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by
Paul Dosh

Marc Becker *Pachakutik: Indigenous Movements and Electoral Politics in Ecuador*. Updated edition. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012.

In 2005, the Ecuadorian presidential candidate Rafael Correa showed up uninvited at a national congress of the Pachakutik Movement for Plurinational Unity—the political party that had emerged in 1995 to facilitate the Indigenous movement’s foray into electoral politics. (As does Marc Becker in the book reviewed here, I follow the recommendation of the South and Meso American Indian Rights Center that “indigenous” be capitalized.) The up-and-coming Correa gave a speech in the Kichwa language, but Pachakutik leaders viewed his actions as a folklorization of their concerns and responded sharply—in *English*. It was an awkward first step for Correa and Pachakutik in what Benjamin Dangl calls “dancing with dynamite”—the fraught interplay between social movements and elected left leaders in Latin America. Six years later, in 2011, Correa’s government charged nearly 200 Indigenous activists with terrorism and sabotage and had imprisoned at least 8 on similar charges. Despite these early missteps and Correa’s notoriously brusque style, the severe deterioration of relations between the Indigenous movement and the government surprised observers who had hoped that collaboration between these actors would contribute to *sumak kawsay* (living well). How did Correa go from stepping on Pachakutik’s toes to putting Indigenous activists behind bars?

In *Pachakutik: Indigenous Movements and Electoral Politics in Ecuador*, Marc Becker analyzes the intermingled trajectories of the Confederación de Nacionalidades Indígenas del Ecuador (Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities of Ecuador—CONAIE), Pachakutik, and their (latest) poorly matched dance partner, President Rafael Correa. Becker begins by introducing the concept of plurinationalism, describing the politicization of Indigenous identities and laying out the organizational terrain of CONAIE and other Indigenous federations in Ecuador. Replete with detail, the subsequent nine chapters illuminate CONAIE, Pachakutik, and Correa, each dynamic portrait harvested from hundreds of archival and secondary sources, as well as a decade of Becker’s own scholarship on Ecuador.

In Chapters 2–5 (“Uprisings,” “Emergence of an Electoral Option,” “Last Coup of the 20th Century,” “Indians in Power”), a strong narrative thread depicts the Indigenous movement as the protagonist of the story. By contrast, in the second half of the book (“A Citizens’ Revolution,” “Rewriting the Constitution Again,” “2009 Elections,” “Social Movements and Electoral Politics”), we see the movement struggling to remain center stage as Correa elbows his way into the book’s spotlight, increasingly relegating CONAIE and Pachakutik to the role of supporting cast. From the 1990 uprising to the 1995 creation of Pachakutik to the 2004 municipal elections, we see the Indigenous

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movement on the rise and *taking action*. But from the ousting of President Lucio Gutiérrez by the *forajidos* (outlaws) in 2005 to the 2007–2008 Constituent Assembly and Correa's 2009 reelection we most often see CONAIE and Pachakutik *reacting*. On Dangl's dance floor, the Indigenous movement steadfastly rejected the role of follower, but in his first six years in office Correa often still managed to lead.

In the 1995–2004 period, according to Becker, an alliance-eager Pachakutik and a more reluctant CONAIE were crafting partnerships but often getting burned. One success occurred in 1997, when, on the heels of President Abdalá Bucaram's exile, CONAIE traded its support for interim President Fabian Alarcón for a constituent assembly. Pachakutik secured a respectable tenth of the assembly's seats, paving the way for the inclusion of Indigenous-drafted articles in the 1998 Constitution. Often, however, electoral partnerships went awry. The Indigenous movement twice partnered with Lucio Gutiérrez, during 2000's "shortest coup" and in the 2002 presidential campaign, but by 2005 the alliance had so soured that the movement largely sat by and watched as the *forajidos* drove Gutiérrez from office.

For the Correa era (2006–present), Becker portrays a presidency built on the pragmatic substance of Brazil's Lula da Silva but cloaked in the flamboyant window-dressing of Venezuela's Hugo Chávez. For example, he reminds readers that despite Correa's crowd-pleasing ejection of the U.S. military from Ecuador's Manta air base, under the radar he pledged to maintain collaboration with the U.S. drug interdiction strategy. Against this backdrop, CONAIE and Pachakutik won gains but struggled to find their footing in the interplay of party and movement. Ecuador's 2009 Constitution—notable for rhetoric about plurinationality and the rights of Nature—stands as the most concrete record of Indigenous gains under Correa, but Becker's dense catalogue of Indigenous defections from Correa's camp conveys the depth of Indigenous leaders' sense of betrayal with regard to their latest failed partner in Dangl's dance with dynamite.

The former president of Ecuador's Constituent Assembly, Alberto Acosta (quoted on p. 160), wrote: "Recognition of a plurinational state is an important step, but it is not enough. Now we have to build it." Indeed, as in South Africa in 1996 and Bolivia in 2009, the approval of Ecuador's new constitution met with fanfare, but few of its 444 articles have delivered the reform they promised. Becker gives us a vocabulary and an analytic framework with which to track the efforts of Ecuador's Indigenous movement to resume the role of protagonist and transform Ecuador into a place where its peoples live not just better but well.