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Bolivia

"I am the bad conscience of Evo Morales"

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Presidential candidate for the second time of the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP) of which he is the leader, Felipe Quispe was however in a more delicate position than in 2002. In spite of his charisma and his plain speaking, he no longer appeared to be capable of contesting the legitimacy of Evo Morales to speak in the name of the indigenous peoples of Bolivia, and received only a small number of votes. Nevertheless he remains a central figure in Bolivian political life.

Herve do Alto: What are your hopes for these 2005 general elections, considering that the polls are giving you a result greatly inferior to the 6 per cent that you won in 2002?

Felipe Quispe: In fact, the MIP has no economic resources. It is an indigenous, native organization whose only capital is the mobilization of its militants. So we don't have campaign offices in the neighbourhoods like the other parties do.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/quispe2q-2.jpg>]

Felipe Quispe

In these conditions, to compete with the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), Democratic and Social Power (PODEMAS) or the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) on a national level is for us mission impossible, all the more so as these parties respond to the interests of the multinationals and of imperialism. We are only the expression of the most oppressed, which doesn't mean however that we start out as losers. We have good hopes of winning elected positions.

Has the division of the United Trade Union confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB) [1] affected your own public?

First of all, you have to remember that those who split the CSUTCB were the MAS. They have their own Movement of the Landless (MST-B) led by Moises Torres, their CSUTCB led by Roman Loayza...Evo Morales is waging war against me, because I am his bad conscience. As soon as he deviates from a line in defence of the peasants, I give him no peace.

He wants to physically eliminate the militants of eh MIP! For example, in this campaign, I can go anywhere in the country, except to Chapare [2] to which I am denied entry. We don't do that. No militant of the MAS has been denied entry to the Altiplano, even to Achacachi [3].

Alvaro Garcia Linera, your former comrade in the Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army (EGTK) has however invited you on many occasions to join in the MAS's project for these elections, hasn't he?

Alvaro Garcia was indeed our comrade. He was even commander of the EGTK. Where have you seen a commander who betrayed his troops? Before the campaign, I asked him during a meeting if he wanted to be the MIP candidate for vice-president, or for parliament, and he refused. He said at that time that he wanted to be elected to the Constituent Assembly.

In the course of a subsequent meeting, he explained to us that in his opinion the MAS was going to win and that we had to join their lists, in the name of unity of the indigenous peoples, which we refused to do. I was in Venezuela

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when I learned that he was the candidate of the MAS. So he's a traitor who had one foot in our camp, and one foot in the camp of the MAS, and he went where that suited him best. He's a White, and like all the Whites in the past, he has betrayed our people.

You refused to ally with the MAS for these elections; however you did so in March 2005, by jointly signing the Pact of Revolutionary Unity against President Carlos Mesa.

That's true, but this kind of conjunctural agreement, even between organisations which hate each other, is nothing unusual for us. When I came out of prison in 1997, they practically came looking for me the following year to put me at the head of the CSUTCB, a Confederation that was then divided between Evo Morales and Alejo Veliz [4].

I was a sort of referee, and I had to sign a secret pact with the two of them in order to be installed. We did indeed sign this pact in March, a pact that was anti-liberal, anti-imperialist and in favour of the nationalisation of hydrocarbons. But in the end it was the MAS that broke it ! We have never been sectarian towards them, since we even supported Evo in Congress to try and help him become president in 2002.

On that question, you have declared in the press that you will not support Morales in Congress for the presidency and that he let his chance pass him by in 2002. Will you stick to this position?

I have to make one point clear here: this electoral campaign is for us a war that we are waging against all the candidates, including the MAS. Everyone is fighting to maintain and enlarge their own electorate. PODEMOS, for example, has the support of AND (Nationalist Democratic Action, the ex-party of Jorge Quiroga)...The MAS and ourselves, with similar electorates, are therefore also engaged in battle in this campaign. Having said that, we will see what we will do after December 18th. We will decide together in the MIP if we will or will not support Evo for the presidency, if ever we have members of parliament elected.

Furthermore, you have not hesitated to indirectly attack Evo Morales by declaring that you only defended the coca of the Yungas, and by openly suspecting the coca of Chapare of supplying the circuits of the drug trade. Is that something new in your discourse?

The coca of Chapare is worthless, no indigenous person chews it. In Chapare itself, the coca growers consume the coca of the Yungas, which tastes a thousand times better. So I'm just asking myself: if the coca of Chapare is unsuited to traditional consumption, what real use is it, if not for the drug trade? As for me, in any case, I will only defend the coca of the Yungas, which is the sacred leaf...

However, the Yungas is a historic bastion of the MAS...

That's true, all the leaders belong to the MAS. But in the past, we were well established there, before becoming victims of a campaign of slander by this party, which spread rumours of corruption about us. We are nevertheless continuing to carry out work in this region, work that we could describe as clandestine, with a long-term perspective, with young leaders.

Why wasn't the candidacy of Jaime Solares for vice-president confirmed?

We are politically close to Solares, there's no doubt about that. But he is a leader who is permanently slandered and who has to face strong internal opposition within the COB (Bolivian Workers' Confederation) itself.

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In fact, he didn't have many people behind him. The COB should have had the responsibility of organising the campaign in the departments of Beni and Pando, but the departmental confederations (CODs) didn't want to do anything. Without militants from his side, such an alliance was becoming difficult and we preferred to go it alone. Having said that, I think that with Solares, we've only put things off till later.

Do you hope to bounce back by taking the leadership of social mobilisations in the event of a MAS government?

I don't really see the situation like that. I think rather that the MAS will want to neutralise us or even kill us. Alvaro Garcia knows us well and he has the means to hurt us. We will no doubt have to go underground to be able to continue to fight against the system. With Alvaro Garcia in it, a MAS government would undoubtedly be our enemy.

How do you explain that Alvaro Garcia, who was for so long your comrade in the struggle, is advocating in the programme of the MAS an "Andean capitalism", whereas you yourself are taking more and more anti-capitalist positions?

Once again, Alvaro Garcia is a White, he is not indigenous. His proposal is totally foreign to our movement. The indigenous peoples are not capitalist; on the contrary they have been victims of capitalism for centuries. We are communitarists. Any practical implementation of Andean capitalism is doomed to failure.

[1] The United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB), led by Felipe Quispe since 1998, suffered a split on the initiative of members of the MAS at its Congress in Sucre in June 2003. Convoked by a majority of departments on the grounds of non-respect of the statutes by its leader, Felipe Quispe refused to attend, as did the local leaders from La Paz and Tarija. That is why there now exist two peasant confederations, one led by Quispe and under the influence of the MIP, the other, which has the majority, led by a MAS senator, Roman Loayza.

[2] Chapare is the bastion of the coca growers led by Evo Morales.

[3] Achacachi is the stronghold of the MIP.

[4] Alejo Veliz was a leader who was in competition with Evo Morales during the 1990s. He is at present a member of parliament for the New Republican Force (NFR).