

QUIROZ, Alfonso, 2013, *Historia de la corrupción en el Perú*, Lima, Instituto de Estudios Peruanos and Instituto de Defensa Legal. 615 pp.

Historian Alfonso Quiroz's book about the history of corruption in Peru has burning relevance. It only appears to be a book on a historical topic because it discusses the long history of a problem that continues to reoccur today: bad government that appropriates public funds and treats them as booty for the enrichment of those who were charged with looking after them. Recent news in Peruvian newspapers appears all too similar to information contained in the report of Jorge Juan and Antonio Ulloa to the King of Spain in the 18th century. Government officials rob shamelessly and almost all of them rob. The official that leaves government poor is a fool.

Faced with this shameful history, one has to ask if Quiroz's book offers any hope and, indeed, the question as to whether it is possible to put an end to corruption is ever-present in the text. After reading the volume, the reader feels overwhelmed. But, poking around, one can find a positive path. The tone of the author is mocking and critical, not bitter and despairing.

Quiroz bases his hope on the fact that throughout Peruvian history there have always been groups of thinkers and politicians who fought against corruption: from the above-mentioned Juan and Ulloa, who informed the King about the larceny of viceroys and *corregidores*, to the «good guys» of our times who have committed themselves to the fight against corruption. Throughout Peruvian history, there have been a long line of personalities who made the fight for good government a norm in their lives. Two such individuals, González Prada and Gustavo Gutiérrez, demonstrate that ours is a republic that has also produced profound reflection about ethics and good government.

Thus, Quiroz's book demonstrates not only that we are a country of corrupt individuals but also a land of people committed to honesty. Among the former and the latter, there is an unresolved battle. According to the interpretation of our not-forgotten friend, Alfonso, we are a country in the midst of an agonizing struggle, a country which has not overcome the tensions this struggle has produced, but not a despicable nation where everyone operates illegally.

At the same time, Quiroz provides a characterization of the most corrupt governments; by contrast, we can deduce the components of good government. Thus, according to Quiroz, all the dictatorships have been corrupt. Unfortunately however, this does not mean that all the democratic governments have been honest. But there are some that were less corrupt; for example, those of José Pardo and Guillermo Billinghurst. Thus, all Peruvian dictatorships are condemned and a few democracies are spared.

Why? According to Quiroz, what feeds corruption is the absence of the rule of law, which constitutes the essence of authoritarianisms. Thus, dictatorships became by definition the regimes most prone to stealing public funds. The lack of transparency and the absence of an institutional framework both conspire against good government in these regimes.

Another essential characteristic of authoritarianisms is control of the press. In countries such as ours, the conduct of government officials is monitored via a range of spaces, one of these being the communications media. The media are not perfect nor are they immune to corruption as attested by the sad story of Montesinos and the owners of television stations in that den of bribery. But, so long as the media are free, there will always be those who monitor and denounce corruption scandals, thereby impeding government officials from embezzling to their hearts content.

Another issue brought up by Quiroz is clientelism. The most corrupt governments are those that are the most generous with handouts. The governments that give gifts to the poor are in collusion with sectors of property owners. Thus, only those that respect the institutional framework and treat citizens as equals can reduce corruption.

After a detailed historical narrative, in his conceptual reflections, Quiroz proposes a very precise definition of corruption. In his view, corruption implies that two actors are in collusion, e.g. a crooked official who reaches a criminal agreement with an unscrupulous businessperson. One cannot treat the state as separate from civil society. The problem lies at the point of encounter. Therefore, in order to confront corruption it is not only necessary to reform the state but also the historical relationship between the business class and politics. Without measures in both areas it will not be possible to eliminate corruption. According to Quiroz, corruption is not to be found in a social agent but in the collusion between the private and the public.

Thus, it becomes clear that in the view of the author, it is not easy to end a bad political habit that has lasted without interruption for 250 years. However, he affirms that it can be accomplished but it would come at the cost of a true reform of the republic. We are close to the bicentenary when Peru will mark 200 years of independence. It is time for serious introspection about who we as Peruvians are and in what direction we want to go. When the time comes for this national debate, the ideas in this book will be at the forefront.

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