



OSVALDO HURTADO

Ex-President Osvaldo Hurtado met me at the offices of his own think tank in Quito, the Corporation for Development Studies. The attractive receptionist behind a Formica counter, a maze of tweed-covered low partitions arrayed among walls of bookcases, and young men in shirt sleeves scurrying among them set a scene like that in the many think-tanks around Dupont Circle in Washington. But the president of this one looks more elegant and prosperous. A handsome man, looking younger than his forty-eight years, Osvaldo Hurtado wore a freshly pressed three-piece dark blue suit with deep maroon tie. His sharp, clean features seldom yielded to a smile as he discussed the turbulent world of Ecuadorian politics.

A reflective, serious intellectual of international standing, Osvaldo Hurtado is still trying to bridge his two roles as political science professor and politician. The professor is a consummate gentleman, who is offended by the personal invective of Ecuador's recent election campaigns and what he sees as the "bullying" tactics of Febres Cordero, Ecuador's president from 1984-88. As a politician and leader of Ecuador's Christian Democratic Party, Hurtado has been unable to control the ward politicians who have grown up in the party he founded at age twenty-four. In July 1988, his own party, against his wishes, joined President Rodrigo Borja's Social Democrats in a coalition of the center-left, because jobs and power today are what ward politics are all about. But Professor Hurtado looks down the road and fears that the stern measures needed to break Ecuador's raging inflation will burn all parties in the current government and hand the 1992 elections to the right if no center-left party holds itself in reserve.

Hurtado is quick to point out that he was never elected president. He became president in August 1981, just one year after the

transition to civilian rule, when the charismatic Jaime Roldós was killed in a plane crash. As presidential and vice presidential candidate in the 1979 election, Hurtado and Roldós, both then in their thirties, presented an unusually young team. But there the similarity ended.

Hurtado, the bookish, thoughtful political scientist, had played an important role in the transition. He chaired the commission of experts which drafted the new constitution for Ecuador's civilian regimes. This constitution excluded any president from serving more than one term, a provision which ironically later ended Hurtado's presidential career at age forty-four in August 1984, when he finished the term he and Roldós started together.

Hurtado himself believes that the two roles of professor and politician actually did come together in his presidency, when he claims his political science concepts actually helped him understand the rough-and-tumble play of Ecuadorian politics. As president, Hurtado's task was a tough one, trying to confront a series of financial and natural disasters (particularly the El Niño phenomenon) in the face of a strident opposition majority in Congress. Ecuador's young democracy has not yet sired a sense of constructive opposition, which recognizes that ferocious assaults on the government can weaken the democratic system as well as the regime. The tactical quest for jobs and power is as far as some politicians look. Hurtado and his successors have all suffered from such destructive opposition tactics which still leave Ecuador's democracy vulnerable.

However Hurtado may blend the roles of professor and politician in the future, he comes out in this interview as an impressive representative of the fresh talent which has entered politics in Latin America over the last generation.

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BOEKER: During the 1978-79 electoral campaign both you and President Roldós were under forty, which is young for politicians in this hemisphere. Do you believe this was important in your electoral victory?

HURTADO: I believe it is one factor among many. Ecuador is a young country. Our campaign was youthful and innovative, conveying an image of change to an electorate ready for something different from the old politics. It was not just the physical appearance, it was how we expressed our thoughts to the Ecua-

dorian people. At that time television had already reached most homes and I took advantage of it, much more than Roldós did, to address the electorate and discuss some basic substantive problems. However, there were other factors, such as our confrontation of the dictatorship and mobilization of the people, which were instrumental in our electoral victory.

BOEKER: You have said that both you and President Roldós had a political style different from that of Ecuador's traditional politicians. How would you describe that new political style?

HURTADO: Political debate in Latin America and Ecuador in particular has had a strong personal focus, at the expense of discussion of the real problems of society and of the solutions they demand. My political science studies and my experience first as a politician and then as president all taught me to concentrate on Ecuador's basic, specific problems. More substantive, and less personalized, discussion is one characteristic of the new political style we introduced in Ecuador.

A second characteristic is that we tried to put behind us the relentless logic of "friend or foe" which has characterized Ecuadorian politics, and to replace it with the logic of democracy. That logic considers the opposition as both adversaries and potential allies whom one needs to work with, listen to, and consult. That has not been the practice in Ecuadorian politics.

A third characteristic was the introduction of technical discussions into the political debate. Political speeches in Ecuador were largely rhetorical and literary, only alluding to specific economic and social problems. I think I have contributed to rational debate of economic problems.

BOEKER: When you became president did your approach have to change under the pressures of the office you held?

HURTADO: My presidency reaffirmed my view and introduced a new dimension—a great interest in concrete problems of economic policy. When I became president and during the 1978 presidential elections, my vision focused on long-range, structural problems. Yet the crisis we are now facing has made it clear to us Latin American political leaders that the region's fundamental problem is management of the economy. We will be successful in the long term only to the extent that we can find economic policy responses to our present problems.

BOEKER: A political analyst whom you know, Nick Mills, passed an interesting judgment on the Roldós-Hurtado administration: He said, "for Roldós and Hurtado, democracy necessarily involved patience, tolerance, bargaining, negotiation, and compromise, qualities they both exercised to such a degree that they were criticized for not exercising enough authority and for not using a heavy hand..." Are you satisfied with that judgment?

HURTADO: The analysis is correct. It is another way of saying what I did in answer to your second question. The logic of friend or foe, which aims at destroying your adversaries, is characteristic of dictators, and forces the same behavior on political parties trying to destroy the dictatorship. However, this cannot persist under democracy. Even in countries with a dominant majority party, the opposition has a voice. This is especially important now that the media is instrumental in shaping public opinion.

The essence of democratic politics is dialogue, the search for compromises, and the formation of a majority. This is all new to Ecuadorian politics. So much so that when my presidential term ended, the country went back to the practice of a political style which was not at all the one we had tried to establish as one worthy of being called democratic.

I believe I am one of the few politicians in Ecuador who has never, or very seldom, insulted another political leader. You will never find in my speeches or statements anything offensive. However I am one who has suffered more than his share of insults.

During my administration I had almost everyone against me. The extreme left and the extreme right were both radically opposed. Groups representing industry, trade, and agriculture were all united in militant and active opposition. Labor unions declared more general strikes than they did during the dictatorship. The center-left parties were also against me, especially the Democratic Left.

The question is thus: how did I survive during a government of transition, in the midst of a serious economic crisis, in a country without a tradition of stability? Public opinion held that devaluation, which I had to carry out, was tantamount to treason. I was not an elected president: I was sworn in after Roldós' fatal accident. He was the one who had been the popular leader. The answer then would have to be that I had the loyalty of the armed

forces and that I was able to reach what I call Ecuador's "Silent Majority." This group supported me and my presidency despite the organized opposition.

BOEKER: Well, I wonder if Rodrigo Borja would agree with your statement that you may have suffered more verbal abuse than other politicians?

HURTADO: He is a beginner. I lived through that starting when I was a vice-presidential candidate.

BOEKER: He feels that he suffered much abuse during the past presidential campaign.

HURTADO: It is even worse when one is president of the country and is still given the same treatment.

BOEKER: With the third democratically elected president since the transition now in office, do you think there is more political stability than at the time of your administration?

HURTADO: There are two ways to analyze the stability of democracy in Latin America. One is by the length of time over which normal democratic succession has occurred. For example, Ecuador in 1988 transferred power from one constitutionally elected president to another for the third consecutive time. However, I believe that the problem is more complex and has to do with the nature of the social, economic, and political structures which support the democratic form of government. From that perspective I think that in general, Latin America has not changed much and in the specific case of Ecuador it has deteriorated.

The fundamental democratic institutions in Ecuador have suffered over the four years of the Ferebres Cordero administration. I will mention just two examples. First, the armed forces have intervened in political decisions on various occasions, acting as deliberative bodies, exercising an arbitrary function in the political life of the country. Second, the president has frequently governed by executive decrees, which have been used to reform laws, to create them and to prevent others from entering into effect. An elected and active legislature is a pillar of the democratic

structure, together with recognition of the rights of the opposition, freedom of the press, and respect for human rights. These are areas which have suffered severely during those four years.

From 1984 to 1988 in Ecuador we had an abuse of democratic institutions similar to what happened in Chile under President Salvador Allende. Of course Allende had an ideology totally opposite to the one of our head of government from 1984 to 1988 (Febres Cordero), but some measures taken here were equivalent to those taken in Chile under Allende. Our system of government was in danger since democracy depends on the legitimacy of its origin and of its actions.

BOEKER: Do you believe that President Borja's administration can recoup what you see as the weakened legitimacy of democratic institutions?

HURTADO: I believe so. The electoral outcome was a vote for return to democratic values—clean and honorable. Despite having had dictatorial regimes, Ecuador is a democratic country, and even our dictatorships have had to keep in mind the democratic conviction of our people; thus, our military dictatorships have been "soft" ones. President Borja's administration also represents a political party which stands for democracy, not only in Latin America but throughout the world. I believe that President Borja will govern taking fully into account the Ecuadorian preference for a democratic style and democratic values.

BOEKER: I understand you were opposed to your party participating in the Borja government. Why?

HURTADO: I was opposed when we had the national party convention in May 1988. What has happened since then has proved me right. Within my party, my opinion was that we should support the new administration along with other democratic forces in order to help restore democracy and rebuild the economy. There was no talk of opposition. The only difference of view occurred between those who insisted my party should be represented in the cabinet and my view that this was not at all necessary; all we needed was to support the government in Congress. I believe the new administration will need support throughout the whole presidential term, and the type of bid for offices made by my party does not assure that.

Finally, I feel strongly that a political party should always keep its eye on the long-term horizon when it takes decisions. That horizon is the year 1992, when new presidential elections will take place. If we think about the devastating economic crisis that we are facing today, and the negative impact it will necessarily have on the government, then it is crucial that the Christian Democrats are prepared to hold themselves apart as an alternative in 1992. We must prevent a return of the forces which in the last four years damaged the country's economy and its democracy. We must prevent a basically non-democratic populism from winning the elections, as it was so close to doing in the last months of the 1988 campaign.

BOEKER: Do you believe that the policy of President Carter with its emphasis on support for democracy and respect for human rights played an important role in the 1979 transition to civilian rule?

HURTADO: I have never understood how the United States, a genuinely democratic nation, with the oldest democracy in the hemisphere, could be so disinterested for most of its history in democratic government and values in Latin America. In light of this history, one has to give President Carter credit for having changed this lack of concern into concern for Latin American democracy. What he did in Ecuador is a good example.

I participated directly in the process of return to democracy. I presided over one of the commissions which drafted the laws governing the referendum, the elections and the role of political parties. In these functions as well as later as a vice-presidential candidate, I was very aware of all the conspiracies within the military, but even more so in the civilian sector, to frustrate the transition.

I know of diplomatic messages sent to the military government by President Carter, which had great influence in preventing these anti-democratic forces from succeeding. These forces wanted first to stop the constitutional referendum, then the elections and finally the transmission of power we had legitimately won.

BOEKER: Was there any thing more that Washington could subsequently have done to help you as president consolidate Ecuador's new democracy?

HURTADO: Latin American democracy has more to do with our own actions than with those of the U.S. I am not denying the United States the role it could play in the building of Latin American democracies. In fact, I have just mentioned what President Carter accomplished.

When I visited with President Reagan at the White House I expressed my concern for the future of Latin American democracy in light of the economic crisis. I did not go to the White House to ask specifically for help for Ecuador; I talked about problems that were critical for the region. President Reagan's reply was that Latin America's crisis would be solved by renegotiation of debt, by austerity programs such as I had implemented, and for which he congratulated me, and "the locomotive effect" of a booming U.S. economy on the growth of our economies. I expressed my disagreement with this argument, and I believe that the historical record has proved me right. I might add that during my presidency the U.S. administration, while recognizing our problems, did not take any specific steps to support us in our efforts to overcome the crisis.

BOEKER: Are there any measures or policies which you would like to suggest to a new administration in Washington to help cope with the problems in the hemisphere?

HURTADO: Latin America will overcome its crisis on the basis of a prolonged national effort which extends beyond a particular administration; Latin America needs continuity. By this I mean that I do not share the opinion of some Latin American politicians who argue that all of our problems are somehow foreign-made and that the solutions can be found abroad. Latin America needs to make a tremendous effort to raise the level of savings and investment, and to work with discipline and a sense of organization.

Even with all that, Latin America will not be able to overcome its crisis until we resolve the "bottleneck" of our international accounts which in some years has resulted in an annual transfer of financial resources in the amount of one hundred billion dollars. There has not been a country in the world's economic history which has developed while being a net exporter of capital. All countries which have developed have been net importers of economic resources. It was the case with the Roman Empire and with the United States. Under these circumstances I believe that

the best thing the developed countries can do for Latin America is to contain this outflow, and if possible reverse it, although the latter is probably not feasible. Many ways have been suggested as to how to contain the outflow. What matters is the result; namely, to arrest the net export of capital to the United States and other industrialized countries. If we do not find a way to stop this transfer, or at least to decrease it, our economies will remain stagnant.

I would not be surprised if toward the end of century, ECLA (the U.N. Economic Commission for Latin America), could say that in the year 2000 the level of development and the welfare of the Latin American people will correspond to that of the Seventies, which would mean that we would have lost thirty years of development. This is going to happen to a continent with enormous possibilities and one which is very much linked to the hemispheric security which so worries the United States.

During my presidency I was able to lower the public sector deficit to zero. However, the Ecuadorian economy continues to have problems. Why? Because we did not have the resources to invest, to create jobs, to produce capital and thus to achieve some progress. One way to reverse the transfer of resources is by finding a solution to the debt problem. Another possibility would be through increases in the prices of our export commodities. Another would be through increases in the volume of our exports. Such an increase depends on our effort and our investment capacity, but we cannot be successful unless we have access to the markets of the industrialized world.