Reflection on Tammy Lewis’ “Ecuador’s Environmental Revolutions”

Lauren Teach

Stockton University

 Abstract

Throughout the chapter, she discussed the changes and major impact President Correa has had on Ecuador since his election in 2006. She mentions how the state has changed from a state of a “weak and incapacitated agent into a strong and effective actor.” There were many positive changes including, international agents, such as, UNAID, decreasing their involvement in certain cases, and others, such as, Conservation International, shifting their target partners from ecodependents to the state. Since the state started having capacity and resources, environmental leaders moved from the nonprofit sector into the government. In this chapter, are even weaker than in previous periods and ecoresisters are stronger than ever. Many of their ideas had been incorporated into the state, such as constitutional rights for nature and the Yasuní-ITT Initiative. On the other hand, the state continued to be resource dependent which still relied on legitimation and accumulation. Correa was helping a large portion of Ecuadorian people out of poverty, however, he was doing this with money made from extraction which was still against the whole purpose of the environmental movement and a lot of environmentalists and indigenous views. Correa was the longest serving President in Ecuador, as he served for three total terms whereas many other Presidents had resigned or been voted out of power. Vanessa Ruales, an Ecuadorian herself commented, “Correa lifted the spirits of many Ecuadorians and compelled them to look together towards a brighter future with his creation of a “national project,” one akin to the American dream.” The era that he had started has at least five elements to describe it. The first element is “states have taken on a role of responsibility for social welfare that differs from their laissez faire approach during the neoliberal era, the second: economic development gains have been translated into social goods such as health care and education and are being distributed to ‘the people,’ not just to elites. The third element: there are efforts for broader social inclusion and the deepening of participatory democracy. The fourth: economic gains from natural resource extraction have shifted away from private actors (e.g., multinational corporations and national elites) toward the state and have been an important source of funding for states’ social welfare programs, and the fifth: through the establishment of new regional institutions, nations in the region have consciously attempted to shift the nexus of power away from the United States toward Latin America and the Caribbean.

*Keywords: Correa, Positive Change, Five Elements*

Aside from some of Correa’s environmental flaws, data from the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) show that the increases in funding for social welfare programs have made a difference for the poorest in Latin America. “In 2002 over 221 million people (44 percent) in the region were poor; these numbers declined to 180 million (23 percent) in 2010. The numbers for extreme poverty over the same period declined from 97 million (19 percent) people to 72 million (32 percent). In contrast to the neoliberal era of the 1980s and 1990s, during this period, Ecuador in the region also recorded rising GDP, while they received less official development assistance from abroad.” After Correa took office, a lot of positive changes were happening economically. Although, Ecuador and a number of other Latin American countries were starting to show signs of practicing radical democracy. Lincoln Dahlberg states, “Radical democratsargue that we can draw out two central, inter-twined and historically constituted root meanings or conditions of democracy: first, the free and equal participation of ‘the people’ (the *dêmos*) in power (*kratos*); and second, that democracy – including any of its criteria, institutions, and decisions – has no grounds, justifications, or guarantees outside of the people, that is, outside of itself.” Unfortunately, all of this economic gain had to come from somewhere and that somewhere was Ecuador’s natural, non-renewable resources. According to James Chen, “A **nonrenewable resource** is a **resource** of economic value that cannot be readily replaced by natural means on a level equal to its consumption.” With extracting to North America for centuries, the rates were increasing astronomically. “Between 2000 and 2008 the volume of regional exports rose by a remarkable 42.4 percent. The key break with the past is that in this era the benefits of extraction are going to the many rather than the few because states have increased the proportion of the revenues that they collect from extractors and are moving those funds into social welfare programs.

*Keywords: ECLAC, Poverty Decline, Economic Gain*

Citations

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