

**The Volcano and Ecuador's New Constitution;  
How Tungurahua and President Correa Transform Baños  
By Phillip Bannowsky**

While residents of Baños, Ecuador await Volcan Tungurahua's final eruption and the citizens of Ecuador await the government of President Rafael Correa's new constitution, change has already begun for the country's poor. Change has not arrived cataclysmically like a major eruption, but, like occasional plumes of ash and steam, new policies appear on the horizon, benefiting Ecuador's Indigenous *campesinos* and working class.

This is Phillip Bannowsky, with an eyewitness report from Baños, Ecuador.

When Volcan Tungurahua erupted in 1999, 2006, and in February of this year, pelting this town of thermal baths with ash and rocks, many were forced to abandon Baños temporarily, but some of the Indigenous residents who lived on the volcano's flanks were driven from their homes permanently. In earlier disasters, such as the great Josefina landslide to the South of Baños in 1993, religious leaders told me there was a deliberate effort to eliminate the Indigenous from the Paute Valley altogether. This time, in contrast, a new barrio has been constructed in Baños for the displaced Indigenous near their old homes.

The hoteliers, restaurateurs, and workers serving the tourist trade in Baños have discovered another change. The government will no longer permit employers to avoid paying social security taxes. Laws protecting workers had always been on the books, but when a worker took the boss to court, the boss would simply bribe the judge and the case was thrown out. Now, with President Correa proclaiming "Socialism in the Twenty-First Century" and waging a campaign against judicial corruption, workers are winning thousands of dollars in settlements.

Indeed, Correa's new Constitutional Assembly is replacing judges all the way up to the Supreme Court.

Additionally, the Assembly blocked an expected bail-out by corrupt Supreme Court Justices of Grupo Isaías, seized by the government for illegally diverting some 661 million dollars in deposits from the failed bank Filanbanco, although the Isaías brothers are permitted other avenues of appeal.

The Catholic Church, meanwhile, allied with the defeated political parties, threatened to oppose the new constitution, set for approval by referendum September 28, if it recognized gay marriage or permitted abortion. Rather than see its hopes for Ecuadorian workers blocked by wedge issues, the Constitutional Assembly withdrew the language on gay marriage, but temporized on abortion. Illegal abortions are very common in Ecuador, with disastrous effects on Ecuador's poor women. So, language demanded by the Church asserting the inviolability of life from conception ("que el Estado garantice la inviolabilidad de la vida desde la concepción") was rejected. The Assembly proclaimed alternatively that the state would recognize and guarantee life, including care and

protection extending to the unborn. (“El Estado reconocerá y garantizará la vida, incluido el cuidado y protección desde su concepción.”)

Bañeros speculate endlessly on Mama Tungurahua’s moods, how they are affected by the moon, the rain, or by sunlight, or whether she will drive everyone from the idyllic Bascún Valley again. What is certain is that she will continue to show her power, just as Socialism in the Twenty-first Century will continue to transform this land of volcanoes, *campesinos*, and rich, rich soil.

This is Phillip Bannowsky, concluding this series of special reports from Ecuador, and now saying, “Adios.”