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The short story of the Coup

Introduction

I use, for this conference, a different title than the “sexy” one with which our friends at DRCLAS have advertised it. I have misgivings as to how much of an “insider” I have really been and am not sure I will cover here as much or the same territory as my patrons would want. Let me start by warning also of what I am not going to do. I will not attempt to refute the various theses which I consider erroneous of the Coup, either from interested parties or from those uninformed commentators and new “experts” that have proliferated in the last three months. I will not try to solve false legal issues or fill in all the information gaps. Nor will I dramatize the monstrous human rights abuses in Honduras or complain about those who pontificate or are intent on whitewashing the de facto regime. I will not decipher the mysteries of American Foreign Policy, nor inventory the regional power games. And I will not give you a definitive and impartial version of the story, first of all because I am not inclined to do so, secondly because there is such thing as good and evil, black and white, in the face of which shades and subtleties seem irrelevant and lastly, because I am still Secretary of State for Culture.... But much confusion derives from the fact that people don’t know the basic story line and by trade, I feel obliged, on the other hand, to bring that story into a historical and theoretical perspective.

Remote Historical Antecedents

Honduras is today a failed state, not because of the coup, which has only exposed basic structural flaws but because of these “fallas”, derived from extreme poverty, inequality and the resulting social polarization, because of a flawed political system that pretends to be a “democracy” while it is and has been controlled by a very small although astute clique of power brokers, a pretense that has become dysfunctional. And I want to start then with a summary historical perspective of the remote origins and evolution of the problem. Honduras became “independent” as a result of the collapse of the Central American Union.

After Independence, it has been said, we had the figments of a State before the elements of a nation and following the collapse of silver mining and of dye and tobacco trade at the dawn of the 19th C, the Honduran economy reverted to its elemental agrarian bases. A few merchants remained in five or six regional “capitals” connected to neighboring countries. A few cattlemen with large landholdings had more cows than their peasant neighbors, but there was land for all and that society was the closest thing I can imagine to what one British historian has called “the one class society”.¹ It was not utopia. Violence erupted intermittently for regional autonomy. The center did not hold...

Coffee became a cash crop that generated wealth in the late XIX Century and banana cultivation did the same on the North Coast before the American companies took over. But historians have long argued, and I think demonstrated, that the American banana enclave became so powerful in Honduras precisely because we lacked a national (Honduran) capitalist upper class to lead a process of economic modernization. 2 And perhaps that is still the case and the explanation for the extreme form of economic “occupation” by recently arrived immigrants, mostly from the Middle East who today control the national economy, even though many do not have a national identity or a commitment to the nation and to the integration of social groups. Honduras is a nation without a founding myth, without a social compact and without a project.

I think Marco A Soto conceived a national project in the 1880s but had not the wherewithal. In the nineteen twenties there was an effort by intellectuals and the precursors of the labor unions in Honduras, as in other Central American countries, to posit a National Project, but if that was so, the Carias dictatorship (1932-1948) broke it, as the first Somoza did in Nicaragua, with slightly different tactics.

A couple of modernization movements emerged at the Mid Twentieth Century in Honduras when, due to resentment against the enclave, Honduras became the Central American country with the greater degree of labor and peasant organization. These mid century movements evoked an inclusive “national integration” (with Galvez and Villeda), and they achieved important reforms, such as female suffrage, and later the beginning of social security, labor codes and even a projected agrarian reform, but they also were aborted (through coups), and we have never been able to connect that idea to the dynamics of development.

The Common Market triggered growth again in the nineteen sixties. But Honduras is an extreme case of what R. Mayorga calls “a concentrated and polarized” economic growth, that excludes the great majority of the population. 3 The growth of that population and the expansion of capitalist agriculture in the last half Century led to problems in rural areas and we had a very dynamic landless Peasant Movement from the sixties to the eighties which, from 1971 to 1982, served as pretext for populist military dictatorship, twice “renovated” by “golpes de barraca”.

We did not have a Civil War, as did all countries around us, thank God. While agrarian Reform was not so good for agro business, it doubtless released some steam, and stemmed off a crisis. But social tensions accumulated again. The contradictions now reached the urban sphere and were intensified by substantial rapid urbanization. Landless peasants were now only part of the problem and many had moved to the cities. The return to civilian rule with a new Constitution in 1982 was well received by every sector. And it could have been an opportunity for formulating, finally, a real social compact, with inclusive representation. But it was a missed opportunity. Mostly because, still under military rule, two political parties assumed and agreed that they were the legal representatives of the populace. And in the midst of the “secret dirty war” against Nicaragua, a two party political system, which has been characterized as “non ideological” was “good enough”. 3 (Anna Belver) Though critics have said both parties are identical moieties and many feel alienated from both.

In fact the “civil” regime inaugurated a series of corrupt, inefficient administrations. At the same time, the country had been growing, though not much more than the population. The urban sector prospered. The sweatshops or “maquila” provided better paying jobs for young people who migrated to the cities. Our exports flourished. Mostly towards the American market and recently

availing themselves of the Free Trade Agreement which, in his campaign President Zelaya defended, stating that we needed foreign markets. Ours is one of the more dependant regional economies. We import 75% of our consumption, all our oil and export t-shirts and socks, wood, shrimp and fruit of course, more melons than bananas lately and a little bit of coffee, though these agricultural staples are secondary nowadays. Tourism is the most dynamic sector. And mostly we export people.

Honduras is today one of the five countries in the Americas with greater poverty and it is the second most iniquitous, with the highest Gini factor measurements. Poverty concentrated in marginal urban slums and in rural and particularly indigenous regions, populated by the Lenca and the Chorti, the Garífuna, Pech and the Miskitu. As a result of this situation, perhaps a million Hondurans have migrated to the US in the last quarter century and their remittances have become the most important source of foreign currency, and the best distributed. After several years of a supposed “Poverty Reduction Strategy”, which our foreign partners demanded in exchange for debt pardon, we still had by 2005, 65% + of the population living in poverty, 29 per one thousand children dying in their first year from preventable causes, 31% of the surviving children malnourished, an illiteracy rate of 20% and middle school for only one third of elementary graduates, an almost African condition. One that should explain why studies show that amongst Central Americans, Hondurans had the lowest self esteem and the least social cohesion and one of the lowest degrees of civic engagement. 4

The Zelaya Proposal: Poder Ciudadano and its evolution

That is the country we were called on to govern in 2006 after Liberal Manuel Zelaya won national elections with a 5% margin over his contender, Pepe Lobo, who was then President of Congress and thus running for office against the Constitution and proposing the death penalty against gang members, a man who will probably win the next election. Zelaya won with his proposal to increase social investment and with a mandate to “empower citizens”. Nothing was interrupted. No radical change was proposed. No enterprise national or foreign was ever menaced with expropriation. The State did not embark in any adventure.

In his Inaugural Address, the President however reminded all that he had the commitment to empower citizens. That he believed that was the only way to reduce poverty and fight chronic corruption and violence, through accountability and transparency. He announced no one would henceforth pay to go to public schools and asked and got Congress to approve a “Citizen’s Participation Law”, to establish a new connection of the government with the population. He also asked the chief officers of the five American companies that have distributed fuel in the country to come to his office the very next morning. He had to discuss with them the “Report” signed by Cardinal Rodriguez, amongst others, which asserted unequivocally that, with their contracts and procedures, they were in effect extorting the nation. (Later he demanded they comply with universally recognized rules in the trade they were ignoring, and warned that if they did not, he would open the oil supply to a competitive bidding.) And he announced an end to open pit mining.

President Zelaya afterwards met with the business elites on a couple of occasions and was, once and again, confronted with their demand to submit to their plans. They wanted a free hand with concessions, further privatization of the National Power Company (ENEE) and TeleCom (Hondutel). He refused; and insisted he would rescue these public companies from their

administrative collapse and make them competitive to guarantee public competition to the private sector and a surplus for the State. The oil policy brought the President into conflict with the American Ambassador Mr. Charles Ford, “on loan from the Commerce to the State Department” and an expert, so he says, on “the use of commercial policy for diplomatic purposes, in order to avoid the use of force”, this under the Administration of Mr. G. W. Bush, who was directly confrontational in his meetings with Mr. Zelaya.

The Zelaya Administration essayed participatory democracy through regional Meetings of the President and his cabinet with citizens and local authorities, Citizen’s Empowerment Assemblies. And established a true Social Cabinet to study and coordinate social policy, which was also discussed with representatives of independent social organizations. Not a very complicated proposal, that policy. On the one hand, an enhanced welfare program for the extremely poor, availing itself with resources freed by international debt relief and fresh funds from IADB, a program under the symbolic umbrella of the First Lady. With these funds, the government also launched a local investment plan which was approved by Congress, and apportioned more or less \$40 million dollars annually to municipalities, for investment in local economic projects and social services, supervised by a Poverty Reduction Commissioner, increasing resources for local governments, from a theoretically never before paid 5% to around 8% of the national budget. There were criticisms. Welfare was said to be politically oriented, supervision and “disbursements” slow and costly to the municipalities. But beneficiaries were happy. They had never had these opportunities. Some funds were destined to microcredit. All public institutions were instructed to work with the people, with communities and local governments and to decentralize functions in as much as allowed by the centralist Constitution.

After the failure of the oil imports bidding process, due to systematic sabotage by transnational suppliers and in the midst of the oil price crisis, President Zelaya accepted the offer by Hugo Chavez of provisioning our country with oil. We would pay 40% on delivery, the rest would be a loan, with capital due in twenty years and 1 % annual interest rates. Congress first declared “it would not ratify the Treaty” that needed to be signed but was later convinced to do so (I am not familiar with how that was accomplished) and President Zelaya invited the Presidents of the Alba Accord to Tegucigalpa for the public signing of the Treaty. We were merry, sang songs and joked. (A little after that Hugo Llorens the new Ambassador named by the US, had his formal reception by the President delayed by week, as a way of protesting diplomatic pressures against Bolivian President E. Morales.) Doubtless, we made mistakes. Who doesn’t in governing? Pampering the military? But we had our “vacas gordas”.

Tourism flourished, in fact grew enormously in the Bay Islands. The first two years we grew at unprecedented rates 6, 6.7% per year. And we had a substantial reduction, 10% out of extreme poverty as a result of good economic policy (forcing bankers to invest their money rather than renting it out to the State at a fixed, secured and high rate) and of focused social investment programs. The poverty reductions figures were questioned of course, but then certified by a World Bank study.⁵ We still grew last year at 4.5%, one of the better regional rates.

Yet tensions accumulated. Already by late September of 2008, there were rumors of a Coup. General Romeo Vasquez appeared on a popular TV talk show and confessed he had been approached with the suggestion that he lead a Coup, but not by President Zelaya, as the opposition argued, in order to prolong his mandate, but by members of the opposition. During the primary campaign of November, in which the major parties selected their candidates, the

crisis in the Liberal Party was obvious. And soon after that, President Zelaya was clearly isolated from this political base. He tried and failed to nominate some Supreme Court justices, all fifteen of which were elected by Congress. He failed also to promote his candidates to Attorney General and was forced to condemn the election, by Congress also, of the Electoral Tribunal, stacked with acting elected public officials, who legally could not assume that function. All the Liberal Party nominees elected by Congress to those institutions belonged to the “Florista” faction, (the right wing of the Liberal Party, led by ex President Carlos Flores) of which a few months earlier, Elvin Santos, now elected the Liberal presidential candidate had proudly said, was “la que pone y quita presidentes”, (“the one that places and removes presidents”).

Meanwhile, President Zelaya strengthened his own direct relationship with union leaders, representatives of the cooperative movement, peasant and ethnic leaders, leaders of independent social service organizations and reiterated his commitment to the development of the social sector: cooperatives especially. ALBA resources were doubly useful to that purpose, as many popular leaders identified with Chavez and the pact provided resources for funding the broad social movement. Y. Martinez, a colleague, comments “Zelaya committed himself to rowing a boat with actors that were not new but had been ever more marginalized by a State that imposed politics from above without taking into account “los de abajo”...which greatly bothered the oligarchy”. In fact the rowers were the same as in the mid Twentieth Century, and had coexisted peacefully with military populism and bipartisan politics, but felt increasingly relegated and had never had a chance to participate.

Things came to a head clearly by January of this year when President Zelaya, availing himself of the “Law for the Minimum Salary”, which gave him the power to determine that “figure” if employees and employers did not reach an accord, decided that minimum wage increases should not just cover annual inflation, as the private sector argued, but also cover the basic cost of living (canasta basica) of the ordinary family, and decreed a 60% + increase, which then came to be \$280 per month, and was still one of the lowest in the region. In fact only one half of employers abide by that law, but the private sectors’ reaction was violent. The media, controlled by five family owned companies, connected to the power brokers immediately warned there would be massive layoffs, that a great number of small companies would go broke, and that we would cease to be competitive in international markets, even if exemptions were allowed for the maquila.

All hell broke loose, and a very consistent theory came to the forefront of the pro-coup “national” press. President Zelaya was said to be an irresponsible populist who was fueling the fire of class division. He was an instrument of Hugo Chavez. He was alienating Honduras from the United States and was endangering the extension of the TPS, the temporary protection status granted to Honduran migrants after the Mitch catastrophe. Thousands of migrants would be expelled from the States. Exports would lose their markets. Mayhem would ensue.

A few hundred people lined up at the Labor Ministry offices to ask how much their severance pay would come to, some alas hoping they would be fired. There were no massive layoffs and few people went broke, although many of course were disgruntled by their loss of profit and budgetary problems. But if you will allow me the metaphor, one could then almost hear the wheels of the coup turning. It was conjured. In the midst of accusations about a cover up of massive capital transfers to foreign banks that speculated against national currency, the President also dismissed G. Alfaro, a protégé of Carlos Flores Facusse from the National Bank and

Insurance Commission and Adolfo Facusse, Carlos Flores F cousin and President of ANDI declared that “the government was planning to assault the private banking system”.

The drop that overturned the glass...La gota que derrama el vaso.

And then the last chapter opened. President Zelaya announced in March he would send to Congress a “Thirty Year Development Plan” based on a series of consultations with civil society, formerly carried out by the now Minister of the Interior, Victor Meza. We could not hope, he declared, to improve the conditions of the country, planning only for four years at a time, and elected governments should commit themselves to the long term, and a steady course of sustained public investment.* And he began talking about the legal problems he confronted to promote development, of legalized fiscal loopholes that deprived the State of sufficient income and of the need for a new Constitution that would resolve contradictions, allow decentralization and promote a participatory democracy. There had been wide agreement, even since the 2005 campaign, that the Constitution guaranteed a monopoly of political representation to traditional parties and that it was in fact conceived as a straight jacket to assure privilege rather than as guideline of principles. But his political enemies immediately interpreted President Zelaya had only his continuity or reelection in mind. It was said again that he was imitating Chavez, and that he was betraying his mandate.

The President insisted many times every time that elections would be held as scheduled, but that a referendum should be held simultaneously, to see if people wanted to convene a new Constitutional Assembly, during the next presidential term. Since our present Constitution did not contemplate any solution to the predicament, he announced first a popular “consultation”. And, when a judge said that would have to be organized by the Electoral Tribunal (which, you’ll recall, was stacked by Congressmen and aldermen in favor of the status quo), the Administration determined instead to have a survey to see if people favored the idea of an eventual referendum on constitutional reform.

Did we want a Cuarta Urna: A fourth ballot box?

So a survey was called for, under the authority of the “Citizen’s Participation Law”. The President convened the Cabinet and asked us to back him with a decree establishing that this survey would be a government project, and to accompany him in organizing it nationwide. Participation would be completely voluntary and the results could not be binding. But if the response from the electorate was positive, it would serve as justification to ask Congress to order the Tribunal to establish a Fourth Polling Box. I don’t know what the President was thinking of in his labyrinth but no one ever spoke of staying in power. Most of us were committed. It would be our legacy! Real change.

During the National Elections of November, aside from a ballot box for voters to choose: 1. A president, 2. Deputies to Congress and 3. A mayor with his roster of aldermen in each municipality, we proposed we should also have “a fourth ballot box” for a referendum on the Constitutional Assembly: “la cuarta urna”. The survey would be held on the 28th of June. Unnecessarily and improperly, in Washington, Ambassador Thomas Shannon pronounced the idea “a distraction” and pontificated that Honduras had “other more urgent problems to solve”.

But backed by social organizations, teachers' unions prominently, the idea caught on like fire in a haystack. Before we knew it and before many people understood exactly what it meant or implied, la Cuarta Urna became a symbol of "real change at last". Polls showed it had an approval rate of almost 80%. And its adversaries quickly moved against it. The proposal was "illegal", they said, because it posited a change by referendum or popular consultation which was yet unregulated and could not be used to change the system. Ours was a representative not a direct democracy. Our constitution was perfectly ok and its minor defects could be amended without an Assembly. But that argument would not hold much water. (In fact, one third of the Constitution has been reformed to the convenience of a few beneficiaries and Coup leaders have been the foremost amenders and proponents of constituent assemblies in the past.) You would not get many people to vote against being consulted. Then, a media campaign of almost incredible proportions began, again accusing the President of the evil intention to use la cuarta urna as a pretext to stay in power or to become a candidate for illegal reelection. To these critics again, Chavez was his inspiration, and staying in power his only concern.

La Cuarta Urna, they howled, was unconstitutional also because it pretended to "change the system of democratic respect for private property into socialist populist (chavista) authoritarianism". An ironic accusation in light of what has happened, since we never interfered with, much less sabotaged opposition media, never suspended constitutional guarantees and never killed protesters. We were accused of imitating a projected (though inexistent) Venezuelan law to take second homes away from people in order to solve the housing problem, and when this did not seem radical enough, that we were planning to force families with multiple room homes to take in houseless tenants. That we were planning to take custody over children older than three years away from parents!! Really preposterous stuff fabricated in South Florida. Red baiting, you call it. So after this massive bombardment, which the government was helpless to offset, the popularity of cuarta urna on the eve of the survey had descended, according to polls, alas to only 60% of favorable opinion. With an additional problem for opponents: they had urged people not to participate in the "criminal" survey, rather than to vote against; we would get a resounding triumph in the survey.

In the public arena, the basic argument against the survey was that a judge had declared the original consulta illegal (only the Electoral Tribunal could hold such) and determined also literally, though absurdly that "any future activity with the same end in mind" would be illegal also. A bizarre idea.

That being the case, to have the military distribute the survey material would be illegal also, and they would be held accountable. A loyal congressman moved in Congress, as the military asked, to exempt them from responsibility, but the Florista faction defeated it, despite the fact that supposedly The Military High Command had asked Flores Facusse to help pass that motion. So, though they had received an unspecified amount of money to do it, two days before they were to distribute the printed materials for the survey, the military High Command visited President Zelaya and told him they would not do it, whereupon the President being Commander in Chief, fired General Vasquez and accepted the resignation of his Staff. The Attorney General confiscated the survey material on the following day, Wednesday. President Zelaya rescued it from an Air Force base that same day with his followers and rented trucks to distribute it, and The Supreme Court reinstated Gen. Vasquez, and his High Command. That already was a Coup. Or aren't the military are a dependency of the Executive?**El Golpe en si: some raw facts.**

On Thursday, Congress met to consider a motion to impeach the President. But it could not carry through on it because the Constitution they were “defending” did not contemplate that possibility. There was no time for the Supreme Court to try him. Clearly there was a conspiracy, a decision had been agreed upon and the dispute was about method and procedure. It was the same old oligarchy and the same rehearsed play. On Friday, June 25 President of Congress Micheletti wrote to Gen. Romeo Vasquez reminding him of his promise to act before the survey. And on Sunday morning when we were beginning to install the booths where people were going to come fill in their survey forms, at 5 am, a hooded military platoon attacked the president’s home (shots were fired) and took him in his pajamas to a waiting car and plane and to Costa Rica, where, at the airport the President gave a press conference explaining what had happened, at 9am. At that hour the military and policemen were confiscating survey material at gunpoint all around the country. It was criminal evidence. And we, the Ministers who had organized it, were a part of that criminal activity. A couple of ministers were forcibly exiled.

At eleven o’clock that Sunday the (Military) High Command notified Micheletti they had decided to put him in the Presidency. And the Secretary of Congress (convened without the twenty seven deputies who were faithful to Pres. Zelaya) read and “accepted” a supposed resignation letter, invoking bad health, which President Zelaya denounced immediately as a forgery and, when that ruse was exposed, Congress proceeded “to dismiss The President”, for which there is no legal provision and swore Micheletti in as President amidst a show of supposedly Christian piety. Alleluias! Formally, the Catholic Hierarchy and Protestant Churches applauded. Although immediately one of the bishops, the only Honduran bishop, L.A Santos and many pastors protested they had been no part of those accords. COHEP and industrialists in ANDI, both controlled by ten wealthy families, declared their support.

Some sequels: three months have passed

While formerly, presidential victims of many coups have always accepted their fate and gone home or peacefully to exile, and everybody else was resigned to their removal, Manuel Zelaya simply refused to give up. He called the people to peaceful resistance and went first during two months into a frenzy of presidential diplomacy, initially visiting a meeting of Central American and the Grupo de Rio presidents; the day after, the OAS; three days after that, the UN; and later making official visits as head of state by invitation to Mexico, Chile, Peru and Brazil. UNASUR, ALBA. He declared he would sign the unfavorable Arias Plan. And then, in the last two months, he thrice attempted to return, until he succeeded last week, and took refuge in the Brazilian embassy. His activity must have contributed to the unprecedented international reaction that immediately isolated the de facto regime. A great deal of foreign aid has been cut. And both the President’s leadership and the international reaction have been crucial in the birth and growth of The Resistance, which I think is the real hero of this story.

Three months after his kidnapping, the Coup is still in power. But coup leaders must have repented many times of not having killed President Zelaya. Coup authorities confront a rising of the population against them. They have made every effort to mobilize their own social bases. Big employers give employees bonuses to go to their marches and have had at their disposal almost all the national media and bureaucracy. Soldiers and policemen protect “the whites” in their rallies with banners in English defending peace, nationalism and democracy as they brutally clamp down and persecute the Resistance movement (known as “the reds”), with gases and clubs and live munitions and detain marchers. On last Sunday they suspended all legal guarantees for 45

days, renewable, though they repented and promised to retract the measure after encountering unexpected opposition in Congress.

As Manuel Torres, a brilliant Honduran journalist has phrased it, the Coup has been “socially defeated”. (The best estimates tell us confidently that some 65% of Hondurans sympathize with The Resistance). Despite brutal if “selective” repression, The Front for Resistance has organized daily opposition rallies with hundreds of thousands of participants confronting the police in the cities but also road blocks and neighborhood protests, in which people have begun to fire back at the police. The President and The Frente still avow a peaceful negotiated process to “reverse the curse” of the coup. But repression has already transgressed a fine line. The Coup has declared war on them as it stalls on negotiation. A new kind of repression is in sight and there will be a new kind of reaction, unpredictable but yes, justifiable. Negotiations proceed slowly and secretive as is their nature.

A long term appraisal: the ironies of the situation

Many are hopeful of a prompt restoration. Anything can happen. I do not know what it will be. And will not vouchsafe for the future. Honduras depends more than any other Central American country on foreign aid and markets. The coup regime is running out of resources. Despite depletion of National Bank Reserves, it will soon have to fire the public servants it has tried to bribe. Damage to the economy is catastrophic.

Certainly President Zelaya’s return has put Coup authorities under great pressure; their ever more irresponsible reaction reflects that. But they have no intention to give in and have declared they will only be taken out of power by an armed intervention. They count on the “under the table” complicity of two or three governments in the region: Panama and Colombia the more important ones, who refuse to cut ties and maintain the hope of recognition of elections, held under Micheletti’s heavy hand, to whitewash the Coup. And they count on ambiguity in the position of the US, whose OAS representative, Mr. Ansalem today mocked other delegates and declared President Zelaya was irresponsible and foolish to have returned without a political agreement in place, though formerly Secretary Clinton had declared Zelaya’s presence in Tegucigalpa would facilitate talks and the US had cancelled visas, limited aid and expelled Coup officials. The Coup refuses to allow the press into the Embassy and has refused entrance to and expelled the OAS delegation that arrived Sunday, declared the ambassadors from countries that do not recognize it are unwelcome, though again it has just backed down.

It is difficult to imagine the scale of repression that would be needed to stamp out The Resistance. I am not sure that the armed forces have the material capacity or the will to do it; many are uncomfortable with the task. And it also seems probable that, if there is no restoration, there will be civil war. The international community has a responsibility in preventing anarchy. But it must act urgently. U.S, Canada and a couple of Latin American countries however have just blocked a resolution that would have committed the OAS against elections held under coup authorities and thus would have generated political will for an Accord.

In the long term, things seem less obscure. I can say a couple of things with certainty. An old Hispanic American saying argues. “No hay bien que su mal no traiga, ni mal que por bien no venga” (No good thing fails to bring bad, nor bad thing that comes without bringing good.). A bit fatalistic perhaps. But there is general agreement amongst informed observers that the sequels

generated a degree and type of civil participation which we had never seen before. Honduras is a different country after the Coup and after three months of massive mobilization, which would not have evolved if President Zelaya had been restored to power a couple of days or weeks after the Coup. It is not a matter of a new class divide. The one class society disappeared a century ago. Rather we are now seeing a new civic consciousness, a cultural change, interestingly enough generated without mass media support, in the street.

This transformation is clearly irreversible. My country will never be the same. People are empowered by mobilization. They sing to the police (Nos tienen miedo porque no tenemos miedo; “you are afraid of us because we are not afraid of you”). They resist torture. They have formed, in days, an incredible web of relations between disparate kinds of organizations, ethnic representations, lencas and garifunas, unions, labor and artists’ unions, lawyers and students, teachers and taxi drivers, who help each other evade curfew, and house, feed, and hide each other. And they come together to deliberate on the matter at hand everywhere. They have all marched before, each for their own particular group interest, but not together and for a common cause. That is the novelty. Together, “they are a new social force with its own logic and dynamic” says R. Sierra, another colleague.

And the same author notes “people who had never participated before in any protest take the microphones in rallies and speak up, read a proclamation or a poem, a litany or howl a slogan”. They have created a new social space, in which everyone of the participants feels himself an actor...the protagonist of a cause”. What we are on the verge of seeing is a true society in movement (“a space with rotating collective leadership” as R Zibechi says), based on community relationships. (PC)

They demand to have President Zelaya back even though many didn’t like him before. He has become not just a man but a symbol, as John Womack noted long ago was the case for Emiliano Zapata in Mexico. But most want much more. They demand the Constituent Assembly that was, through the Coup, denied to them. They have denounced and rebuke traditional party candidates. They dream about social justice. The idea of it has possessed them. Y. Martinez observes there is a new symbolism of plural identities converging in the idea of a new constitution, a new order. The Cuarta Urna has become the National Project no one will stop, although this time the ones left out will be foreign entrepreneurs who conspired for the Coup and have backed it fanatically, a genuine and certainly inspirational Revolution. The “non ideological two party system” is finished. A compact will be forged.

We are living a national tragedy, every night is a nightmare. Protesters have been assassinated selectively in public, are arbitrarily detained, beat in custody, tortured in the most degrading manners, Resistance movement associates killed by hit squad and homes broken into. But I have said in Honduras and, in order to be honest, I repeat for you here that I am an old man and I have loved and long served my people faithfully but I have never been happier or prouder of being a Honduran. Nor as hopeful as I am today. And satisfied that, despite the coup, or perhaps even because of it (that is the final irony of the thing) we have achieved our main goal: we have today an empowered citizenry. El resto vendra por anhadidura.

(Oct. 3, 2009)