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Bolivia

# The Morales government

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### **Following the victory of Evo Morales and the MAS Herve Do Alto sends us his first impressions of the new MAS government.**

On the morrow of his triple inauguration - before the indigenous peoples of America at the Inca temple of Tiahuanaco; in the Congress building where he officially became President of the Bolivian Republic; then in the historic Plaza San Francisco where he swore allegiance before the social movements - Evo Morales presented his governmental cabinet on January 23rd in La Paz.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Moraleshats.jpg>]

The announcement of the MAS government certainly invalidated many prognoses: whereas some people were expecting Morales and Garcia Linera to show signs of moderation to the United States and to the multinationals who are present in Bolivia, it was finally a government equal to the hopes of the popular movements that was designated, during a ceremony which saw many ministers accepting their new appointment with clenched fist raised, as a sign of the pursuit of the struggle against imperialism and for social justice. This government was described as "radical" by the right-wing press, and as "bringing hope" by the left press.

Obviously, the first salient characteristic of this cabinet is the massive presence of leaders of social movements. This is the case, for example, of the trade unionist Santiago Galvez, who was made Minister of Labour, of the leader of the Federation of Neighbourhood Committees (FEJUVE), Abel Mamani, appointed Minister of Water, and of Walter Villaroel, co-operative miner, who is now Minister of Mines. Some appointments even surpassed people's wildest hopes: this was the case with the appointment of Casimira Rodriguez, leader of the Union of Women Cleaners, to the Ministry of Justice.

Finally, we should take note of the fact that it is the radical trade unionist Hugo Salvatierra, openly hated by some big landowners of the Santa Cruz region, who is at the head of the Ministry of Rural Development

Some of these appointments have given rise to some discontent, often due to the divisions that affect the social sectors from which the new ministers come, as in the case of Villaroel, who is contested by the miners of the state sector.

Nevertheless, the predominant feeling is that this government is representative of the working people of Bolivia. To such an extent that even the secretary of the Bolivian Workers' Coinfederation (COB), Jaime Solares, despite his constant criticism of the MAS, expressed his satisfaction that Galvez was in the government.

The so-called "political" ministries have mostly been given to men and women in whom Morales has confidence: the Minister of the Presidency (Prime Minister) is the sociologist Juan Ramon Quintana, the Minister of Foreign Affairs is the Aymara indigenist David Choquehuanca, while the Ministry of the Interior is headed by the MAS ex-senator, Alicia Munoz, the vice-ministry in charge of the coca question being given to Felipe Caceres, a cocalero from Chapare. The same goes for the main economic portfolio, the Ministry of Planning, of which the Keynesian Carlos Villegas is in charge.

Some ministerial appointments have nevertheless had people wondering, such as that of the businessman from Santa Cruz, Salvador Ric, appointed Minister...of Public Services, who is suspected of representing the cruceno private sector, but who has however been involved in the MAS for several years.

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The Minister of Defence, Walker San Miguel, proposed by an electoral ally of the MAS, the Movement Without Fear (MSM) is on the other hand openly contested by many social leaders: his collaboration in the process of "capitalization" (privatization) implemented by former president Sanchez de Lozada, who was driven out of Bolivia during the October 2003 events, is an established fact. Was this just a casting error?

The radical profile of the rest of the government makes it a plausible hypothesis, even though for the moment, despite the criticisms, Morales has decided to keep him in his cabinet.

Over and above the names of the ministers, it is interesting to see that the first positions of the MAS on the "hot" dossiers augur an unyielding attitude towards both the United States and the multinationals. Andres Soliz Rada, who is in charge of the key Ministry of Hydrocarbons, and who was for along time opposed to the MAS, which he reproached with not advocating a genuine nationalization of gas, has announced that there will be an audit of all the oil companies which are present in Bolivia. He has already succeeded in making the Spanish company Repsol back down, by forcing it to admit that it had committed fraud by putting on the New York Stock Exchange gas reserves that in fact belong to the Bolivian state.

Another point of contention is the invitation for tenders to exploit the mining reserves of Mutun: Morales himself gave his approval in December for it to be maintained, whereas many unions pointed out that the conditions for sharing out royalties would only leave crumbs for the Bolivian state.

Now, the Minister of Mines Villaroel has finally announced that it is being suspended in order to review the present Mining Statute, so as to give the state back sovereignty over all mining resources, and to revise the sharing of the profits they generate in order to make it much more favourable to Bolivia.

Although we will still need time before we can formulate the first judgments on the actions of the MAS government, there is nevertheless no doubt that its first tentative steps are going in the direction of satisfying the popular demands of the famous "October agenda". And so they keep alive the hope of building a real alternative in Bolivia.