

Lecture Ricardo Calla in Wageningen, 29th Februari 2012

Organised by SHI and Otherwise



Ricardo Calla, sociologist and anthropologist, is one of Bolivia's prominent social scientists. Throughout his career, he has combined an active political role with his academic activities. For many years, he conducted field investigation with indigenous highland population of Bolivia. He published, amongst others, about the territorial rights of the original indigenous organisations, the Ayllus.

In 1998, he founded the Universidad de la Cordillera in La Paz, of which he is president nowadays. In 2004, he became Minister of Indigenous Affairs in the administration of Carlos Mesa.

The past 20 years, Bolivia has experienced interesting political processes in which the indigenous population – who form a majority in the country – has gradually expanded their influence and political power. They demand more social justice and respect for their rights. The presidency of Evo Morales is often considered the proof that they have succeeded. Still, there are many challenges remaining.

Ricardo Calla has been in the midst of those processes. He talked about the various intents to integrate the continent in South America with the cooperation of Andean countries, Mercosur and lately the Unasur promoted by Brazil, concluding that there is little integration between the various integrative efforts. Remarkable is the influence of the EU, that inspired the Unasur at a certain point to consider the introduction of one valuta for all the countries involved. With the problems the EU is living today, that aspiration has been abolished again.

The Community of Andean Nations (CAN), which comprises Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia and Venezuela, has an important function to counterbalance Brazil as the economic giant of the region. The CAN is positioning itself increasingly as Andean - Amazonic countries, given the fact only those Andean countries are included that surround the Amazon basin and form part of the Amazon catchment. Besides, that notion is strategic given the importance of the Amazon basin in the climate change debate.

Given the importance of global climate change Calla characterised the decision of the Dutch government to withdraw from Bolivia as regrettable, since the Netherlands has developed a fine reputation and enormous efforts in sustainable management of natural resources in his country. Also it seemed unwise to him, since the Netherlands is vulnerable to rising sea levels. In his vision, there is too

much faith in technology to counteract the effects of global climate change. Attacking the causes requires more attention.

Finally, the Tipnis issue was debated. This national park and indigenous territory Isiboro Secure was founded in 1965 when oil companies wanted to construct a road through this area with high biodiversity. Now, president Morales has planned a road in order to connect Brasil with Peru. The protest march of the local indigenous people to stop the plans was brutally attacked by police forces. That affected the prestige of Morales as a president, specifically since he is the first indigenous president. A discussion arose amongst the public on the various interests associated to the construction of the road. International companies, the coca cultivation of the nearby Chapare area, an emerging land market within the park are involved and make it an extremely complex situation. Calla was not optimistic about the chances to prevent the construction of the road.

The issue has also turned the IIRSA, the Initiative for the Regional Integration of South America, into a theme of political debate again.

