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INTERVIEW WITH LEGISLATOR CELIMO GUIDO
FACTION LEADER OF THE *PARTIDO FRENTE DEMOCRATICO NACIONAL*
(NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC FRONT PARTY)
SAN JOSE, COSTA RICA
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JOHN: Well, my project has to do with the levels and sources of unity among the political factions in several parliaments, in their majority in Latin America.

The members of the Legislative Assembly's directorate are all from the majority party?

GUIDO: Historically, yes.

JOHN: How is the parliamentary agenda coordinated among the other parties?

GUIDO: Here it's not coordinated. Here it's imposed through negotiations with the two majority parties. Here nothing's coordinated because first, five projects are requested, at the end one, and utimately none are taken into account. It's determined at high level of the majority factions, of the bipartisanship (*bipartidismo*).

JOHN: In the legislative votings, are nominal votings quite rare? In nominal votings is it very rare for a registry of each legislator's vote to be made? In the plenary.

GUIDO: No, here -except for when there's a request for the vote to be justified- the legislators stand up or they remain seated, publically. In other words, there's no possibility to abstain. It's "yes" or "no".

? : There's a type of voting that's a nominal voting, since a motion has to be approved with 29 votes, so the legislators are obligated to say I voted "yes" or I voted "no".

GUIDO: Ah, the reasoned vote (*el voto razonado*) Since we've been here, during these past two years, it hasn't occurred even once, although the regulation allows it.

JOHN: Why isn't it done?

GUIDO: Because precisely when, for example, an emergent party proposes something like that -we've already proposed it twice, I believe- it's because it's a hot issue, it's a difficult topic, it's a topic that can implicate many legislators with national problems. So, they knock us down all at once by saying "no", and that's as far as it goes.

JOHN: Do electronic voting machines also exist in the plenary?

GUIDO: No. One was bought and it didn't function. The machine doesn't work. In any event, there isn't even a screen that shows who's in what order (*orden*). So, either you're standing up, or it depends on who manages the Assembly's bills *(proyectos)* , they put

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them in whatever order they feel and lots of times you're first on the list and they place you further down or the other way around, depending on if it's something of interest to them. I think it's atrocious that in a parliament, with the technology that there is nowadays, that you can't see what order you are in the list. Not to mention that many times when they want to monopolize the time, the legislators of the *PLN* (*Liberación*) or of the *PUSC* (*la Unidad*) push the button all at the same time and they take ten minutes. That would be okay, but it's happened to me when I've asked for the floor with sufficient time to speak on this day and afterwards they pass you by.. They handle it however they want. Here there are no controls.

JOHN: Within the factions, how's it decided what the faction's position will be on some matter, about a motion?

GUIDO: Well, we have a party of three legislators and generally we have much affinity of thought and of method. Nevertheless, two or three times, I personally haven't respected the action lines when something hasn't seemed right to me.

JOHN: You've voted against?

GUIDO: Yes, I've done it three times. On very hot, very difficult issues and ones that don't convince me. I find that the fact that there's a rigorous party line diminishes your autonomy; the lines can come from outside. In the case of the parties from here, generally they come together, they totally unite, they close ranks; however, in this case, currently the two big parties, let's say it this way, in the *PLN* (National Liberation Party) there's no unity, they vote however they feel. The voting is like mincemeat. Here you can never be sure - everything's by convenience - that they'll come as a block. But now it's not due to a question of principles, but because of personal internal clashes. It's another thing.

What's more, when the topics are really of interest to them, big business issues, transcendental things, here yes, they tighten the screws and everyone votes the party line.

JOHN: What would happen if a legislator regularly votes against his faction?

GUIDO: Here I believe that if the legislator repeats this practice just a little, possibly they'll throw him out or he'll be sanctioned or taken before an ethics tribunal. What happens is that many times someone must be sanctioned -they've already done it- to a legislator because he's voted against the faction while being consistent with his party's ideology because of what he said in his political campaign. And if he's consequent, many times they've sanctioned the legislators because the line interests them and not the consequence, the congruence. It doesn't interest them.

JOHN: Attendance in the plenary is also a partisan disciplinary matter?

GUIDO: Yes, well, attendance is obligatory and if you don't go and don't request permission with a justification, they reduce the diet (*dieta)*, you don't earn your salary. I believe that most of the legislators, at a very personal level, despite the fact that they're

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"burned out" parties - the traditional parties - they try to put them into the same sack; however, at the hour of arrival *(hora de llegada*)the legislator settles in as he likes.

JOHN: Is the part of attendance or not voting a way of refusing to give consent to the faction without actually voting against the faction? Or is it a lack of consideration and nothing else?

GUIDO: Many times it's that the legislators go and take a trip. Many times it's that the "*bandidos"* will go to for some "R & R". Us no, for example, we have three legislators and every time that someone has to leave the country or the Congress for some reason, we speak to each other and we see if there are important bills *(proyectos*) to attend to and if there are very important bills we don't go anywhere. We're there, shoulder to shoulder. The other people are very divided. Historically they were parties where there was only one line, but not now. I repeat, except for when there are very big business issues, like selling the country into pieces or something like that, then you'll see that neither one of the two parties fails to be present. When the thing is to sell the country to foreigners, to foreign capital, there you'll have them because obviously someone from the parties is a part of the "*chorizo"* (corruption) as we call it in Costa Rica, he's with the *mordida* (bribe), he's with the commission, so here they have them like slaves. But when it's not these types of things, no one cares and then it's *tira a la libre* .

JOHN: Good, thank you. Those are all my questions.

GUIDO: We're at your service.