INTERVIEW WITH:
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(HOUSE OF BOLIVIAN LEGISLATORS)
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JOHN: To begin, how's it decided inside the *bancada* (faction), what it's position will be regarding a bill *(proyecto*) or a voting?

HUGO CARVAJAL: The *bancada* decides [its position] depending on the parliamentary rhythm; the parliament has rhythms. The consultation sometimes only gets as far as a *bancada* leader, and he defines a position and then transmits it to the *bancada*; we could say he socializes, with the *bancada,* this decision that he's already made and has adopted in the name of the collegiate body. Sometimes this produces, in this first case, short circuits in the parliamentarians' reaction. In other words, since the [*bancada's*] made up by human beings who have different perspectives on life, the economy and the society, the parliamentarians reason in different ways. Some *bancadas* are more disciplined than others and this necessarily characterizes the type of political and party organization that's in the foreground. Usually, when the decisions demand a time, not only in the approval of a law, but that of several polemic articles, they're evaluated, analyzed and debated with the political *bancada*. An example could be like when the topic of controlled surveillance (*vigilancia controlada*) in the penal procedure code was debated, which is a new mechanism that's been very polemical, very debated, on the topic of phone tapping (*escuchas*) without the judge's authorization. So all those topics can sometimes generate a lot of polemics; sometimes topics referring to the subject of gender also generate polemics in the House *(Cámara).* So these topics are debated internally within the *bancadas;* they're settled *(concertados)* among the *bancadas* leaders - for this, there's a Political Coordination Committee in the House of *Diputados* - and then they're transferred to the plenary. Like what occurs in all the parliaments worldwide; the Bolivian parliament is an exception, sometimes all these procedures, even the commission's work, aren't enough and polemics and debate are generated inside the House; this occurs even more when there are interests, political interests, economic or corporate interests, at stake.

JOHN: Do all the copartisans or *bancada* members generally vote together in the plenary?

HUGO CARVAJAL: Generally, yes. They usually vote together on polemical topics and sometimes when the topics are regional or [refer to specific] sectors. Sometimes the *bancada* is divided in the cases of the mining or rural, indigenous, etc. [sectors], but 90 or 85% [of the members] usually end up voting for an established position (*línea*).

JOHN: And what happens if a *diputado* votes against the *bancada* in a disciplined voting, is there a sanction or a disciplinary process?

HUGO CARVAJAL: There's no internal disciplinary process; in the *bancada* there's only an internal social-political control process; there are no sanctions, neither economic or political, placed on a parliamentarian. In Bolivia, the parliamentarian freely exercises his function.

JOHN: When the presidential election doesn't produce a candidate with an absolute majority, is it necessary to form government coalitions in the Congress? Please explain to me how government coalitions are formed and how they're maintained?

HUGO CARVAJAL: Government coalitions are formed starting from a constitutional precept, Article 90, that requires there to be a parliamentary majority in order to elect a president. So, no candidate in democracy obtained half plus one of the votes; we have a fragmented and dispersed electoral process and usually there's a series of five to six political forces. So, coalitions must necessarilyl be made to obtain the majority of the votes.

These coalitions have usually been [formed] more with a view to, let's say, yield to the government than to see how it will govern. So what the parties, the President of the Republic's government leaders have looked for is the majority and not so much the coalition's internal governability (*gobernabilidad*). The coalitions have normally worked more with an instrumental logic, even by returning to the legislative as the Executives' co-legislador, and before thinking about a global program or governmental agenda standpoint (*visión global de programa o agenda gubernamental*). So this causes there to be very diverse political forces in the country that represent different types of interests and situations. There are political forces like a cessation (*cese*), for example, that was more under the logic of a leader, who apparently moves in a political dynamics that's more *propietarista* (with ownership) than democratic, so his political party sometimes has very defined interests and the citizenship knows it. For example, its characterized a lot by the tributary topic. Or some objectives and goals that have been proposed, for example, in the national road service. So, they're political forces that react according to the interests that concern them or those strongly desired interests which they'd like to make concrete; sometimes the negotiation panorama becomes very, very difficult with these political forces. Other political forces are more encompassing (*global*), like the *DNA*,the *MNS*, and the *MIR*; they're more global and they have a better image, which is more encompassing, of the national spectrum, of the national project. Another thing that compels, like *CONDEPA*, that's more supportive of the national, patriotic [project], so it's very polemical, very controversial and that's why it didn't tolerate much time in the current government coalition, and then there are also other political forces that are a minority, insignificant. In the case of the *MBL*, which is more a company party (*partido compañía*), for example, like what happened with the *MNR* when it allied with the *MBL*. And that's what happened, like a cessation, which I mentioned a while ago, who were in the previous government and are in this one. In other words, they're clear cases where what matters isn't the principle but rather the logic of being in the government in any way that's possible (*a como dé lugar*).

JOHN: So, the [coalitions] aren't necessarily formed based on common ideology, but yes, on a government program?

HUGO CARVAJAL: The majority are constituted mainly to govern the parliament and in that way obtain an appropriate gobernability between the Executive and Legislative; a minimum government agenda is made, but that's not the coalition's *ideario* (main reason for being).

JOHN: Are government coalitions united in the plenary? In other words, do they vote together, more or less like the parties?

HUGO CARVAJAL: They usually work in a united way, although there are apprehensions (*sobresaltos*), and it always depends on the majority's fragility; to speak clearly, sometimes there are extorsions (*chantajes)*, there are pressures for more power spaces in the administration of the Executive or topics that have not been fulfilled.

JOHN: But since the year 1985, all of the government coalitions have survived through the entire period?

HUGO CARVAJAL: The pacted democracy began in 1985 and has continued up to the present time, and all [the government coalitions] have survived for the entire period and there's nothing to indicate the opposite in the upcoming years.

JOHN: This is a very strange case in the presidential systems, very strange.

HUGO CARVAJAL: Very peculiar.

JOHN: When is nominal voting required, or when is it used in the House (*Cámara*)?

HUGO CARVAJAL: Nominal voting is required when there's a very controversial topic; in other words, [nominal voting's] not very common. It's sometimes used as a pretext by the opposition to delay the session and initiation on a new topic, or in order to deal with a very polemical topic for a greater amount of time. But beyond that, usually and rationally, the nominal vote is used to determine the position on a certain topic that's very polemical, like for example, if we ought to lower or increase taxes. So, when it's a polemical topic, nominal voting is requested. Or for a regional bill, which sometimes can also be polemical; it's the same [procedure], nominal voting is requested.

JOHN: The minority can request nominal voting and it's obligatory?

HUGO CARVAJAL: Yes, it's obligatory; it's sufficient for five *diputados* to request [nominal voting] for it to be implemented.

JOHN: How does the leadership of the *bancada* or of the board of directors (*mesa directiva*) know how their *diputados* voted in a voting when it's not nominal? Only by watching them vote?

HUGO CARVAJAL: Usually, [the leadership] waits for the result, if the result is unsuccessful, a fourth intermission (*cuarto intermedio*) is made to adjust the vote. But I should say that the

opportunity for a fourth intermission to adjust the vote is rare. Usually the parliamentarians, even in the secret ballot, in the *escrutinio* (official count of election results), they vote according to conscience, but they usually vote following the position (*línea*) that's been established by the *bancada,* because usually the *bancada* establishes a collegiate and collective position. Here I should say that dissidences are common in the Bolivian parliament. There are parliamentarian's who say that they're not voting for a defined and certain positon.

JOHN: Is it common, or not?

HUGO CARVAJAL: It's common, although it doesn't cause much trauma and it has press repercussions, but it doesn't go against the press, no, not that either.

JOHN: Does that mean that they're analyzed and reported in the press, too?

HUGO CARVAJAL: They aren't analyzed or reported in the press.

JOHN: I've been told in the office of the *Oficialía Mayor* that after this current session a new modern electronic voting system will be installed in the Congress. With these systems it's very easy to make all the legislative votings public, for example on the Congress' website, like is done in many other parliaments with these types of systems. In your opinion, what effect would this type of public vote have on the legislative process, on the operation of the parties?

HUGO CARVAJAL: I'd say that more than via the webpage or through computerized data, that it's the media which makes [the voting] public.

JOHN: But do the journalists have access?

HUGO CARVAJAL: The journalists will have access to that information although they won't stop going to the parliament, because the press, I should say, doesn't faithfully reflect the parliamentary work, it usually reflects the citizens' criticism, with several places, it reflects the scandal, sometimes it reflects the work that's not done, but it doesn't reflect the commissions' work, or the sometimes tedious work that's carried out to reach agreements in the plenaries, or in the workshops and seminars that are held to evaluate laws. So voting isn't really a very prominent act nor does it concern the citizens very much, because in Bolivia we don't have a "*partidizada*" or politized society as far as there being an interest about how the parliamentarian in a party has voted or not. Except for very important topics, very fundamental [topics], like the abuse *(desaforo)* of a parliamentarian, where ethics are at play, that yes, the citizen's attention will be very important and probably it's of interest to him to see how each one of the parliamentarians has voted, but after that, no.

JOHN: How would you characterize the relationship between the legislators and the citizens or voters? As strong or weak?

HUGO CARVAJAL: It's a weak relationship, yes, because first of all, Bolivia still has a democracy that's consolidating a system of representative democracy, and it's the first

prolonged, pluralistic, pluripartisan democratic period that we've experienced in our republican history. The previous [periods] were excluding, in the time of the??????? there were concentration camps, there was no place for dissidence or intolerance, the previous periods were very restricted, sensitive democracies, oligarchical democracies. So, this is the first continuous, pluripartisan, pluralistic, tolerant and inclusive period that we've had in Bolivia's republican history. So, I should say that, on this basis, the new (*recien*) citizen is getting accustomed to seeking out the national representative or the councilman, because there's an electoral climate, a need to vote in the municipal or national elections that extends from three months before [the elections] and probably for two months after, but the rest of the time Bolivian society still has a very corporate reflex, it resorts to the civic committee a lot, it resorts to the union a lot, it resorts to the cooperative a lot, or to other social adhesion mechanisms (*mecanismos de aglutinación social*). The indigenous peoples head for their indigenous organizations, or go to the *Central Boliviano*. So, outside of the elections there's still a reflex of a very corporate behavioral attitude; Bolivia's also very paradoxical. In other words, when the citizen goes to vote, he votes for some people to whom he entrusts the country, it's like giving a blank check to them for five years. Then he takes refuge in his natural, corporate environs, be it the civic committee, be it the union, the cooperative as I told you, or another type of organization (*instancia*) in the society. So, there's still not a very close, a very carnal relationship, - if the term could be used - between the voter and the [persons] elect.

JOHN: There's not a lot of awareness about the legislative activity?

HUGO CARVAJAL: That's right, there's not a lot of awareness and maybe to start to obtain this awareness, we have to gradually implement a system for the parliamentarians' accountability (*rendición de cuentas*) before the society.

JOHN: And how would it be done?

HUGO CARVAJAL: It would have to be through a mechanism that the parliament places at their disposal. At this time the parliament doesn't provide - it's also good to mention it - the parliamentarian has no capacity (*facultad)* to link himself with the society and with his voters. He receives no type of support, neither financial or in infrastructure, from the parliament. What has been done up until now to link parliament-society, are public meetings (*audiencias públicas*), which are positive; and the departmental brigades that have their own buildings that make this link have had good results; and the regional parliaments, the case of the indigenous [region], the Amazon [region], etc., but after those, there are no other linking mechanisms. This is still a deficiency of the Bolivian parliamentary democracy, or of the parliament.

JOHN: Do the *diputados* in their majority want to be re-elected to the Congress?

HUGO CARVAJAL: No, the *diputados* have a high level of "recycling", 80% are usually recycled.

JOHN: Because they don't run as candidates (*por no postularse*), or because they don't win?

HUGO CARVAJAL: It's due to both elements, because the representation is debilitated a lot for not running and they don't run, the party*'s* internally debilitated and it stops being representative; and because others want to occupy this place. So usually there's a natural replacement (*recambio*) of 80% in the parliament, although it's good to stress that there also are others who previously were parliamentarians who return again. But we usually have parliaments, - especially with the uninominal system that's implemented - that have a very high level of replacement by at least 80%.

JOHN: That is high. For the elections of 1997, a new electoral system was adopted, the mixed system. What effect has this new electoral system had on the legislative representation in Bolivia?

HUGO CARVAJAL: The mixed electoral system is similar to the German system; the mixed one's based on that [German system] although it has some modifications; it has had a positive impact in 1997. It's perfected and provided more legitimacy to the representative democracy; however, while Bolivia experiences a representative democracy, at the same time, as I told you a moment ago, it also experiences a logical corporate direct democracy. And it's a fact that Bolivia, in democracy, still hasn't been able to achieve a harmony *(acercamiento*) between the representative democracy and the direct democracy, which is expressed in unions, productive associations, civic and indigenous committees, etc. So, the 1997 lesson provided improved legitimacy, greater strength to the parliamentary representiveness (*representividad*), especially in *diputados*, but it still hasn't been sufficient nor has it satisfied the citizenship. I believe that the citizenship has seen that the quality and the representation have improved, but maybe in the direct relationship with its elected [representatives], with the parliamentarians; but the parliament has lost, it's become more parishioner (*parroquiano*), it's become more provincialer (*provinciano*) and that, indeed, has subtracted from it perhaps; and that, while the parliament has gained representativity, territoriality, maybe it's lost in parliamentary experience, in political handling and therefore, in debate.

JOHN: Then, is there a division between the interests, the perspectives of the *diputados* of uninominal districts (*circumscripciones)*?

HUGO CARVAJAL: Yes, notoriously.

JOHN: And does that make the coordination of the legislative agenda more difficult?

HUGO CARVAJAL: No, it doesn't make it more difficult, that's to say, ultimately the national logic is imposed and the uninominal *diputado* ends up obeying the national logic.

JOHN: This dominates?

HUGO CARVAJAL: Exactly, it maintains a political, ideological - if it's possible to use the term - discipline in the parliamentarian, a fidelity to the party. But the uninominals also experience a tension (*tensionamiento*), they also yield to their territory. So, this tension between political loyalty and a territorial loyalty to the uninominal district will always occur and I believe that it's very positive for the democracy and for the political parties. The *bancadas* have won

more in the internal debate, in democracy and in the internal discussion with the uninominals. I have been a parliamentarian for twelve years and I can tell you this quite knowingly.

JOHN: Well, it's been a pleasure. Thank you.