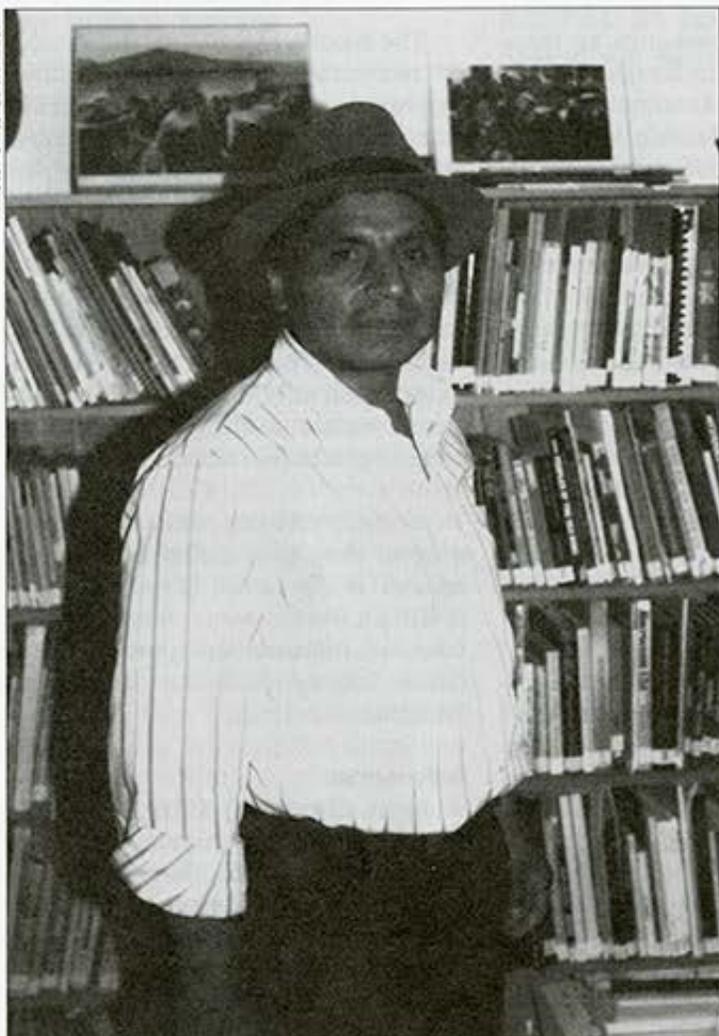


Photo: Guilles Combrisson



Luis Macas during a recent visit to SAIIIC.

Pachakutik- Nuevo País:

Breaking New Ground in Ecuadorean Politics

In an historic moment, Luis Macas, former president of CONAIE (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador) ran as a candidate to the National Congress in Ecuador's last presidential elections and won a seat as National Deputy on the Pachakutik-Nuevo País (New Country) ticket. This was the first time in recent Ecuadorian history that an Indigenous leader sought election to a national office. In this interview, we talk with Luis Macas about CONAIE and the future of the Indigenous movement in Ecuador.

Interview with **Luis Macas**

In general, could you evaluate the election process from the point of view of the Indigenous winners—not just the significance of the number of votes, but also of this election and of the participation of Indigenous candidates?

For the Indigenous movement it is an extremely valuable experience. We have experienced triumph and gains in many forms. First, the increased coverage of the Indigenous movement's struggle, the extension of the Indigenous movement's political realm to other social sectors, and the formation of the Movimiento Unidad-Plurinacional Pachakutic-Nuevo País.

For us, this is a move forward. Now, Indigenous peoples are not alone, but united with workers, Afro-Ecuadorians, women, youth, professionals, teachers, human rights workers, and the grassroots Christian community. That is to say, all the inhabitants of our country who anxiously want change, transformation, and better days for our nation and people.

The fact we will forge this great movement, achieving the unity of Ecuadorian peoples, is really a triumph. For us, it means an historic step. It signifies having initiated a different process in the country, and one that is unique in Latin America. I would say this time we believe we have gained a lot.

Our fundamental objective was to consolidate a social base in our country. We wanted to consolidate a strategic base of Ecuadorian peoples for the near and long range future. You have to remember we had an absolute disadvantage facing political parties of the right, parties that have invested millions of dollars in their campaigns: the Social Christian Party, the Roldosista Ecuadorian Party, the Popular Democracy party, the Conservative Party, and the party led by Mr. Noboa. All have invested money, and what they want is to get back, with interest, their investments in the political campaigns. However, they are not the only ones who personally make investments but also other businessmen. I would say

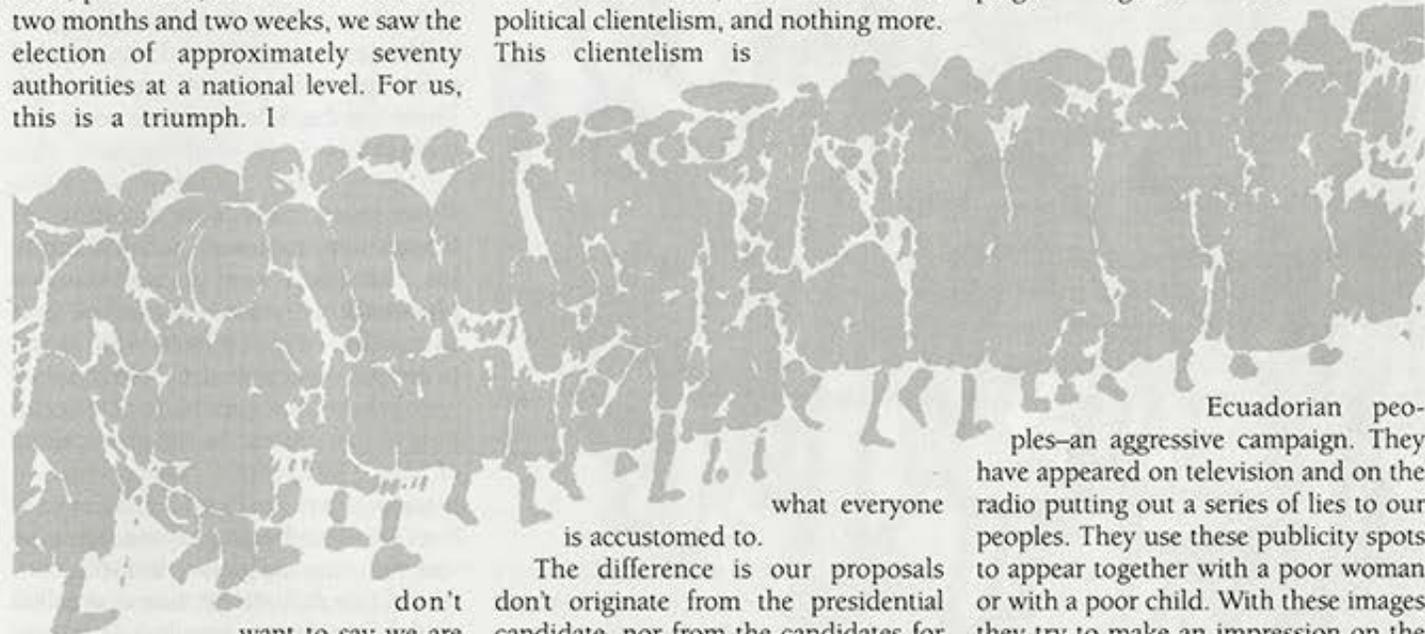
this is how corruption in electoral campaigns begins. Once they are in power, the debts accumulated by the electoral machine have to be paid to the businessmen. In this last election, it was an incredible machine, as never before in the history of Ecuador.

We were also at a disadvantage concerning time, but the Indigenous candidates quickly achieved a national presence with people in positions at a local, provincial, and national level. In two months and two weeks, we saw the election of approximately seventy authorities at a national level. For us, this is a triumph. I

mean between a traditional campaign and the traditional form in which the political parties have driven their electoral campaigns. First, we focused on content. It was obvious to rely on the candidates at a local, provincial and national level. We favored a government program. We didn't want to imitate the traditional political ways: the cheap offers to the Ecuadorian people in an attempt to convince them and attract their votes, the discourse of political clientelism, and nothing more. This clientelism is

Ecuadorian people a government program. Everyone has to submit to what they think. There is no consultation about the needs of the people, the community. So that's another difference. Theirs is an individual effort, the work of an aristocracy that scorns the people.

Another difference is in electoral spending. They have spent millions of dollars in this electoral process. In my opinion they raised an offensive campaign against the



don't want to say we are in second or third place. We believe we are the first political force at a national level. Ours is a political force that isn't necessarily sponsored by any political party. Civil society expressed its political will with decision. I would say that in this game the Indigenous movement has played an important role. Before the convoking of the Indigenous movement, all the social forces, all the popular forces of our country decided to organize a national minga (communal work) to build something different, something that hasn't been seen in the history of our patria.

What were some of the differences between the campaigning style of the Pachakutik movement and that of the traditional political parties? How did you implement the campaign?

There is a radical difference in

what everyone is accustomed to.

The difference is our proposals don't originate from the presidential candidate, nor from the candidates for deputies. Our proposals come from the people. We have been working on them for years. They are a collective effort, a collective force. They are the

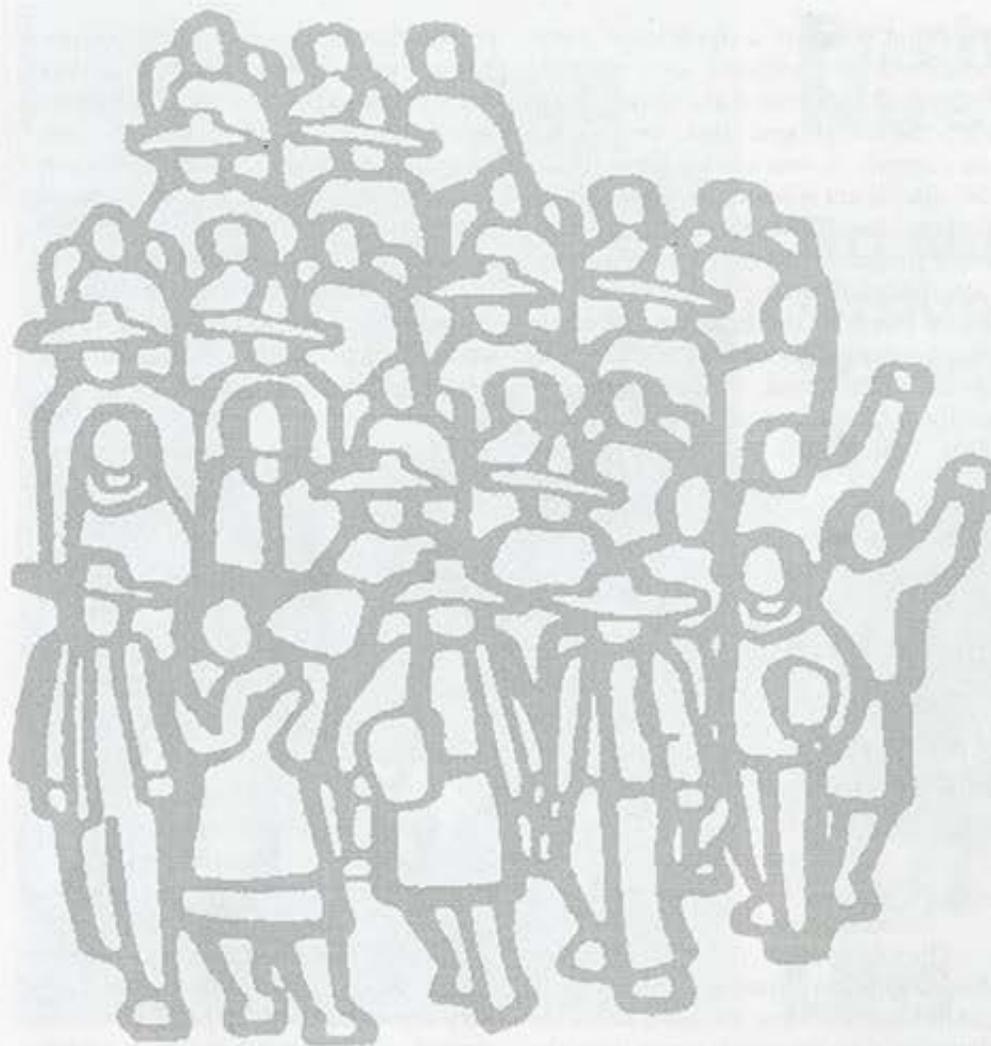
Ecuadorian peoples—an aggressive campaign. They have appeared on television and on the radio putting out a series of lies to our peoples. They use these publicity spots to appear together with a poor woman or with a poor child. With these images they try to make an impression on the people. Also, the other urban sectors that see them are definitely affected. It may not reach the majority of the people, but it reaches a wide social sector

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result of uprisings, struggles, and the marches of our peoples. This then transforms itself into a political proposal, into a government program. This isn't how Mr. Nebot proceeded, who only presented his political proposal, or Mr. Rodrigo Paz. What they do is sit down at a desk with their two specialists, write whatever, and show the

of the country. If we had to describe our country right now, we would say that there it is absolutely covered in paint. The walls, trees, rocks, and paths are covered with posters. Everything is covered.

We can observe the differences in the campaign proceedings. There are posters everywhere. Where did this



money come from, we ask ourselves? These expenses? There, I would say, is where the corruption of the politics of our country is initiated. The aristocrats of national politics have an understanding of political work. What, for me, personally is a sacred act, for them it is a civic act, transformed into one of buying and selling, of business. Because, neither at a provincial nor at a national level can you explain the political staying power of these men. I would be ashamed. For example, Nebot is a candidate for the second time. This is his second electoral campaign. For Abdala Bucaram, this is his third time. Even though the Ecuadorian people don't want them, nevertheless, these men keep appearing in our politics.

There we established another differ-

ence. A very wealthy campaign facing a campaign of programs that visits the communities. How have we instituted our candidacy? We have gone to the communities. We have gone to the neighborhoods. We have gone to the families. We have gone to the cooperatives. That is, we have gone to the people. We have gone to our peoples, to the Indigenous communities. We have gone with a message, with a proposal. Our campaign has been absolutely different. With this government program, what we have done is hold workshops, seminars, assemblies. Thankfully, the Indigenous movement has a national structure, as do the workers and some campesino organizations that are part of the Movimiento Unidad-Plurinacional-Pachakutik. These structures have helped us to bring the cam-

paigned to every last corner of our country—from the last community in the Amazon region, to the last plateau in the sierra region, to the last beaches in the coastal region. This has been our way of running a campaign. We have had to walk. We have been accompanied by these people. We attended meetings in plazas, many of which were designed by the people. Because they asked, we had to walk to such places. We had to attend seminars in such places. Everything was done in a collective and coordinated way, in common agreement, in a great minga. These are the differences we were able to establish.

What does your new position in Ecuadorian national politics imply for the project of establishing a pluri-national state in Ecuador? Is it compatible? Or, if it isn't, what is the principle objective of CONAIE now?

I believe that parallel to the beginning of this process, to the great calling of the Indigenous movement in Ecuador, there has been a great answer from the Ecuadorian peoples. But what was the proposal? What was the content of this political process that called to the Ecuadorian peoples? It is precisely this proposal, one of the construction of a modern state and a state that responds to the needs of all Ecuadorians. We have said that in Ecuador the legislation provides for—in theory at least—individual rights, rights of the citizens, rights of the family, but it doesn't consider collective rights, the rights of Indigenous peoples. We are going to insist that it is time, in the stage our country is living through in Latin America, for a change, a qualitative transformation in the way we conceive the state and the nation, to put ourselves at the height of the advances humanity has achieved in these recent times.

The construction of a plurinational state responds to this—to raise, to dignify the rights of Indigenous peoples. However, we are not only talking about benefits for Indigenous peoples. We

want to start to revise the traditional, archaic legislation. We think ours is a Constitution that doesn't respond to this era, this information age. It absolutely does not respond. It benefits only a few groups in power in our country. In this, we have a great backing. It is because of this that we are now a great political force in our country.

Because there never was one before, all the Ecuadorian peoples have assimilated themselves to this proposal. Before, no political party was capable of doing it, nor did they ever intend to change our country. Therefore, things only changed little by little. We are going to continue fighting in the National Congress with or without support. Obviously, we are going to look for the necessary support in different sectors and progressive political movements. We will build a political force in the parliament so that the interests of the people, and those of the Indigenous peoples, can be defended.

What would you say to someone who ignores the potential benefits of the CONAIE proposals and the general project of the Pachakutik? How would you invite other sectors to unite with Pachakutik?

Our proposal is a national one, although it has not been finished and presented to the others. What we want is a national debate. Everyone should participate in this. First, in our country, we think the changes should be global and structural. The changes can't apply to only a minimal sector of society, one with economic or political power. We want all Ecuadorian people to assess actively participating in the neoliberal model. This policy is against the Ecuadorian people. What we want is to give dignity to politics in our country. We think the structure and traditional ways of doing politics in our country should be changed. This representative democracy has to transform itself into a participatory democracy. Could there possibly be equality without participation in Congress? No. Haven't

Indigenous peoples historically been isolated from Congress?

I definitely believe that if we don't begin to understand ourselves, in the framework of mutual respect, if we don't begin to be conscious of each sector and its particularities, our country is finished. We believe it is necessary and important that everyone have the opportunity to participate in the benefits the state can give them. Here, we are obviously speaking not only of bettering the lives in the Indios and the campesinos, but also of all Ecuador's citizens.

On the other hand, we are called to

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a great chore. We have to search for an ideological focus point. I believe the fundamental issue all Ecuadorians have spoken to us about is identity. This is another of the crises we live with. Although in recent years we have seen an appropriate response to this problem, there still isn't the recognition of human values in ourselves. We are not going to be able to change politically and economically because we are living in a global crisis. This crisis is the absence of self-recognition, the absence of the recognition of the human values in one's self, as well as the values of the collective group. Therefore, we are also moving towards this idea. What the Indigenous movement proposed years ago isn't an empty discourse. We believe the resources for the development of our people are in ourselves.

There are various elected Indigenous people who will occupy places in the

political institutions of the state: deputies, advisers, mayors, etc. How do you think this will change the future of the Indigenous movement?

I think this question is very important. The Indigenous movement is going through a crucial stage, precisely because of our great achievements.

First, I would say there are people we have struggled with: regional organizations, grassroots organizations, provincial organizations, communities. And, at least for me, this makes me think the Indigenous movement in Ecuador in general and CONAIE will undergo a great development.

Second, our fundamental objective wasn't only to win positions in these last elections at a local, provincial, and national level. Our fundamental objective was searching for a way to consolidate our organizations. Here I believe we have taken an important step. This will serve to strengthen the organizations in their respective levels.

We think that if there is a collective decision our peoples will respond to the correct needs. At least, I personally think I shouldn't settle down and I won't. For example, I will continue working on the proposals that come from organizations and not just those from myself and from the National Congress. Proposals from underneath, from the communities, will be delivered to the National Congress. Only like this can we speak from a parliamentary level, instead of an individual one. This is what we propose. Because of this, I think it is a difficult challenge, but we have to take it on. 🐾