignoring CONAIE's resolution and of "following their own personal interests." (González: 1996)¹⁰

Tensions between Oriente and Sierra groups appeared to peak over the issue of selecting Macas's successor as CONAIE's president. CONAIE held its 1996 Congress in Saraguro, Macas' home. The Sierra faction -- which had controlled CONAIE's leadership positions in the past --

⁸ We use the term "purportedly" deliberately given the lack of an agreed upon concept of who is and who is not an indígena in Ecuador. Estimates as to the indigenous percentage of the country's population vary from about 10% to more than half (see, inter alia, Knapp: 1991; Zamosc, 1995; Pacari, 1996). The authors have tentatively concluded that the estimated size of the indigenous population varies directly with the political agenda of the estimator (Beck & Mijeski: 1997 and Beck: 1998). Notwithstanding that conclusion, The authors are attempting to obtain cantonal level electoral data for the 1996 and the 1998 elections from the Tribunal Supremo Electoral which should provide for a more precise estimate of who voted for whom.

⁹ A much softer "spin" regarding the change in the Pachakutik-CONAIE relationship was provided by Arturo Yumbay, CONAIE's current vice-president, who simply said that it was decided that Pachakutik would be autonomous from CONAIE (Authors' interview, August 11, 1998, Quito).

¹⁰ Conflicts between Oriente indigenous organizations and CONAIE have surfaced over other issues also. For example, in 1993 the U.S.-based Maxus petroleum company succeeded in winning the support of the Huaorani Nation of the Ecuadorian Amazon (ONHAE), despite CONAIE's demand for a fifteen year moratorium on oil exploration (Jochnick: 1995).

elected José María Cabascango of ECUARUNARI.¹¹ Meanwhile, the Oriente faction elected one of its own, Antonio Vargas Huatatoca, a leader of the Organización de Pueblos Indígenas de Pastaza (OPIP). The Congress ended contentiously. The day before it reconvened in Quito, CONAIE's headquarters were taken over by Shuar-controlled military commandos (*Hoy*: January 16, 1997). This threat to the integrity and solidarity of CONAIE was finally resolved with the Sierra faction acquiescing to the Oriente's presidential choice of Antonio Vargas. Arturo Yumbay, of the Sierra province of Bolívar, was selected as CONAIE's vice-president.

Bucaram's Demise

Abdalá "El Loco" Bucaram, on the heels of massive civic protests -- participated in by CONAIE and its affiliates -- was ousted from office in February 1997 by the Congreso Nacional on the charge of mental incompetence (i.e., corruption), plunging the country into a political and economic crisis. An interim government was formed with Fabian Alarcón as president. According to many, Alarcón's interim administration -- which came to an end on August 10, 1998 -- was even more corrupt than that of his ill-starred predecessor.¹²

After Bucaram was deposed, the interim president called a popular referendum to be held on May 25, 1997. The referendum included a question regarding whether or not the country's political constitution should be amended. The results revealed that a majority favored reforming it. The Congress, under much pressure from CONAIE, Pachakutik/Nuevo País and other popular movements and organizations, called for the formation of a National Constituent Assembly (Asamblea Nacional) to be elected by the people and to be charged with reforming the constitution.

The Politics of the Asamblea Nacional: Indigenous Solidarity Challenged

One of CONAIE's perennial demands was for a reform to the first article of Ecuador's Constitution, explicitly saying that Ecuador was a multicultural and multinational state (un estado pluricultural y plurinacional)(Meisch: 1994). On one hand, therefore, CONAIE had a vested interest in participating in the Asamblea Nacional. But the dominant political forces and traditional parties first delayed the elections for the Asamblea Nacional and then manipulated the manner in which asambleistas were to be elected, how long it was to exist, and the way it was to be structured (NotiSur: August 15, 1997). As a form of protest, CONAIE and other progressive organizations formed an alternative body, the Asamblea Nacional Popular, which convened on October 12, 1997 for a period of three weeks. The purpose was to revise the entire Constitution and to present it to the public before the official Asamblea completed its work.

In early November, the National Congress, in an apparent effort to make an end run around the constitution-making process, hurriedly passed reforms to the Constitution. In response, CONAIE, along with state workers and students, staged a day of protests. The reforms

¹¹ Cabascango is currently the coordinator for the Pachakutik/Nuevo País delegation in the Congreso Nacional.

¹² There seemed to be consensus on this position among the diverse group of people we interviewed during the first half of August 1998.

were designed to facilitate privatization of state enterprises and included a ban on strikes by public sector employees. CONAIE claimed that the congressional action usurped the prerogative of the Asamblea and Ivan Narváz, a leader of the oil workers union, said that "the passage of these laws can only be seen as an act of desperation to privatize and to mock the will of the citizens" (NotiSur: December 12, 1997).

Both protests -- one against the machinations of the dominant parties regarding the Asamblea, the other against Congress' manipulation of the constitutional reform process -- provided CONAIE and its allies a common focus, a common enemy, helping to maintain solidarity in the ranks. On one hand, CONAIE was successful in preparing a new Constitution which, according to Antonio Vargas, would "take into account the proposals and needs of the diverse population of Ecuador ... [and] guarantee the democratic participation of indigenous nationalities and other social groups of Ecuador" (Vargas: September 1997). On the other hand, the Asamblea Nacional Popular revealed even more cleavages within the ranks of the indigenous movement.

At the outset, delegate Ricardo Ulcuango, president of ECUARUNARI, demanded the immediate resignation of interim president Fabian Alarcón, the dissolution of the "official" Asamblea Nacional, and the removal of all judges recently elected to the Supreme Court. Nina Pacari, CONAIE's Director of Legal Affairs and Pachakutik/Nuevo País candidate to the "official" constitutional assembly, skillfully deflected Ulcuango's radical demands, saying only that the issues he raised were important ones and deserved consideration (*El Comercio*, October 13, 1997). CONAIE had expected to find solidarity among indígenas on the issue of privatization of state enterprises and the role of the state in the economy. Yet on the final day of the Asamblea Nacional Popular, the rank-and-file broke ranks with the leadership. The committee responsible for addressing this issue included Pachakutik congressional deputy Napoleón Saltos and Pachakutik economic theorist Alberto Acosta. According to Luis Ordóñez who presided over the committee, the majority of the 85 indígenas and workers insisted on a much more extensive role for the state than did Saltos' and Acosta's proposal, demanding, among other things, that the budget of the national government dedicate "no less than 30% of its budget for education and the eradication of illiteracy, no less than 15% for health and 15% for municipal and provincial councils" (*El Comercio*, October 18, 1997).

Even when it appeared that a consensus could be readily grasped, such as amending article one of the Constitution to recognize Ecuador as multinational, multiethnic, and multicultural, and where both Spanish and Quichua were acknowledged as national languages, dissension raised its head. Achuar delegates, for example, demanded explicit recognition in the Constitution for their nationality and their language (*El Comercio*: October 18, 1997). Finally, the "people's" constitutional assembly exposed real disagreements regarding participation in the "official" Asamblea Nacional.¹³ While CONAIE did not take part directly in the official Asamblea

¹³ Milton Cáceres, Director of the bilingual and educator training program, the Escuela de Educación y Cultura Andina of the Universidad Estatal de Bolívar in Guaranda, and many of his students participated in the "alternative" Asamblea. According to Cáceres, a serious split took place regarding the role of Pachakutik/Nuevo País in the "official" Asamblea. Cáceres was part of the more radical faction which urged Pachakutik/Nuevo País to resist participating in the official constitutional assembly. The other faction -- the dominant one -- opted for participation (Interview with Cáceres, August 5, 1998).

Nacional, it did engage in lobbying efforts and via participation by CONAIE activists such as Director of Legal Affairs, Nina Pacari, who represented Pachakutik/Nuevo País. Perhaps CONAIE's decision to abstain from direct participation was prescient. Of the seventy seats in the Asamblea, the traditional parties of the center-right or right controlled the majority. Delegates of the rightist Social Christian Party (PSC) held 21 of 70 seats, and they, along with Popular Democracy (DP) and the Radical Alfarist-Liberal Front (FRA) formed an alliance at the outset which guaranteed conservative control of the Asamblea's leadership positions (*El Telégrafo*, December 21, 1997).

Beyond the reality of a conservative-dominated constitutional reform process, the history of the Asamblea Nacional was one of coalition making and coalition breaking. Pachakutik, along with the Socialists (PSE), the Roldocistas (PRE, the party of ousted President Bucaram), the Democratic Left (ID), the Popular Democratic Movement (MPD) and representatives of some social movements, formed the Patriotic Convergence which became the minority bloc on the left. But these blocs waxed and waned repeatedly, depending on the issue.¹⁴ A despondent Luis Macas -- CONAIE member, Pachakutik deputy in the National Congress and member of the Asamblea Nacional -- was not optimistic about the work of the Asamblea regarding recognition of Ecuador as a multinational country and attention to greater participation by grassroots organizations. "[N]o advances," said Macas, "will be made regarding incorporating these issues into the Constitution" (NotiSur: December 12, 1997).¹⁵

There was, in fact, majority opposition to amending Article One of the Constitution to recognize Ecuador as a multinational state. The revised article does, however, recognize the Ecuadorian state as "pluricultural y multiétnico." In addition, one of the Pachakutik/Nuevo País asambleistas from Bolívar province pointed out that, despite the failure to amend Article One in that regard, the essence of multinationalism was acknowledged in Title III (Of rights, guarantees and obligations), chapter five (collective rights), Article 83, which states that "the indigenous peoples, who define themselves as nationalities from ancestral races, and the black or afro-ecuadorian peoples, form part of the Ecuadorian State..." (Constitución Política de la República del Ecuador, published by *El Universo*, June 21, 1998)¹⁶

The Road to the 1998 Elections: Turbulence in the Mainstream

The tired cliché, "politics makes strange bedfellows," was reinvigorated in the scramble to forge alliances for the May elections. The instability and widespread strategic disagreements after the impeachment and removal of Bucaram (and numerous congressmen), the delays and

¹⁴ Even relatively inconsequential issues such as the number of vice-presidents the Asamblea should have failed to achieve solidarity on the left. Pachakutik proposed three and the Socialists recommended two. Pachakutik's proposal was defeated by a vote of 39 to 31 (*El Telégrafo*, December 21, 1997).

¹⁵ Other indígenas were even more critical of the politics of elections and the politics of the Asamblea Nacional. According to news reports, about 2,000 indígenas in Riobamba founded the Movimiento Revolucionario Jatarishun (MRJ) on October 11, 1997. A communique from the organization described the MRJ as revolutionary and distinguished the group from other organizations "that are using indígenas as electoral criteria" (*El Comercio*, October 11, 1997, internet edition).

¹⁶ Interview with Ing. Gabriel Galarza López, Guaranda, August 3, 1998.

entanglements of the Asamblea Nacional, as well as legal issues, produced a short but frenetic campaign season in 1998. There continued to be real uneasiness among the factions of the indígena organizations and their various allies.

At the national level, it appeared that the Movimiento de Unidad Plurinacional Pachakutik Nuevo País, as it was renamed, was in search of both a leader and strategic alliances with established parties. In the case of the province of Bolívar, there was an effort to both extend the movement to all of the province's cantons, while at the same time apparently consolidating the leadership positions. Freddy Ehlers -- Pachakutik/Nuevo País' presidential standard bearer during the 1996 elections but later abandoned by the Oriente indigenous groups -- once again found himself at the center of controversy, exposing other fissures within the indigenous movement.¹⁷

In mid-March an extensive report in the newspaper *El Comercio* (March 14, 1998) makes it clear that leaders of Pachakutik were searching for a left-of-center front, especially in terms of one presidential/vice-presidential team that could effectively challenge front-runner Jamil Mahuad of Democracia Popular. While on the one hand "threatening" to collect the 150,000 required signatures to register Luis Macas as their own presidential candidate, movement leaders were also attempting to promote Paco Moncayo, a recently retired General and hero of the 1995 border war with Peru, as the presidential candidate for Izquierda Democrática instead of former president Rodrigo Borja whom many indigenous and movement leaders resented for past policies and actions. This effort by Pachakutik leaders for a united broad left front did not work as Borja went forward as the presidential candidate and Moncayo agreed to head the list of candidates for national deputies of Izquierda Democrática. Freddy Ehlers was already campaigning for president under the banner of his own movement created after 1996, Ciudadanos de Nuevo País (Citizens for a New Country), with or without the backing of Pachakutik or any other organized movements.

This period also witnessed other splits both within the Pachakutik movement and between certain segments of the movement and CONAIE. The Oriente faction of Pachakutik seemed to be pushing the Moncayo candidacy while CONAIE and the Sierra contingents were the ones pushing for Macas. As if to underline the Pachakutik-CONAIE differences, Antonio Vargas, CONAIE's president, added that "we will maintain our own strategy in the future...CONAIE is autonomous of Pachakutik..." (*El Comercio*, February 28, 1998). In a further sign that all was not blissful solidarity within Pachakutik, National Congress deputy Napoleón Saltos announced that Pachakutik was maintaining dialogues with Ehlers as a possible presidential candidate in its efforts to forge a solid left-of-center electoral front.

By late March, no effort had been made by Pachakutik to register Macas or any other presidential candidate for the movement. There were still three sectors or divisions within the movement: one that desired to align with Borja and the Democratic Left (ID), another that preferred Ehlers who had recently made an alliance with the small socialist party (PSE), and a third that eschewed any alliances, at least regarding a presidential candidate. Given these machinations, it is not surprising that the leadership of CONAIE was publicly making attempts to

¹⁷ From the perspective of the president of Pachakutik in the Bolívar province and that province's Pachakutik representative to the Asamblea Nacional, Ehlers wanted the freedom to control his 1998 presidential campaign and refused to be held accountable to the demands of Pachakutik (Authors' interviews, August 3, 1998, Guaranda).

distance itself from Pachakutik and searching for its own "social identity." For example, in March of 1998 CONAIE co-sponsored a public workshop on indigenous peoples with the Catholic Church and the Inter-American Development Bank (*El Comercio*: March 9, 1998). In essence, CONAIE has been making efforts to establish connections with various organizations and groups in the pursuit of social and economic development programs that are not tied to the political movement.¹⁸

On the other hand, at other points during the campaign CONAIE and Pachakutik seemed to be hand-in-glove. In January 1998, for example, CONAIE, in a meeting of its general assembly, sided with the Oriente faction of Pachakutik by clearly rejecting Ehlers as a candidate for the presidency (*El Comercio*: January 13, 1998). Two short months later, José María Cabascango, the coordinator of Pachakutik, and Antonio Vargas, CONAIE's president, together announced their total support for Ehlers, with Pachakutik entering into a coalition with Freddy Ehlers' Movimiento Ciudadanos de Nuevo País and the Socialist Party for the presidential ticket as well as the list of twenty candidates for national deputies (*El Telégrafo*: March 21, 1998).¹⁹ Ehlers recruited the well known and respected socialist León Roldós, former Vice-President under Osvaldo Hurtado, to head the list of national deputies and Dr. Nina Pacari was placed second, representing Pachakutik in this national alliance.

The national leaders did not attempt to forge common lists at the provincial level, something that would not have been successful at any rate. In fact, an analysis of the province-level lists for congress indicate that the official national-level coalition of Ehlers' Nuevo Pais, Pachakutik and Socialists was not widely followed. Out of the 22 provinces in Ecuador, only eight had candidate lists representing a coalition of the three parties/movements. In many of the remaining provinces Pachakutik presented their own candidates, in a few they did align with the socialists but not with Ehlers' movement, in Azuay (Ehlers' home province) they aligned with both the socialists and Izquierda Democrática in a public rejection of Ehlers and his movement. And in the strangest of local alliances Pachakutik supported the candidates of the centrist Democracia Popular in the Oriente province of Pastaza.²⁰

In our interviews with Pachakutik activists in the Bolívar province it was clear that the local leadership did not support Ehlers or his movement, though some of the successful candidates for cantonal councils had positive views of the presidential candidate. This is a specific indicator of what appears to have been widespread in the elections of 1998: dissension and particularism, both within Pachakutik and between Pachakutik and CONAIE; top-down decision-making by Pachakutik and CONAIE; failure of both organizations to mobilize and engage their respective membership base in electoral strategies or tactics, resulting in splits between the national leadership and the rank-and-file.

¹⁸ Arturo Yumbay, Vice-President of CONAIE, reiterated this effort in a personal interview with the authors (August 11 and 13, 1998, Quito).

¹⁹ Each recognized political party or movement participating in the 1998 election submitted a list of twenty candidates for the twenty national deputy seats available.

²⁰ In two coastal provinces, Guayas and Esmeraldas, and in the Oriente province of Sucumbios the Pachakutik movement did not even offer candidates in the congressional elections.

The May Elections: A Disappointment for Pachakutik

In the May 31 election Jamil Mahuad of Democracia Popular placed first in the presidential contest with approximately 35% of the valid votes and would be joined in a run-off with Alvaro Noboa (27% of the votes), perhaps the richest man in Ecuador but who represented populist parties such as the Partido Roldocista Ecuatoriano. Borja of Izquierda Democrática was third with almost 16% of the valid votes and Ehlers finished a disappointing fourth with slightly more than 14% of the vote. Though some people argued that Borja and Ehlers split the left-of-center vote, it is doubtful that even if only one had run that they would have superceded Noboa to gain a run-off spot. Though it cannot be empirically tested, given Ehlers' vote total, there is little doubt that he did not garner much support from indígenas despite the official national-level endorsement of Pachakutik.²¹

The voting for national deputies was by bloc or party (“en plancha”) and as noted previously Pachakutik was in coalition with Freddy Ehlers' Movimiento de Ciudadanos Nuevo Pais and the Partido Socialista-Frente Amplia. This coalition received slightly less than 10% of the valid votes, which resulted in the first two listed candidates being awarded congressional seats, León Roldós and Nina Pacari. At the provincial level there were five candidates elected that were either solely representing Pachakutik or were part of the coalition. Three of the new congressmen represent Sierra provinces (Bolívar, Imbabura and Cotopaxi) and the other two represent the Oriente provinces of Morona Santiago and Napo. Rafael Sancho was elected as one of the two congressmen from the Oriente province of Pastaza in the unlikely coalition of Democracia Popular and Pachakutik but he is really aligned with the former. Also, in the Sierra province of Cañar Leonidas Pacheco was elected under the coalition banner of Ciudadanos Nuevo Pais - Socialista but not Pachakutik.

Overall, even counting the Guayaquil socialist Roldós, the indigenous-based Pachakutik movement has seven congressional representatives out of an expanded congress of 121 (about 6%) which is less than its initial showing in 1996 of eight out of 82 (about 10%). One indicator of the difficulties that the Pachakutik movement faced in the 1998 elections is that three of the deputies elected in 1996 who attempted re-election did not garner sufficient votes: Miguel Lluco of Chimborazo, Washington Saltos of Pichincha, and Luis Macas in his home province of Loja who entered late after his four-year term as a national deputy was cut short.

Confusion and dissension continued during the runoff period within the Pachakutik movement. While some leaders seemed willing to consider an endorsement of Mahuad for president, others preferred to simply stay out of the presidential contest. Based on preliminary electoral data, and impressions of people we interviewed in August 1998, a large proportion of the indigenous voting population decided not to vote or to nullify their ballots in the July 12 runoff election. Of those who did vote, it is quite possible that -- as they apparently did in the 1996 runoff -- half or more voted for the PRE candidate: Guayaquil billionaire-cum-Bucaram populist Alvaro Noboa.

In July the newly elected deputies and the national directorate of Pachakutik entered into an agreement to form a legislative bloc called the Concertación Progresista with Izquierda

²¹ As mentioned previously, we are trying to obtain data at the cantonal level from the Tribunal Supremo Electoral (TSE) for both the 1996 and the 1998 elections.

Democrática, Nuevo País and the Socialists (*El Comercio*: July 11, 1998). However, in an interesting tactical turn, the Pachakutik deputies abandoned this bloc to vote with Democracia Popular and more conservative factions in the first action of the new Congress, electing a president of that body. In return for Pachakutik's support of DP's Juan José Pons for President of Congress, Pachakutik's Nina Pacari was selected as second vice-president. While various strategic and tactical alliances may be necessary for the Pachakutik movement, such maneuvers may also create the impression of politics-as-usual among the indigenous and popular base of this movement. Relevant to this latter possibility is the opinion of a long-time, and cynical, ID politician from Bolívar who lamented that the once promising Pachakutik movement was becoming just another political party.

Discussion and Conclusions

Social movements, including ethnic-based movements, grow and decline, solidify and rupture, strengthen and weaken with the passage of time and with changing circumstances, both within and outside the movements. During these various changes that a movement experiences, both the goals and means used to achieve them are also likely to change. It is our contention that the difficult task of maintaining solidarity in the indigenous movement is revealing itself by a widening of the means through which noticeable progress can be achieved. In other words, the political movement Pachakutik can be viewed as the outgrowth of continuing strains and pressures within organizations such as CONAIE to advance their corporate, and in some cases, individual interests.

Through the formation of CONAIE in the mid-1980s dedicated leaders and activists, at first through a strategy of political mobilization for taking politics to the street along with direct negotiations with the country's political leadership, have been able to create both a political space and a degree of social awareness and, to some extent, acceptance in Ecuador for the needs and desires of indigenous peoples. This itself is a significant achievement. Through various civil actions, both CONAIE and regional indigenous organizations have at times been able to accomplish other lasting advances; two cases in point being widespread though underfunded bilingual education programs and the significant modification of the 1994 agrarian reform bill.

There is little doubt, however, that two of the most central goals for the indigenous organizations show little evidence of being achieved. First, what solidarity and militancy there has been among indígenas in Ecuador has been based around the economic goals of increased land holdings and, more generally, improved standards of living.²² However, one thing that is apparent to both indígenas and non-indígenas alike in Ecuador is that most people, and especially rural inhabitants, are not living better now than they were 10 or 15 years ago.²³

²² Anthropologist Lynn Meisch argued regarding CONAIE's various goals for indigenous folk that "[t]he demand for genuine land reform is the glue that binds the indigenous movement. Many indígenas do not have a clue, and could care less, about the rest of CONAIE's agenda" (Meisch: 1994, p. 58).

²³ Recent data collected by the Centro de Estudios y Análisis and published in the Quito daily, *El Comercio*, reported that more than half of Ecuador's population is poor with 20% of them living in extreme poverty. Moreover, the data reveal, indígenas fair even worse: 74% of them are poor with 37% living in

A second major goal of the indigenous movement has been explicit recognition by the state that specific indigenous nationalities exist and have separate identities. This is the "plurinacional" agenda and, as previously discussed, even after the Constitutional reforms of 1998, this term is not used in describing the Republic of Ecuador. While politicians and analysts point out that the collective rights of indigenous and afro-ecuadorian peoples have been recognized in the 1998 Constitution, it is clear to most, including indigenous peoples themselves, that a major goal has not been achieved.

As we discussed previously, the indigenous movement, mainly via CONAIE, pursued its goals by adopting a popular mobilization strategy whose tactics were extra-parliamentary. Electoral politics of any kind were avoided and, on occasion, explicitly proscribed. In light of the failure to accomplish major material as well as symbolic solidarity goals, the increased pressures, primarily from the ranks of the Oriente-based indígenas to pursue an electoral strategy through the creation of the Pachakutik political movement in late 1995 and early 1996, can be viewed as an earnest attempt to devise new means to achieve those goals.

On the other hand, there is the possibility that a central driving force behind the creation and advancement of Pachakutik were pressures to create avenues for personal advancement and the various rewards possible with political careers, as Nina Pacari accused Valerio Grefa and Rafael Pandam in relation to their support for Bucaram and a Ministry of Ethnic Affairs. Beyond that episode, it is apparent that there are a growing number of well-educated, hard-working and ambitious indigenous leaders, and one way of creating additional opportunities is to enter the mainstream political system, not only as elected officials but by way of related posts such as advisors, coordinators, and mid-level bureaucrats in both governmental and quasi-governmental agencies.

This maturation of not only the relationship between a social movement and the state, but also of the leadership in terms of years of service and knowledge of the workings of the system, does not necessarily mean that the interests of the rank-and-file will be discarded, but it certainly is a possibility. The conceivable emergence of a professional political class out of the indigenous movement has been recognized, and criticized, by others. For example, Segundo Moreno of the Catholic University in Quito was quoted as saying "...regional and historic differences between Indians are now augmented by ... 'the emerging Indian bourgeoisie' -- political leaders who have risen to prominence and are now removed from their poor, and powerless, brethren" (Escobar: 1996).

For the near-term future of the indigenous movement, what are the possibilities in regard to the electoral strategy reflected in the Pachakutik movement? From our vantage point, there are both promises and pitfalls. The promises are contingent upon two things: first, that Pachakutik really does become a broad-based, poor people's movement that is national in scope and second, that the current leadership can continue to recruit activists that are involved with the base. If these things occur then Pachakutik may be able to wield substantial power in the context of a political system seemingly always mired in petty skirmishes among the powers-that-be by mobilizing support not only at election time but during critical junctures of state action.

One small but positive piece of evidence in this regard is what occurred in the canton of

extreme poverty (*El Comercio*: August 10, 1998, B7).

Caluma in the Bolívar province in the May 1998 elections. Two of the three council seats were won by Pachakutik candidates in an area where there are virtually no indígenas, but plenty of poor mestizos. Of course one explanation for this is that the two men recruited to run are highly-respected, well-known physicians who have posts in the positively-viewed provincial university and that they would have won regardless of the party/movement banner they represented.

Also, it is troubling that Pachakutik has no presence, and in fact offered no candidates in the provinces of Guayas or Esmeraldas in 1998. Guayas is the most populous province in Ecuador and certainly has its share of poor and dispossessed people, and Esmeraldas is approximately half black, the large majority of whom are poor. If a political movement that purports to represent the needs and desires of all "popular sectors", not just among indígenas, cannot make inroads in these areas, there seems little chance of the movement having a significant impact at the national level.

There are also pitfalls in regard to the potential impact of Pachakutik activities on the specific goals and efforts of the indigenous movement. One danger is linked to the electoral success of Pachakutik, the other to electoral failure. If Pachakutik is successful at the local, regional and even the national level in electing representatives the hazards are twofold: the temptation and at times necessity of substantial compromise and questionable alliance-making that may produce dwindling enthusiasm among activists and the rank-and-file and secondly, a possible weakening of CONAIE and other base organizations due to a perception that civic actions are no longer necessary. In other words, mainstream success at some level may weaken the ability of leaders to mobilize people who come to believe that voting is enough. The more obvious danger involved in electoral failure (which we would define as a decrease in the number of elected representatives at the various levels from what exists in 1998) is discouragement and discontent among leaders and activists that spreads through organizations such as CONAIE and the province-level structures, with a consequence similar to electoral success: inability to energize and mobilize the base.

There is a corollary danger stemming from success at the polls to furthering indigenous endeavors. Insofar as Pachakutik continues to be much more than a movement of indígenas, victory at the ballot box may translate into the pursuit of objectives which fail to speak to the distinctive indígena needs and ambitions for which CONAIE and its predecessor confederations have struggled for decades. In this event, CONAIE, if it continues to support Pachakutik candidates, may either be forced to renege on its claims to proprietary indigenous necessities or pressure non-indígena Pachakutik politicians to support specifically indígena goals. Such may already be the case in the canton of Caluma in the Bolívar province where mestizo councilmen represent a region almost bereft of indígenas.

In conclusion, Pachakutik, born from indígena initiatives in 1995, saw itself as a movement to advance the causes of indígenas and non-indígenas alike. While this is still a possibility, the occurrences of the past two years, deeply involving indigenous aims in mainstream electoral politics, do not inexorably point in that direction. Cleavages between the base and the leadership and among much of the leadership itself, open dissension, unlikely and even bizarre political alliances, and the possible submersion of so-called indigenous needs in the face of a more diverse constituency may result in the failure of the electoral strategy. Moreover, and ironically, the possible breakdown of the electoral strategy could frustrate rather than fulfill the aspirations the indigenous movement has struggled mightily to attain for decades. As we pointed out in this paper, CONAIE officials have maintained that CONAIE is separate from Pachakutik and will

continue to pursue indigenous claims and goals apart from the politics of the mainstream into which Pachakutik has inserted itself. From our observations thus far, this approach seems notably prudent.

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