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**INTERVIEW WITH:**
**LEGISLATOR GUILLERMO LANDUZURI**
***IZQUIERDA DEMOCRATICA* (DEMOCRATIC LEFT)**
**QUITO, EQUATOR**
**MAY 22, 2001**

**JOHN:** How's it decided inside the block (*bloque*), what it's position regarding a bill (*proyecto*), or a voting in the Congress, will be?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** At the moment, the *Izquierda Democrática* (Democratic Left) block has sixteen legislators. It's a block that processes the fundamental topics in an internal debate, where there can be different positions; then, based upon the arguments, an unitary position is taken that should be complied with, supported and backed by all the legislators. I believe that our block has been one of the more disciplined [blocks] in that sense, but it's a block where the decisions are made based on arguments and decisions I would say, and with a majority consensus. Once a decision is made it becomes a policy of the block that must be adopted by all the legislators.

**JOHN:** If there's not consensus, then the decision's made by majority voting inside the block?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** In reality, if we speak in practical terms, I don't remember a topic where we've had to proceed to have an internal voting inside the block. Yes, there have been debates, different positions, yes, but then based on the arguments majority consensus has been reached; sure, the position that gains force is the one that's finally assumed, even by those who have defended another position. So we've never reached that point of saying: Let's see, there are two practically excluding positions within the block and in consequence, we have a voting within the block. We have not had to do this because we've had a very transparent attitude of argumentation by which a consensus has been reached.

**JOHN:** In general, do all the co-partisans or all of the legislators of the block vote together?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** Yes. In general, I'd say that in 90% and more of the cases, the block's voting has been unitary. There have been about three or four times where indeed, yes, there has been a slight division. Our block of eighteen legislators, well now we are only sixteen, is precisely a reflection of the different positions manifested on some occasions, not only one, but by two legislators; so it's better that we've decreased in number to sixteen [legislators], but with a block that I'd say is coherent and united.

**JOHN:** So, the legislators who don't vote in agreement with what's been decided in the block are expelled?

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**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI**: In this case, I'd say that there's been a simultaneous attitude. The block was annoyed and uncomfortable with their attitude, and they in turn wanted to leave the block. So, it was a simultaneous process of telling them to leave and also, of them leaving.

**JOHN:** Do multiparty coalitions, or stable multiblocks that vote together in a government program exist in the Congress?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** Well, one of the problems of democracy and of Ecuadorian governability *(gobernabilidad)* is that of not having a few, strong political parties. We have a lot of fragmentation in the National Congress, which makes it necessary to have periodic multiparty alliances. There's no consolidated alliance that has an ideological and programmatic program for the National Congress, no. Situational alliances (*alianzas coyunturales* ) are formed on the different topics and sure, this is one of the biggest problems in the Ecuadorian democracy where the majorities are modified according to the topics, no, because there are no parties or stable alliances that have a permanent majority. So, that's a reflection of the National Congress' instablity and a reflection that, I'd say in Ecuador which now is internally fragmented, the parties themselves, I'd say including ours, are regional parties. There are parties that are strong on the coast and parties that are stronger in the mountain areas; that's why it's necessity to consolidate a few national parties, majority parties, which would secure the gobernability. But definitively, there's no permanent programmatic or ideological agreement, but rather majorities are formed according to the specific topics.

**JOHN:** Then what are the most important factors in the formation of situational coalitions? Common ideology, the electoral advantage, the control of the Congress' resources, or support for the Executive or what?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** Well, it depends on the positions that the blocks take. In some cases the government's block obviously joins with the government's position. In our case, being an organized ideological party, we see all the topics that are processed in the National Congress under an ideological prism and their empathy with national interests. I believe that one of our party's greatest recognitions is exactly that, it's a party which acts at the margin of particular interests and consequently our great reference, is the ideology. To know how the National Congress' bills, how its resolutions either serve the great collective or are decisions that try to serve created interests, in which case, obviously, we are completely opposed to those decisions.

**JOHN:** Isn't there an electronic voting system in the Congress?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** No, there isn't one [in place]. We have different types of voting [mechanisms], although the one most commonly used is simple voting by raising your arm; however, this is imprecise and sometimes, depending on the topic, elections must be repeated or rectified. When there's an intention to know how each legislator votes, then nominative voting is requested; there's also nominal voting when aside from voting, the legislator has a possibility to argue his vote.

**JOHN:** Has the adoption of an electronic system in the Congress been considered?

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**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** I've heard that there's an intention, a proposal's been made by the National Congress' administration. It would seem very convenient to me because, as you've noted, I believe that there should be voting registries on all the topics and I think that an electronic system, just like they have in other Latin American countries, would also speed up the decision-making process a lot. I believe that its implementation in Ecuador would be an important step.

**JOHN:** What effect would it have on the legislators' political responsibility, what in effect would be obtained?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** Well, I'd say on one hand, it would be transparent because there are no mistakes with electronics as there sometimes can be with a recounting [of the votes] of a person who's saying let's see how many arms are raised. So, this is fundamental in Congressional decisions where sometimes there can be a difference of one or two not well-counted votes; so, I believe that it would be fundamental, as well as the registry of these votings which serve to observe the coherence, the unity of the different blocks. So I find that this is a positive step.

**JOHN:** What are the most important things that a legislator should do to be re-elected?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** I would say that the National Congress has two fundamental duties: to legislate and to oversee (*fiscalizar* ). It's not that we lack laws in Ecuador, we probably have too many, but what is lacking is their compliance, and we also need a Congress that, with independence, oversees the Executive. That's why, it seems to me, we should strengthen these two lines of action. The legislators should be propositive. I'm an economist, logically in my profession's ambit, I have spearheaded the presentation of bills directed towards the national interests, above all now that Ecuador is in the middle of a very deep financial crisis. So, I believe that the legislator's role is to identify bills that have real national importance (*transcendencia)* rather than so many of the bills that are presented which treat very particular but sometimes very powerful interests. So, in my opinion, a legislator has to be a person with: training (*formación* ), autonomy, independence, the knowledge of how to distinguish between general and particular interests and who should have a supervisory attitude *( actitud fiscalizadora* ) that's absolutely independent of the created interests. This is very difficult to achieve, but it should be the profile. In Ecuador the Congress is a completely devaluated (*desvalorizado* ) function, that's been discredited due to its own errors and omissions by many legislators, but it's a function without which there would be no democracy, so it's up to us to improve the quality of the cadres (*cuadros* ), the quality of the debate and sure, it goes without saying, the quality of the legislators.

**JOHN:** How is the quality of the legislators?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** In the first place, I'd say that we have an excessively high number [of legislators]; in the second place, as far as the legislators' training (*formación* ) and their vision regarding the country's problems, I believe that both leave a lot to desire. In the measure that we have better trained legislators who defend Ecuador's general interests, I believe that the Congress could recover, at least partially, its image which is very deteriorated right now.

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**JOHN:** What effect has the 1997 and 1998 electoral system reform *(reforma del sistema de elecciones* ) had on the legislative representation in Ecuador?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** Well, I believe that we should have an electoral system that favors the formation of government majorities, majority [governments]. In the last legislative reform, for example, the legislative period was extended to four years; there are no elections midway [through this period]. Seemingly, that would be a mechanism to favor gobernability because normally with elections midway, the block of government's party deteriorates and the government loses its support (*sustento* ).

However, on the other hand, there's also a parliamentary representation that's not a reflection of what occurs in the country. For example, the current government of President Novoa, which arose from the popular democracy, the number of Congress members that it has in the *retenas* , others who have come out of there, aren't a reflection of what Ecuador is thinking now, so I believe that we should also have a system of elections midway [through the four-year period], but with substitutions of minorities to assure a certain continuity of the National Congress.

**JOHN:** The last topic that interests me, is a procedure that I believe is unique in Ecuador from all the presidencial systems (*sistemas presidencialistas* ); it's the combination of the executive initiative of economic urgency with the partial veto. What are the effects of this combination of procedures on the Congress' operation?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** Well, in reality, the heart of the country's politics is the economy. This is a country where 80% of its people are poor, and in addition, almost 80% are among the underemployed or unemployed. So, the heart of politics is the economy. And in this sense, it is feasible for the President to have the capacity (*facultad)* to present bills that have an economically urgent character, that oblige the Congress to study and resolve them in a one-month period. I see this as positive. What yes, I find complex is that although in some topics of the Congress, such as what occurred with the topic of the Added Value Tax (*IVA - Impuesto de Valor Agregado* ), where eighty-six legislators denied the increase of the *IVA*, the President can reintroduce a topic that's been denied by the Congress and through the partial veto he legislates practically with a third of the legislators. So this is a topic that deserves attention and a constitutional debate. I don't believe that there can be a country where the President is legislating with a third of the National Congress through the partial veto.

**JOHN:** That's what interests me.

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** I'm opposed to that possibility because if the topic's already been denied, the President can not use the tool of the partial veto. As far as this goes, perhaps we have a small discrepancy with Andrés, because I believe that Andrés Vallejo has a position that's a little different regarding the topic of the partial veto.

**JOHN:** Well, but regarding this case in particular it seems to me that you agree?

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**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** With what I am saying? How can the President legislate with [only] a third [of the legislators]?

**JOHN**: That's what's so unique.

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** That is unique, isn't it? I don't believe that that is feasible or constitutional, that President can legislate with a third of the National Congress through the partial veto.

**JOHN**: But does this case have a previous precedent or is it the first time that an Ecuadorian president has tried to reintroducir a bill?

**GUILLERMO LANDAZURI:** I believe that this is the first time that it has happened. What yes there has been, there have been other topics that are also polemic. The Constitution says that a bill should be received on a single matter (*una sola materia* ), and what has frequently happened is that the bills of urgent economic character include five, ten or fifteen or twenty matters through reforms to different laws. This is also another complicated topic, that suddenly the government wants to transform everything all at once; so, this is another polemic topic where I'd say there have been constitutional violations in Mahuad's government and now in that of Novoa's.

**JOHN:** Those are all of my questions. Thank you.