Climate Change and the General Election in Peru
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On 10 April 2010, the presidential elections were held in Peru for the congressmen and representatives of the Andean parliament. As we imagined the aspiring members of the first magistrate of the nation began the electoral campaign with all manner of promises which spanned a diverse range of topics; the working generation, the fight against drug trafficking, the reduction of poverty and the fight against corruption amongst other subjects.

No one can deny that these issues are important in an electoral campaign and that they arouse a certain interest from the general public. Everyone wants to have a secure job with social benefits now and in the future. Everyone wants the scourge of drug trafficking to end, as it is currently feeding terrorism. Additionally, poverty and corruption should stop once and for all throughout the whole country. However, one of the issues that the presidential candidates did not touch upon is climate change. It is something that everyone talks about and has an opinion about, it is even written about in articles like this one, but no one does anything about it. In Peru, the issue seems to be a lot worse then the fact that there is not a lot of discussion on the topic and that the presidential candidates haven't said anything about it.

It is well known that Peru forms part of the Amazon; this gigantic green area which is the heart of South America and the lungs of our continent. Without this enormous rain forest our ecological balance would be in serious trouble. However, in Peru, as in other South American countries where the Amazon is found, little effort is being made to preserve the rainforest. What is worse is that in some cases, it is exploited with indifference or complicity of the governments of this part of the continent; with the exception of Ecuador whose government has promised to protect the forests by banning the exploration for oil and excavations of mines. The other republics seem to think that money is worth more than looking after the environment.

Peru doesn’t escape from this rule, and was consequently even more radical. Alan Garcia’s government instigated some controversial laws, called the ‘laws of the rainforest’ in which he gave free reign to foreign companies to explore large areas of the Amazon and exploit minerals and oil. In light of this, the communities of the Amazon reacted with emphatic protests; they believed that as residents of the land they had the right to be consulted about these measures. In protection of what they call the ‘Mother Land’ and the protection of the trees, rivers and the air, contaminated without any impunity for many miners and other Peruvian citizens, as in the case of La Oroya. Agreement 169 of the International Labour Organisation protected them legitimately.

At first the congress was able to revoke some of the laws in August 2008, and later it set up a commission to debate the issue that didn't come to fruition. Faced with the indifference of the regime, the indigenous people of the Amazon protested again with a strike that lasted

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two months and ended abruptly on 5 June 2009, when the police tried to move the protesters who were blocking a road in the city of Bagua. It resulted in the deaths of twenty-four troops and ten indigenous people, and became known as the ‘Baguazo’.

In reaction to these violent events, the communities of the Amazon, together with the Andean people and different human rights groups, led a mass march to the congress, in which they not only demanded justice for the deaths in Bagua, they also asked them to abolish all the laws once and for all. The legislative power had to give in, again under the social pressure, and comply with what the people were asking for. Over this year, the subject of protecting the environment has been under discussion. But as time has passed it seems to have been forgotten about; as seen in the march to commemorate the first anniversary of ‘Baguazo’ which tried to stress the importance of the subject on the government.

If the ‘Baguazo’ tragedy had occurred (although it never should have happened) in October or November last year maybe the presidential candidates would have touched upon the subject of protecting the environment. However, climate change is an ongoing issue that should not be controlled by circumstances. Citizens should pressure the government about climate change so that candidates will declare themselves in favour of the preservation of our rainforest, the Amazon. In this way, we will know who will sacrifice themselves in order to fight against the effects of climate change and also those who will go deeper into the issues in the name of progress.