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Bolivia

“The MAS is of the Centre-Left”

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Sociologist, political analyst, very much present in the media, ex-leader of the Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army (EGTK) along with Felipe Quispe at the beginning of the 1990s, Álvaro Garc a Linera is the newly elected vice-president of Bolivia.

In the eyes of some observers, he is the MAS's “trump card” for winning over the “urban middle classes”, thanks to his profile as an intellectual. For others, he is just an “ex-terrorist”; for still others, he is the person who can be a moderating influence on Morales. He did this interview with Pablo Stefanoni for Inprecor, our French-language sister journal.

What difficulties emerged during the negotiations with the other components of the Left?

From a programmatic point of view, there is a consensus, from the most moderate to the most radical, on the demands that should be put forward. We were quickly able to reach agreement on a common platform of reforms: nationalization of hydrocarbons, a Constituent Assembly and a new economic model. Where the difficulties appeared was when the time came to discuss list of candidates. However, there are some principles which seem to me to be essential.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/ALVARO--GARCIA.jpg>]

 lvaro Garc a Linera

First of all, the respect for the territorial representativeness of the organizations, which is after all an original way to build a social network of electoral mobilization. There is a general acceptance of the principle that consists of leaving each organisation a form of sovereignty in choosing its candidates, and that enabled us to make quick progress.

It is a logic that is very different from the one that governed the previous left fronts between parties. But since, in certain territories, several organisations are superposed, for example in El Alto, it is necessary to achieve a fair balance. And that is where the difficulties appeared.

Did the Bolivian Workers Confederation (COB) want well-placed candidates in return for allying with the MAS?

Alvaro Garcia Linera: All the organisations want that, the COB the same as the others.

Did Jaime Solares want to lead the alliance along with Evo Morales?

Solares wanted the COB to be at the centre of the initiative, for it to be the entity that coordinated the other movements, and I think that in the period we are living through, no social movement can attribute to itself such prerogatives, because there is no longer a national movement in Bolivia. All the social movements, today, are regional and local movements. There exists in the COB a kind of melancholy, but we are not dealing with the COB of the 1970s.

Where do you situate the MAS from an ideological point of view?

I would situate it on the centre-left, because the project of economic and social transformations that this organisation wants to carry through cannot be described as either communist or socialist or even 'communitarist' [a reference to the indigenous communities as units of economic and social production - translator's note].

Is it your thesis that socialism is not viable in Bolivia today?

There are two reasons why there is not much chance of a socialist regime being installed in Bolivia. On the one hand, there is a proletariat that is numerically in a minority and politically non-existent, and you cannot build socialism without a proletariat.

Secondly, the potential for agrarian and urban communities is very much weakened. There is an implosion of community economies into family structures, which have been the framework within which the social movements have arisen. In Bolivia, 70 per cent of workers in the cities work in family-based economic structures, and you do not build socialism on the basis of a family economy.

In that case, what kind of system does the MAS want to build?

A kind of Andean capitalism.

What is Andean capitalism?

It is a question of building a strong state, which can coordinate in a balanced way the three "economico-productive" platforms that coexist in Bolivia: the community-based, the family-based and the "modern industrial".

It is a question of transferring a part of the surplus of the nationalised hydrocarbons [oil and gas] in order to encourage the setting up of forms of self-organisation, of self-management and of commercial development that is really Andean and Amazonian.

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

Up to now, these traditional sectors have not been able to develop because of a "modern-industrial" sector that has cornered the surpluses. Our idea is that these traditional sectors should have an economic support, should have access to raw materials and markets, which could then generate prosperity within these artisan and family-based processes. Bolivia will still be capitalist in 50 or 100 years.

Don't you consider that the movements in defence of water in Cochabamba and El Alto are forms of community-type experiences?

They are community experiences socially and economically, but not politically. They are a dramatic expression of the communitarist limits of the present social movement, for example in the domain of the management of new enterprises. But in any case, these experiences enable us to conceive of a political revolution, in the Marxist sense of the term, which in the case of Bolivia corresponds to the decolonisation of the state.

What differences are there between today's candidate of the MAS and the leader of the EGTK?

There is a line of continuity and a line of rupture. The continuity lies in the conviction that I have, that the indigenous peoples must govern Bolivia, and that this is the only way to overcome the fault line that has existed for 180 years

between society and the state, and to end the colonial character of the Republic, which affects just as much the state institutions as the private lives of Bolivians.

The difference lies in the means: fifteen years ago, we thought that it could come about through an armed uprising of the communities. Today, we think that it is an objective that we can attain through a great electoral triumph. The means change, but the objectives remain the same.

What are your principal theoretical and ideological influences?

I will mention five writers. Two classical writers have contributed to my education. They are Marx, but the Marx of Capital, not the Marx of the manuals [the training manuals of the communist parties] and Max Weber. Reading him led me to become interested in the role of the symbolic in political struggles. Another decisive influence in my intellectual formation is undoubtedly Pierre Bourdieu, from whom I inherit my way of analysing fields, relationships of forces in struggles. And I would cite two classical Bolivian writers: Fausto Reinaga and Rene Zavaleta [\[1\]](#).

[\[1\]](#) Fausto Reinaga was the fundamental thinker of "Indianism". Rene Zavaleta could be described as a Marxist revolutionary nationalist.