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Peru

Ollanta Humala - Peru's New Hope?

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In Peru, the nationalist Ollanta Humala arrived in first position in the first round of the presidential elections, on Sunday April 9, with over 30 per cent of the votes. The second round will take place in a month's time.

The first round of the Peruvian general elections on Sunday April 9 produced a result: in spite of a very aggressive electoral campaign against him, it was the nationalist candidate, Ollanta Humala, who came out on top with over 30 per cent of the vote.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/ollanta.jpg>]

However, Humala will have to wait to know who will be his opponent in the second round: for the moment the counting of votes does not make it possible to know whether it will be the social-liberal candidate, Alan Garcia, or the representative of the Right, Lourdes Flores, who are both on around 24 per cent of the vote.

In spite of the opinion polls, which were crediting him with a higher score, this result is a real success for Humala, whom the United States perceive as a "second Chavez" and whose possible accession to the presidency is feared by the Peruvian bourgeoisie. Thus, on the eve of the elections, the outgoing President Alejandro Toledo addressed the Peruvian people in a televised "message to the nation", in the course of which he declared that the people had to "think" and not vote "for a candidate who represents instability and authoritarianism". In short, a direct attack on Humala.

The day of the elections itself was marked by an unexpected event: at the moment of going to vote in a private university situated in a bourgeois neighbourhood of Lima, Humala had to face five hundred right-wing activists shouting "Assassin!". Once he was in the polling station, he found himself literally blocked for more than an hour: a scene that was to say the least surreal and which was only made possible because of the passivity of the police force, which was suspected of complicity.

The incident, far from being a mere anecdote, highlights all the ambiguity of the person who today reflects the aspirations of a majority of the popular sectors. Accused throughout the campaign of having violated human rights, Humala is suspected of having participated as an army officer in acts of torture in 1992, when former president Alberto Fujimori was conducting his "war on subversion" against Shining Pathway - the Maoist guerrilla movement led by Abimael Guzman that had been launched some years previously, and which was particularly active among the Peruvian peasantry.

These are accusations that, paradoxically, the state cannot prove, because to do so would discredit the whole of the army as such. He is also suspected of having established links with the "military mafia" of Vladimir Montesinos, former army chief under Fujimori, links that are only supposed to have been broken after his rebellion against Fujimori at Tacna in the South of Peru, along with his brother Antauro, in 2000.

In the context of elections which were extremely polarized, Humala's success can be partly explained by the disoriented state of the Left, part of which got entangled in "Fujimorism" and which is today totally absent from the political landscape. Ollanta is a career officer who initially adhered to "ethnocacerism", a racist Incaist ideology developed by his father Isaac, and which is still espoused by his brother, who is at present in prison following a new armed rebellion in January 2005 [1].

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Humalahat.jpg>]

Humala (centre, hat) with his brother Antauro (uniform, no hat) during the October 2000 military rebellion against Fujimori

But he has, since his entry into political activity last year, considerably moderated his discourse, giving it a more clearly nationalist character, which is now centered on recovering the country's natural resources. Proclaiming himself as "neither right nor left", cultivating an image that is in the purest style of the Latin American caudillo, he has nevertheless succeeded in giving a voice to the most impoverished social layers in Peru, and in raising hopes of putting a stop the economic policies that Toledo, by signing on Wednesday April 12 a Free Trade Agreement (TLC) with the United States, intends to pursue right to the end of his term of office [2]. That is what is at stake in the second round of the election, which will take place in a month's time.

"Latin America is exhausted by neo-liberalism"

Interview with Ollanta Humala

At the time of Evo Morales's investiture as President of Bolivia in January, our correspondent Herve Do Alto met and interviewed Ollanta Humala, who had come to Bolivia for the occasion. In this interview, where he argues for a break with neo-liberalism, Humala shows himself to be at the crossroads of nationalism and indigenism.

Q. Evo Morales is the first indigenous president of Bolivia. How does that make you feel?

A. I feel great happiness! It is the expression of a political process which is giving a new orientation and a new face to Latin America. New leaders are emerging from sectors that are social, popular and varied. It would have been unthinkable only twenty or thirty years ago that they should come to power. I think that Evo Morales is part of this new generation of leaders who are going to give a fresh impulse to Latin America in a world context.

Do you think that you are part of this new generation of leaders?

Of course! I've only been in politics for eight months. Until then I was a soldier, posted to France, and in scarcely eight months we have managed to reach the first place in the opinion polls. This is the expression of a progressive current in America [3]. America is exhausted by neo-liberalism, which has brought none of the benefits that its defenders promised. We want to rebuild our economic model. We want to give the masses of this country, who have never been protected by the law, a new citizenship. We are going to see to it that they have education of quality, a reliable health system...

What influence will the victory of Evo Morales have on your campaign?

I think it is important that Morales succeeds in consolidating his position in Bolivia. I see much joy on the faces of Bolivians. This process will help us, if we come to power, to build along with Evo Morales a common agenda for Bolivia and Peru, concerning for example gas, the cultivation of coca, the debt...All these are themes that go beyond the frontiers of our two countries. For my part, I have a long-term ambition, which is to bring to fruition a project of integration between Bolivia and Peru.

Precisely concerning the coca leaf, what is your exact position on the subject? Do you think that it is a

question of a traditional Andean culture that has to be defended?

Of course, that's obvious! The coca leaf is today the object of total confusion with cocaine, whereas it represents an ancestral culture, whatever the United States wants to think about it. So in this sense we are partisans of its depenalisation and we think it is our duty to defend Peruvian coca growers.

Your military past and your participation in a coup d'etat against ex-president Fujimori, in 2000, have contributed to giving you an image as dangerous authoritarian populist, or even a fascist. How do you react to these accusations?

They are really trying to discredit me through these assertions. I did in fact take part in an attempted coup d'etat, but today we are counting on the electoral road to change our country and break with neo-liberalism on a nationalist and progressive basis, in solidarity with all those Latin American regimes who are engaged in a perspective that is similar to ours. Besides, fascism has always defended big capital, whereas as far as I'm concerned, I defend the small producers and the poorest Peruvians.

[1] The term "ethnocacerism" refers to General Andres Avelino Caceres (1836-1923), a "patriotic" Peruvian oligarch, who during the 1879-1884 war with Chile was the leader of the detachments of Indian peasant guerrillas. He subsequently betrayed and massacred them when they began to take on the big Peruvian landowners, and later became president. It is highly debatable whether "ethnocacerism" as such can be properly qualified as racist. Humala himself says that: "ethnocacerism is only the military version of Peruvian nationalism" (editors' note).

[2] Toledo's decision to sign the TLC with the United States has provoked widespread protests in Peru. Humala has called on Congress to block the deal and proposed that there should be a referendum on the question.

[3] Like most Latin Americans, Humala uses "America" to mean the whole continent, including, and even especially, its southern half - unlike most Europeans and North Americans, who use it to refer only to the United States.