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JOHN: I'm interested in the effect of the public vote - in other words, the record of the votings by the parliamentarians - for the legislative process. To start, please describe to me what the last years of Fujimori's government were like. How was public voting carried out in the Peruvian Congress? Was there a decision to change the legislative process, in order to record all those votings?

CARLOS BLANCO: Do you mean the decision to install an electronic screen and where the votings are carried out?

JOHN: Yes, that exactly.

CARLOS BLANCO: In reality, this came about from one of the mechanisms which was part of what, at that time, we called the modernization of the Congress. On that occassion, we had support from the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) which gave us a credit line that was basically a donation. The goal was to put a series of systems into place, with the aim to facilitate the legislative procedure. One of the aspects was the topic of the votings. Usually, votings are questioned under certain circumstances; this occurs mainly at the moment when the votes are counted. Usually it's the chief official, who's the one that accompanies the work of the parliamentary debate during the plenary sessions, who's committed to count the votes of those who are in favor, against, and who abstain in certain votings. However, sometimes there's a time delay, when some persons question the chief official's vote count; then, the other voting system must be implemented, which is no longer by handraising but rather, by rectification. In other words, the parliamentarians stand up with the purpose of recounting the votes. At times, this has caused an unnecessary delay. On other occassions it's reached such an extreme, as to include the request for nominal voting. Nominal voting means that each person is called upon individually and he/she pronounces a "yes" or a "no" or "I abstain", and this is recorded.

JOHN: And there's also an opportunity to explain your vote?

CARLOS BLANCO: Not necessarily. In reality, there's no type of explanation made at the voting. It's done previously or afterwards; the regulations also authorize this. One can explain his/her decision in writing later if he/she believes it's appropriate or let's say, the decision's recorded.

And nominal voting, as you can understand, took a lot of time, much more time. So, it was decided that electronic voting was the most flawless and quickest mechanism and didn't allow for any type of discussion regarding the count. This is what it took to come to the decision to install a panel which records the voting. On the other hand, it's also good to have a quick history of the votings that have been taken and who voted in favor or who against, without the need of having a record of who voted: one, two, three, Juan Pérez, Alberto, Enrique; but rather, it already appears

practically recorded in a computer printout. Then this also facilitates the posterior recording of the voting decision. Basically this was the criteria that was used to make a public decision. Also, how this voting had occurred was externalized for diffusion to public opinion.

JOHN: Reading the newspapers I've seen that the votings by Congress members or Parliamentarians are discussed and analyzed. When Parliamentarians decide how to vote, do they consider the implications of the votings on their political stature? In other words, does the public vote have an effect on the legislative decisions?

CARLOS BLANCO: Yes, I think so. Yes, I think so because in general, the politician is dependent upon public opinion and of the public sanctions of a decision that he/she has made. I believe that in some cases a public voting can inhibit the Congress member to vote one way or another. There's no way to hide it. That's the difference with a secret vote or a vote by handraising which, let's say, is dispersed in the atmosphere. I think that indeed, a public vote is a greater responsibility with oneself, of the Parliamentarian. But evidently it can also originate a voting where a lot weighs on what he/she believes they will think of him/her in the future and especially on some crucial topics; for example, in allocations of economic resources for mayors' offices or for different social programs like a glass of milk, for example. Or simply, for example, when some topic is being discussed in a debate linked to a process of tributary exonoration for the agrarian sector. So, many are careful of that. I think it depends on each person, but yes, I think that in some cases it should inhibit it. The type of voting isn't important to me, especially in these difficult cases. I have no problem with public voting or the other type of voting; I've always expressed my point of view, more or less, on these topics.

JOHN: Were the votings made in the Congress by the current Parliamentary Congress members who were postulated for re-election in the last elections debated in the campaign, or not?

CARLOS BLANCO: Not a lot, really not a lot. I'd say that it hasn't been a topic of debate. It should have been a little, but I don't believe that it's had incidence.

JOHN: How will the role of the Peruvian Congress change in the next governmental period?

CARLOS BLANCO: It gives me the impression, let's say, that there will be some substantial changes. One has already been incorporated, which is the elimination from the Constitution of presidential re-election. It's already been decided, so I don't think it'll be taken up again. In other words, presidential re-election has already been eliminated from the Constitution. The other event that I believe is important as far as the operation of the Congress is that it looks like bicameral legislature is going to be proposed once again. My reading is that there's a tendency to assemble once again, not an unicameral Congress as we have now, but return to what we had before 1993 where we had two houses - the House of Delegates (*Cámara de Diputados*) and a Senate *(Cámara de Senadores*) -. It gives me the impression that this is something that will surely be seen in the next Congress.

JOHN: With representation in a national circumscription, as before, or departmental?

CARLOS BLANCO: I think so. What happens is the following. Nowadays the election of all Congress members has been in what is known as a multiple electoral district, or in other words, in each circumscription. This gives me the impression that it will possibly lead to a legislative scheme that's largely oriented towards specific cases of different districts. I sense that a bit of the national vision will be lost and that possibly there will be a move towards the other extreme. In the case of unicameral legislation, where the electoral district was singular and where one could vote from anywhere as a person, this amply dispersed the exclusive representativity of a Parliamentarian in relation to a district. This gave him/her the facility of a much more general, much more national vision, and that's why I sense that we'll be going to a Senate that will have a national character and a lower house or House of Delegates (*Cámara de Diputados*), with a district character. So that the Senate will once again review and see the laws as a whole, because if not, there will possibly be too many laws concentrated in some places and while there's so much voiced about decentralization, in the end it won't be accomplished through this mechanism. So, for that reason I think that there's going to be a combination of the systems.

JOHN: How's a majority coalition to be formed in a Congress without a partisan majority in the next period? Will there be a multiparty coalition?

CARLOS BLANCO: That's going to be good.... I don't have much hope that that's what going to happen. Hopefully, I'm wrong. Unfortunately, in our country the confrontations that there've been between the legislative and executive powers have always been considerable when a parliamentary majority hasn't existed. However, on the other hand, in an absolute parliamentary majority some type of difficulty can also be created. I've belonged to a parliamentary group that has always been a majority. For that reason, perhaps, I think that the majorities in the Congress should do better through alliances, party alliances . The problem is that we don't have political parties and so, in fact, it's a conglomerate of individualities that in the end don't have an ideology nor a well interpreted partisan loyalty, of a long time, of many years or with a lot of experience or with much past, that permits a Congress member or a Parliamentarian beyond the strictly individual or personal aspects that he/she may have, to see the matter of the political party. So, a unity or parliamentary alliance in the next government will also be flimsy because the only political party that exists in Peru is the Aprista Party. The rest is a conglomerate, it's always been that way. In the same way that the group of people who were with the previous government were a conglomerate, but we had a coordination or disciplinary capacity, however you'd like to call it, which made it very easy or viable to reach an agreement in the plenary. Our discussions were very difficult among the government's parliamentary group; there were the very large discussions there, but in the plenary the situation was much more fluid. In summary, who knows? The next Parliament may be one of the most complicated Parliaments as far as its relationship with the executive power.

JOHN: How did they make decisions inside the government's official faction during Fujimori's government? Were there weekly meetings to debate them?

CARLOS BLANCO: We had practically two meetings per week. We had a plenary session on Thursday and the sessions of the parliamentary group were on Tuesday and Wednesday or Monday and Wednesday, more or less. Those discussions were a revision of all that might be

seen in the next plenary session and votings were carried out the same as in the Congressional plenary. That was more or less the process.

JOHN: Were there sanctions, for example, for Representatives who voted in an undisciplined manner, or who broke the party discipline?

CARLOS BLANCO: No.

JOHN: That's interesting. I've already analyzed some of the votings during 1999 and the first months of 2000, of last year, during the previous government. And the discipline levels -, not only of the official parties, but also of the other parties - or of the unity, are as high as any of the other parties indoctrinated by the European parliamentary systems or the PRI in Mexico before Fox's presidency. Very high. I'm going to do an analysis of more recent votings. Will I discover a decrease in the level of unity?

CARLOS BLANCO: Yes, let's say you're going to discover this in a more recent analysis. I'll never forget when I held a Congressional Vice-presidency, the second Vice-presidency, in 1998, and I had to receive some German Parliamentarians. Naturally, besides exchanging opinions on different aspects, another activity was a to visit the Congressional facilities. I accompanied them to the *hemiciclo,* that's what we call the place where the Parliamentarians meet, and we saw the screen for public votings. I will never forget the German Parliamentarian who was also a leader of his party and how he asked me: "and this public voting?" So I explained it to him and he said to me: "You're all crazy. How can you control your colleagues of the faction? No, one votes like the whole party votes." So, then I realized that also in Europe and all over, that it's natural, it's human, that a political party establishes a long term perspective and not a momentary juncture. So, there must be people who vote differently in Europe too and in the European parties or in the PRI and in others; but in general, they're the minority. An internal discussion is much easier.

I explained to him that what we do is have previous meetings, that we call *plenitos*. But, why? if each of us, more or less - we're like five, six or seven, or ten leaders - each have a group of people who are more or less those who closest to them and then it's a kind of ladder where the voting flows because obviously there are more parliamentarians. We were almost 70 and we had almost 60 or 55% of the Congress, more or less; in other Parliaments there are 500, 400, 600 and each party has ahundred plus, then it's materially impossible to have a discussion. So, what they do is divide into parts, in sections, and each parliamentary leader or leader from the second level is the one who more or less coordinates with the rest. This was the way that it was explained it to me.

JOHN: Yes, well, in English it's called the whip. To protect the parliamentarians. It is an interesting thing. I've had the opportunity to visit several Parliaments, up to now in Mexico, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Venezuela, Colombia, also Chile, and I find that the technology facilitates - particularly, the electronic voting machine technology - the monitoring of the representatives, but there are a lot of complications because of traditional practices, the procedures that you've been accostumed to.

CARLOS BLANCO: Yes, we could say the partisan procedures.

JOHN: Yes, that's it, exactly. For that reason, for example in Venezuela, the machines have been installed but they've never been used. It's the same in Colombia. But in many countries, like Peru, yes, they've adopted it as a normal procedure and I believe that it's difficult to return to the past.

CARLOS BLANCO: That's right. The mechanism's been installed and it's not going to change. And it won't change because although it's true that possibly the public in general doesn't make much of it, the journalists do. The journalists are those who...

JOHN: And the other politicians.

CARLOS BLANCO: And the other politicians, exactly. And the other politicians also because they're the ones who use this information. It seems good to me, the truth is that yes, I'm satisfied with this type of voting. It's much more transparent, it's much more practical. I believe that it has all the advantages from the point of view, let's say, that everybody knows what one's doing. But yes, I understand that it hinders some parliamentary coordinations.

JOHN: We've had it in the United States for something like 30 years now and a thing that I haven't noticed up until now in the Latin American parliaments, but that's common in the United States, is that the votings of the legislators are always debated during the campaigns. In other words, it's possible that it has to do with the fact that we have uninominal districts. So each Congress member has an opponent...

CARLOS BLANCO: in each place...

JOHN: who pertains to him/her. And this opponent always goes in the campaign with a list to demand an explanation. For that reason there's a fixation with the votings. Sure, they have the advantage that they must always think about the voters' reaction to every voting and be able to explain it.

CARLOS BLANCO: I believe that in our country the topic of voting still doesn't have much of an impact due to the completely different reality that exists here. In reality, an American voter, or a voter from a developed country, is already at a superior level, like the Maslo pyramid claims. The universal voter, let's say, from the United States or Europe, has already left his/her primary necessities aside, those such as food and housing. Theirs are other concerns; much bigger concerns which are globally linked to education, progress and health. And now their concern is about if nuclear weapons ought to be used or not; their concern is caring for the environment. So, they're superior needs to those that our voters are faced with. Most voters from Latin American countries, due to the same economic and social conditions they face, do not see these as the main topics of concern. They worry more about the programs that directly benefit them and still don't place importance on topics as crucial as these. It's very strange and very exceptional when one goes to a place and complaints are made about, for example: "Listen, why didn't you vote for..... tax exoneration..."; what they ask about is when will the

government give out medicines, when the government will have this highway ready or when will the government will give out something. So, it's a different level of voter, but hopefully we'll reach a higher level - even in these circumstances - to really make a translation between the vote. I've always thought that just because a person is poor and at a primary needs level, that he/she doesn't stop thinking. Therefore there's always some way to be able to express oneself. Sometimes, even nowadays, that doesn't have any impact. What happens, my impression is - and once again we're at the same point - that it's because there are no political parties. So, thought in general, is hardly politicized. I'd say that the thought is petty politicks, let's say. So, we have the petty politicians, who are us, and the voters are also petty politicians, but it's not a question of national politics, nor of programs. This is the way we are, unfortunately.

JOHN: Those are all of my questions. I thank you a lot.

CARLOS BLANCO: No, on the contrary, thanks to you.