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Bolivia

# After the electoral triumph of the MAS

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**On Sunday December 18th, 2005, there was no demonstration of joy in the streets of La Paz, nor in its rebel suburb, El Alto, source of the popular uprisings that successively ended the terms of office of two presidents in two years. However, it really was a historic evening that Bolivians were living through. [1]**

It was in fact thanks to the massive votes of a majority of them that Evo Morales became their new head of state. The leader of the coca growers of the region of Chapare (the zone of so-called “illegal” cultivation to the north of Cochabamba), a declared adversary of the United States, who for years have been calling him a “drug trafficker” and an “enemy of democracy”, who in the past worked as a mason, baker, trumpet player, football player, and lama breeder, is today President of the Republic of Bolivia. This Aymara living in Quechua territory is the first indigenous peasant to occupy this function in the history of this country. [2]

Undoubtedly the victory of the leader of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) is a source of hope for all the popular and social movements who for five years now, have been engaged in a cycle of intense struggle, both against the neo-liberal model which governs the economy and against the discrimination that the “indigenous people” continue to suffer in a country where however they make up the majority. [3]

## The overwhelming victory of Morales: the hypothesis of a vote for change

The score obtained by Evo Morales - 53.7%, corresponding to more than a million and a half votes - is quiet simply unprecedented. [4] The candidate of the MAS thus avoided having to negotiate his election in Congress, an exercise that has up till now been forced on anyone seeking to be president because of a system of voting characterized by an indirect second round, which has caused the Bolivian political system to be described as “pact democracy”. Favouring consensus and stability according to some, preventing a party from governing alone and applying a clear program for others, this system had in any case the result of guaranteeing, since 1985, the presence at the head of the state of a homogenous group of conservative parties, all partisans of neo-liberalism.

In spite of alliances that were subject to change according to the conjuncture, the period 1985-2002 was certainly characterized by continuity in the public policies that were implemented, particularly on the economic (application of the neo-liberal model characterized by the withdrawal of the state from production) and international (submission to the desiderata of the United States, leading to a consensus on the question of coca) [5] levels and by continuity of political personnel in the ministerial cabinets. Structured around the three parties, the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, the Movement of the Revolutionary Left (MIR) of Jaime Paz Zamora, and Nationalist Democratic Action (ADN) of the ex-dictator Hugo Banzer and Jorge Quiroga, this system of parties [6] had produced up until then a series of “pacts”, marked by “turning” alliances that above all demonstrated the very small ideological differences between the parties. The quasi-unanimity that existed on issues such as economic policy, the export of hydrocarbons or the necessity to eradicate coca led under the last two governments to agreements covering almost the entire political spectrum. Thus it was with the “mega-coalition” which allowed Hugo Banzer Suarez to become president from 1997-2002, [7] with the support of more than 70% of members of parliament coming from no less than 7 parties (including the ADN and the MIR), then with the so-called alliance of “national responsibility” that was constituted around the MNR of Sanchez de Lozada and the MIR of Jaime Paz, once again with the support of nearly 70% of the members of Congress.

The high levels of popularity enjoyed by Carlos Mesa, the former fellow traveller of Goni, [8] who became president following the latter's resignation on October 17, 2003, already represented the expression of a rejection of these parties by the majority of the population. This support lasted for a long time, insofar as Mesa presented himself at the beginning as the president who would govern without Congress, therefore without the approval of these parties, as if that in itself was proof of honesty. After the massacre of October 2003 the use of the expression "traditional party", used against the parties who had collaborated with the governments of Sanchez de Lozada, became more and more common, to the point of becoming a way of distinguishing between parties like the MAS and the MIP (Pachakuti Indigenous movement) and these formations who are considered as pillars of "pact democracy".

In this context, the vote in favour of the MAS can therefore be interpreted as the rejection of a *rosca* (clique), of a homogenous group that exercised power for 20 years, that applied with a few nuances the same package of policies and did not hesitate to criminalize all the social movements, bloodily repressing them if necessary, as in October 2003. [9]

This *rosca* appeared all the more real when scarcely a few days before the election, the parliament distinguished itself when a majority voted against a parliamentary inquiry into Gonzales Sanchez de Lozada for his responsibility in the crushing of the police mutiny of February 2003. Among those opposed to the inquiry there were a majority of the members of parliament of the MNR, the MIR, the New Republican Force (NFR), and the ADN, some of whom were even candidates for the coalitions of the Right and Centre-Right in these 2005 elections: PODEMOS (Democratic Social Power) and UN (National Unity). There is no doubt that the declaration of Ivan Morales Nava, MAS member of parliament for La Paz, denouncing the "reconstitution of the mega-coalition" on this occasion met with a certain echo among part of the population.

So, two major factors seem to argue in favour of an interpretation of the vote for the MAS as a vote for change: the rejection of economic and social policies on the one hand, and on the other the fact that people had had enough of a political class that was represented in this election by PODEMOS and UN.

## An increasingly massive popular rejection of neo-liberalism

The first element that enables us to understand the victory of the MAS is undoubtedly the growing recognition of the legitimacy of the demands put forward by the social movement since the year 2000, demands that were characterized by a rejection of neo-liberal policies. The effects of the privatisation, begun in 1985, of public services and of the exploitation of natural resources, which had up to then been state property, seem increasingly to have been seen as negative by a majority of the population. At the source of this evolution there seems to be resentment at the concrete impact of these privatisations on people's daily lives.

An exemplary case is the "water war" which took place in Cochabamba in 2000, against the leasing of the management of water to the United States company, Bechtel. Thus, according to Pablo Solon, coordinator of the Bolivian Movement of Struggle Against ALCA (in English, Free Trade Areas of the Americas, FTAA), "one of the motives for this mobilization was the more than 300% increase in the price of water in the space of few weeks". This is an example that we could compare to the mobilizations led by the FEJUVE (Federation of Neighbourhood Committees) of El Alto against the company Aguas del Illimani (which belongs to the French multinational Suez-Lyonnaise des Eaux) in February 2005, among other reasons because of the absence of connections in the rural zones of the city, or to the spontaneous protest of the inhabitants of La Paz against gas shortages a few weeks before the election. [10] This is a surreal situation in a country which is one of the leading world exporters of gas, and it serves to underline the absence of rationality of an economy that is principally turned towards exports, to the detriment of social needs. There is no doubt that these dysfunctions, which more and more frequently affect daily

life, contributed to changing the way in which the question of gas was seen by a majority of the population, including among the better-off layers.

When the first deposits of gas were discovered in Bolivia at the end of the 1990s, the oil industry, which had been affected like the entire public sector by neo-liberal reforms, had already been largely re-organized: the principal state enterprise, YPFB (Fiscal Oil Deposits of Bolivia), found itself deprived of any initiative in this sector, as a result of the laws of “capitalization” and “hydrocarbons” developed by the government of Sanchez de Lozada in the period 1994-1996. According to Mirko Orgaz Garcia, a journalist who specializes in hydrocarbons, “capitalization reduced the state to being just a colony that exported raw materials”. [\[11\]](#)

The discovery of gas under the Banzer-Quiroga administration led to the signing of “shared risk” contracts, [\[12\]](#) which provided for a profit for the state that was reduced to a minimum, only 18% of royalties, one of the lowest rates in the world, while a consortium called Pacific LNG, grouping together the main enterprises of the sector (Shell, BP, Total, Petrobras and Exxon), pocketed 82%. [\[13\]](#)

At the time when Goni was advocating the neo-liberal state as a model “modern” economy, which furthermore was supposedly the only solution for a state considered as “non-viable”, there were few people who fought against these reforms. However, this “counter-hegemonic” battle, according to Gramsci’s expression, gradually found a stronger and stronger echo in the population: although the mobilizations of 2003 broke out above all because of refusal to export gas to the United States via Chile, [\[14\]](#) the idea of nationalization, initially defended by a minority around the Bolivian Workers’ Confederation (COB) of Jaime Soleares, the MIP of Felipe Quispe, and the Coordination in Defence of Water and Gas led by Oscar Olivera, ended by being taken up by the whole of the Left and the indigenous and peasant movements, including the MAS, which was for a long time reticent about it. [\[15\]](#) As a sign of the times, all the candidates for the presidency included the demand for nationalization of gas in their programmes. Even though this position was often, sometimes entirely, deformed by semantic subtleties, [\[16\]](#) this fact demonstrates how far nationalization seems today so legitimate that not to mention it during the campaign would have been too risky.

## The Defeat of a Discredited Political Class

The second factor that enables us to analyse the vote for Evo Morales as a vote for change lies in the nature of the opposition which faced him in the course of these general and prefectural elections. Although they were candidates for new parties, the main adversaries of the MAS had all followed the same trajectory: activists within one of the three “traditional parties”, they had also run a ministry in one of the governments of the period 1985-2002. Even while they were seeking to take on board some of the popular demands that had been forcibly expressed since October 2003, such as nationalization of gas or the calling of a constituent assembly, trying also to appear as candidates of “change”, Samuel Doria Medina and Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga nevertheless had a hard time appearing credible in the role, which was against their nature, of spokespersons for social demands. [\[17\]](#) All the more so as from the beginning of the campaign, the MAS pointed out the impressive “recycling” of deserters from the “traditional parties” on the lists of the UN of Doria Medina and especially the PODEMOS of Quiroga. Which is hardly astonishing when you take a look at the origin of these two organizations.

National Unity, the party founded by Doria Medina, mainly came from the MIR. A former member of the governmental cabinet of Jaime Paz Zamora (1989-1993), Doria Medina, who is a rich businessman mainly involved in the cement industry, tried to take power within the apparatus of the MIR at the beginning of the 2000 decade. He criticized among other things the way the party was run by Jaime Paz, which was according to him not very democratic. The creation of UN in 2004 was therefore as much the result of the personal ambition of Doria as of the way the MIR was tightly controlled by Paz Zamora.

The political project of Jorge Quiroga, PODEMOS, is on the other hand more clearly linked to Tuto's former party, the ADN, in so far as it is a "political alliance" bringing together parties and "citizens' regroupments", an alliance of which ADN is part. By its nature PODEMOS was therefore confronted with the problem of considerable heterogeneity in the constitution of its lists, a heterogeneity that was all the more obvious because its candidates often seemed, during the campaign, to be more concerned about getting elected personally than about the implementation of a national political project. [18]

UN and PODEMOS, both by their history and by the presence of the deserters on their lists, could therefore potentially be seen as lists of neo-liberal and pro-United States continuismo (continuity). Furthermore, their emergence onto the national political stage coincides with the collapse of the preceding "tripartite" system. ADN and the MIR having been in part "recycled" in UN and PODEMOS, there only remained the MNR in the electoral race. An MNR which, according to statements by one of its leaders, the present President of the Senate, Sandro Giordano, [19] is still led from Washington by Sanchez de Lozada. It was in climate of intense internal struggles that the choice of candidate for president finally fell on Michiaki Nagatani, son of Japanese immigrants, virtually unknown in the political world, who had only just joined the party. The goal assigned to Nagatani by the MNR was double: to clean up the image of a party widely held to be mainly responsible for the October massacres, and to save its legal status, which is required in order to participate in elections, by obtaining more than 3 per cent in the general elections.

## An electoral landslide in favour of the MAS across the whole country

Capitalising on the social discontent and on a deep-seated rejection of the neo-liberal elites, the MAS was able to attract the votes in favour of "change", all the more easily in that the campaign of Felipe Quispe (MIP) occupied a much more marginal place than in 2002, while the most radical social movements (FEJUVE, COB) seem to have been neutralized by the partial acceptance of their demands, such as the nationalization of gas. This acceptance has no doubt, in the eyes of a part of the middle classes who were, according to many polls, reticent about voting for Evo Morales, been compensated for by the promise of credibility and seriousness brought by the presence of Alvaro Garcia Linera as candidate for vice-president, and of the intellectuals and technicians whom he brought along with him into the MAS campaign team.

The Masista vote, examined department by department in these elections, is marked by its transversal character, inasmuch as the phenomenon appears to concern all layers of the population, and puts into question some prejudices regarding the political panorama of a Bolivia divided between East and West, or between the rural and urban populations. This undoubtedly reinforces the hypothesis of a vote aiming to "prevent the mega [coalition] doing any more harm". "We ourselves were surprised by the scope of our victory", admitted Evo Morales on the evening of his triumph. The MAS in fact notched up impressive results in the Andean part of the country: more than 60 per cent of the vote in La Paz, Cochabamba and Oruro, more than 50 per cent in Potosi and Chuquisaca (which includes the constitutional capital of the country, Sucre), a victory which confirms the foresight Morales showed when said at the end of campaign meetings in these departments: "We have not conducted an intensive campaign in the West of the country, and we present our excuses for that. But the fact is that we know that here, we are going to walk away with the election, and it was more urgent to campaign in the East".

This voluntarist strategy towards those regions that were reputed to be hostile to the MAS seems to have paid off, because Morales's party scored totally unexpected results. It came second with more than 30 per cent in Santa Cruz and Tarija, third by a handful of votes with more than 20 per cent in Pando. Only the results in Beni, the historic bastion of the ADN and the MNR, where the MAS came in third with 15 per cent of the vote, brought a note of disappointment to the party leadership.

The results of the MAS in the Bolivian Oriente, which were obtained despite a weak organizational presence, profoundly challenge the vision of a Bolivia divided between an Andean part, "prone to contestation and backward-looking" and an Amazonian part, "hard working and looking towards progress", a vision that is mainly promoted by the Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee [20] and a part of the Right. [21] The results obtained in some zones confirm the idea of a transversal MAS vote, in particular from what they show about the attractiveness of this vote for the middle classes. Thus, in the department of La Paz, the MAS made a clean sweep of the single-member constituencies, including the constituency that corresponds to the Southern Zone of La Paz, although that is where the local bourgeoisie lives, the same bourgeoisie that in October 20003 organised "self-defence committees" to prepare for the possibility of the "plebs" from El Alto descending on their well-off neighbourhood. In this area, which was historically a bastion of the Right, it was, however, the MAS candidate, the unknown Guillermo Beckar, whose ambition during the campaign was to "make the link between the bourgeoisie and the social movements", who won the seat with more than 35 per cent of the vote.

For the "neo-liberal camp", the defeat was severe. Certainly, Jorge Quiroga won 28.6 per cent of the vote, which is much more than the polls were giving him, but was more than 25 points behind Morales. [22] In his case, his political defeat was compounded by a moral defeat, inasmuch as "Tuto"'s campaign was characterised by his involvement in the guerra sucia, a "dirty war" against rivals whom he had no hesitation in constantly slandering, whether it was Evo Morales or Samuel Doria Medina. [23] As for the latter, he took a real hammering: with 7.8 per cent, the UN has become no more than a marginal force in Bolivian politics. Although their political futures are seriously compromised, both of them have promised to play the role of a "constructive opposition", no doubt counting, like many other actors in Bolivian politics, on a rapid failure of the future MAS government. Only the MNR really has a reason to be satisfied with its results: with 6.5 per cent, the Nagatani campaign proved to be a success, since the result enabled the party to keep its legal status. This also demonstrates that this historic party still has bastions that it can always count on, such as Beni where it won more than 30 per cent of the vote.

In spite of results which were largely in its favour, the MAS is not, however, guaranteed of governing in complete independence. Although Evo Morales's party has an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies, with 72 out of the 130 seats (43 for PODEMOS, 8 for the UN and 7 for the MNR), [24] it remains in a minority in the Senate with 12 seats (13 for PODEMOS, one each for the UN and the MNR), where it will have to negotiate to have its proposals for legislation approved, as well as in the sessions of the Congress (which brings together deputies and senators) where the approval of certain laws that are called "special", such as the law convoking the Constituent Assembly, needs a two-thirds majority, which is 105 out of a total of 157, whereas the MAS only has 84). This means that in spite of an overwhelming victory, the MAS will not be able to govern exactly as it would want to, and will have to come to agreements with a Right that is lying in wait, no doubt ready for anything, particularly in the case of PODEMOS, in order to obstruct its action and take advantage of the slightest false step the government makes to come back to centre-stage.

This configuration is reinforced by the results of the prefectural elections, [25] where the MAS only won three of the nine prefectures (Oruro, Potosi and Chuquisaca). Although PODEMOS also won three (La Paz, Beni and Pando), these elections were above all characterized by the "taking refuge on the local level" of celebrated figures in Bolivian political life who were associated with the rosca, no doubt convinced both of the probable victory of Morales and of the possibility of wresting away some of the prerogatives of government to the advantage of the prefects (who now enjoy the legitimacy that comes from universal suffrage).

There are important things at stake, particularly in the regions where oil and gas, the country's natural wealth, are to be found, regions such as Tarija and Santa Cruz, where some autonomists nurse hopes of being able to be the only ones to benefit from it. That is the significance of the victory of the former president of the Civic Committee, Ruben Costas, in Santa Cruz, and of the former MNR deputy, Mario Cossio, in Tarija. [26]

Parallel to this, these elections also show the continuing influence of clientelism at the local level. In fact,

paradoxically, although the victory of the MAS in the general elections is in a certain sense a victory over the clientelism that the “traditional parties” habitually practise, [27] thus consecrating the voto consciente (“conscious vote”) advocated by Morales, the results of the prefectural elections illustrate a form of permanency of local loyalties and of “de-ideologised” politics, to the advantage of efficiency in the implementation of local public works. This is the case with Jose Luis “Pepelucho” Paredes, whose campaign was centred on the projects that he had pushed through as mayor of El Alto, and those that he would carry out as prefect, and who did not hesitate to distance himself from Jorge Quiroga, although he was standing for his party (see note 16). Other examples were Leopoldo Fernandez, know as the cacique of Pando, of whom Bolivian political analysts say that “many in Cobija [the capital of the department] owe him their careers”, and Manfred Reyes Villa, former mayor of Cochabamba who was close to the ADN, and who founded his own party, the NFR, for the general elections of 2002, where he ran for president and was for a long time the strong favourite, before ending up in third place.

## The challenge facing the MAS: to articulate governmental action and social mobilization

At first sight, everything would make you think that the situation of the MAS in Bolivia was comparable to that of the Workers' Party in Brazil after the victory of Lula in 2002: a dazzling electoral victory, which did not however bring freedom of action on the government level. But such a comparison appears as very limited, from several points of view.

First of all, from the point of view of the legitimacy of the government. Although Lula comfortably defeated his rival from the Brazilian Social-Democratic Party (PSDB), Jose Serra, it was only after a second round in which the campaign was marked by horse-trading and last-minute alliances. On the contrary, the victory of Morales, by an absolute majority in the first round, crowned the cocalero leader with a social legitimacy that brooked no contestation.

Next, from the programmatic point of view. Although the MAS's results will no doubt oblige it to agree to make concessions on a one-off basis to temporary allies in the Congress, Evo's party built its campaign on clear promises such as the nationalization of hydrocarbons, the convocation of a Constituent Assembly and the depenalisation of the cultivation of coca, and maintained real independence from the parties of the Right, in spite of a few gestures towards the UN with a view to a possible alliance if there had been a second round in the Congress. That does not bear much resemblance to the 2002 campaign of the PT, whose slogan was “Little Lula, peace and love”, a PT which had in advance done everything to reassure the IMF on the level of macro-economic policies, and which had concluded alliances with conservative sectors - Lula himself had even imposed a rich neo-liberal businessman as candidate for vice-president.

Finally, the last element of differentiation lies in the state of mobilization of social movements and the nature of the relations of the respective parties with them. Quite obviously, the arrival in power of Lula took place at a moment of reflux of the social movements in Brazil. The electoral victory could be compared to a kind of “compensation” for social mobilizations which were not getting results and were in decline. Another element that should be taken into account is the strong institutionalisation of the PT, whose continuous presence in power structures at the federal, estadual (state) and municipal levels over more than twenty years, has not been without effect on the party, its orientations, its social composition.

In the case of the MAS, it is difficult to talk about institutionalisation, both because of the relative “youth” of the party and because of the way it was formed as a “political instrument” in the service of the peasant-indigenous movement. [28] This has consequences for the relationship of the party to state institutions and to social movements. In the case of the PT, in fact, the relationship to the social movements seems to have drifted towards a relative “instrumentalisation”, leading to a weakening of the mobilizing capacity of movements that were already somewhat

“voiceless”, like for example the United Workers' Confederation (CUT). On the contrary, the growth of the MAS was parallel to that of social movements involved in struggles, whether in defence of the cultivation of coca or the rights of the indigenous peoples for nearly 20 years, or against the neo-liberal economic model for five years. Recently, the MAS demonstrated that it could subordinate the social movements which were loyal to it (such as the coca growers, or the faction of the peasant movement that it leads) to its interests, and oblige them not to resort to mobilization, as during the crisis over the sale of gas to Argentina at a solidarity price by the Mesa government in April 2004. But contrary to the Brazilian situation, the Bolivian social movements, in particular during the crisis of May-June 2005, have also demonstrated a relative autonomy in relation to the MAS in their actions of contestation and mobilization, as well as a capacity to influence the political orientations of the party. [29]

So it is probable that the MAS government will be subject to a relative “control” by social organizations. The attitude of a leader like Roman Loayza, leader of the faction of the Peasant Confederation of Bolivia (CSUTCB) that is linked to the MAS, illustrates all the ambiguity of many Masistas, who sometimes oscillate between their responsibilities as party leaders and their status as trade union representatives seeking to defend their base: accused of wanting to foment a coup d'etat after declaring during the campaign that a government of Jorge Quiroga would not last six months, he announced a few days later that he would only give a government led by Morales three months to respect its promises concerning the nationalization of hydrocarbons and the convocation of a Constituent Assembly. The MAS leadership forced him to retract. On the morrow of the victory, Loayza, who is however a key person in the party, for which he had among other things been a senator, demanded “at least four ministries headed by members of the CSUTCB”!

There is no doubt that this apparent schizophrenia can only be understood in terms of the particular relationship between the MAS and these organizations. Organisations which, though they know how to demonstrate their loyalty to the party, [30] are nonetheless demanding in relation to their leaders, in this way subjecting them to strong pressure. We should however avoid any idealization of the MAS, inasmuch as the demands of the “rank and file”, though they can be “political”, often come down to the defence of purely sectoral interests, as the case of Loayza illustrates, reproducing in an original fashion practices that could sometimes easily be described as clientelist. [31]

The general assembly comprising the leadership of the MAS, the newly-elected deputies and senators and the leaders of social organizations, which was held in Cochabamba on December 21st, symbolically illustrated what should, in theory, be the relationship of the elected representatives to the movements: a relationship of subordination and respect. Sitting opposite a platform where there were seated, alongside Morales and Alvaro Garcia Linera, the leaders of the main social organisations - peasant, indigenous, and - a new element - workers' and urban (for example, the sector of retail merchants and the cooperative miners), the deputies and senators heard the new vice-president declare: “You are the soldiers of the social movements, you should always place yourself at the disposal of these organizations, which gave birth to this political instrument of the oppressed”. For his part, Evo Morales responded to the preoccupations of many rank-and-file militants in the face of the “invasion” of the working groups entrusted with elaborating the programme by engineers, technicians and other professional people with no history of militant activity, by declaring: “The MAS needs competent people, and room to work will be guaranteed to all those who want to put themselves in the service of the government. However, the posts of ministers and vice-ministers will only be attributed to people who, as well as being competent, have already given proof of their social conscience and their willingness to work for the people”.

The risks of the subordination of the social movements to the government are nonetheless real. Few are the leaders who, between unconditional support and threats of radical mobilizations, demonstrate nuances in relation to the MAS. In fact, on the one hand, some leaders have forgotten the differences that in a previous period justified an attitude that made no concessions to Morales. Thus, Abel Mamani, leader of the FEJUVE of El Alto, who had manifested his discontent about the proposals for the candidacies that the MAS proposed to his organization before the elections, and who had adopted an independent profile towards the party during the campaign, concluded an agreement with Morales on December 22nd, stressing that the FEJUVE would not lay down an ultimatum to the

future government. As for Alberto Aguilar, leader of the public sector miners, he agreed to join the governmental transition commissions of the MAS, on the sole condition, however, that the future ministry of mines would not be attributed to the cooperative miners whom his members consider as “traitors”. Lastly, Edgar Patana, leader of the Regional Workers' Confederation (COR) of El Alto, declared on December 24th that “the MAS is the land of change” - this however after having announced before the elections that he would not support Morales and that “he and â€Tuto' would have to prove themselves”. [32]

On the other hand, leaders like Felipe Quispe and Jaime Solares (of the COB) are maintaining an intransigent attitude towards the leader of the MAS. Is this the result of strong resentment towards someone whom they have so often labelled an “enemy of the people”? In any case, they have difficulty in not appearing as the “other” losers of December 18th.

For Felipe Quispe, it's a hard blow: with scarcely more than 2 per cent, his party, the MIP, loses its legal status, which will furthermore prevent him from taking the seat in Parliament that he had nevertheless won in a multi-member constituency. Even his bastion of Achacachi, the village in the Aymara Altiplano which was so often the centre of mobilizations of the indigenous peoples, preferred “Evo” to him - the MAS won there with more than 55 per cent, as against 28.5 per cent for the MIP. By all appearances this election campaign was the last one for Quispe, who is 62 years old.

As for Jaime Solares, he has already committed himself to call on his members to mobilize in three months' time, if there is no progress on the government's part on the questions of gas nationalization and wage increases for government employees, following from the conclusions of the National-People's Summit that was held in El Alto at the beginning of December 2005. [33]

Though the autonomy of the trade union movement towards the MAS government is certainly a positive sign, on the other hand the radical nature of the attitude that has been adopted is surprising. It is an attitude that makes one think of the intransigence of the COB at the beginning of the 1980s, which contributed to fall of the UDP government by breaking off the dialogue with it. Today, the dialogue between Solares and Morales has not been resumed since the rupture in June 2005 of the Pact of Revolutionary Unity, a pact which had, however, made it possible to mobilize together against the Mesa government. As a result Solares risks becoming isolated, whereas his organization no longer has either the prestige or the representative character that it had more than thirty years ago now.

## Many expectations from the Masista government

Moving between corporatist loyalty and radical intransigence, the Bolivian social movements still appear to be seeking to define their relations with the government, which is no doubt understandable at this stage. Nevertheless, it is important for these movements to quickly find an adequate attitude, which will enable them to combine a “control” of the government and defence of it against the Right, should that become necessary. That will of course depend in part on the real place that these same movements have in the government, and on the mechanisms that will be set up to enable them to make use of it. The dialectic that will be established between social movements and government will in fact be fundamental, both for the implementation of the programme that was defended during the campaign and for the evolution of the exercise of power in Bolivia towards a form of participatory democracy oriented towards self-organisation. That is perhaps the only condition for the social movements to really become the best defenders of the MAS government.

One of the first tests will be the nationalization of hydrocarbons, which Evo Morales has declared will be the

government's first measure. After having been for a long time in favour of sharing profits between the state and the oil companies on the "50-50" principle, the MAS became converted to nationalization during the crisis of May-June 2005. However, the nationalization envisaged by Evo Morales does not necessarily convince all the social movements, whose most radical leaders, such as Solares and Quispe, suspect the new president of complaisance towards the multinationals. In fact, while the MIP defended during the campaign nationalization without compensation, the MAS, for its part, only demands a "nationalization of hydrocarbons without expropriation".

This formula, at first sight ambiguous, which Morales justified by explaining that it was a question of "nationalizing the hydrocarbons, but not the property of the oil companies", has however a solid juridical basis and a political and practical justification. Juridically, the contracts signed between the Bolivian state and the oil companies at the beginning of the 2000 decade are really tainted with unconstitutionality (see note 10), although this interpretation is contested by the oil companies, who are appealing to international conventions to maintain the status quo. As for the desire not to attack the property of the companies, it is a response to a concrete difficulty, which is to know how to take back ownership of the hydrocarbons without losing the use of know-how in the exploitation of these resources, in a situation where the state enterprise in this sector (YPFB) has been virtually reduced to being an empty shell since "capitalization" in the mid-1990s.

The proposal of the MAS should therefore lead to the setting up of a mixed public/private consortium to exploit the gas, in which the state enterprise (that is, YPFB, which will undergo a "re-founding") would be the majority shareholder. This would make YPFB, from the point of view of the place occupied by the state in the oil sector, the equivalent of the Brazilian Petrobras. The position of the MAS really resembles a balancing act, inasmuch as it is trying to have the sovereignty of the state over its resources respected, and to make possible the concrete establishment of the industrialisation of gas, while avoiding juridically founded reprisals, as well as the loss of the technical know-how which the multinationals have at their disposal. Through this proposal, judged by some people to be limited because of the important role that the companies will still have, these companies would however lose what was the foundation of their enormous profits in Bolivia: the industrialisation of gas would in fact result in the disappearance of the oil rent that was guaranteed them by the direct export of this resource as a raw material and its industrialisation abroad. [34] This makes foreseeable, in spite of the messages of congratulations addressed to Morales in person after his victory, a possible threat on the part of these companies to the government, whose action could in that case be legitimised by social mobilization.

The other capital theme in these first days of the Masista government will be the convocation of the Constituent Assembly. Demanded for many years now by all the Bolivian social movements, and by the peasant-indigenous movement in particular, the Constituent Assembly could make it possible to put an end to a post-colonial state, cemented by the myth of a unifying republic, which Alvaro Garcia, speaking on this occasion as a sociologist, did not hesitate to describe as "a mono-ethnic or mono-cultural state, of which we can say that it is, in this sense, exclusionist and racist". [35]

It remains to be seen what will be the modalities of preparing this Constituent Assembly. So far, there are many scenarios that can be envisaged. Indeed, the Constituent Assembly could very well be confined to a simple institutional artifice whose sole objective would be to consolidate the presence of the MAS at the head of the state purely by modifying the "rules of the game". On the other hand, this Constituent Assembly could give rise to the launching of a process of democratic self-organisation, by allowing the peasant-indigenous and popular organizations to fully take their place in it. If there are persistent uncertainties concerning the road that the MAS intends to take on this question, it is among other reasons because of the fear provoked by the possibility that the Right might bounce back in the course of an "open" constituent process. If the catastrophe scenario of a chaotic first few months of government were to become reality, the election of the assembly could then lead to a "protest vote". In this context, once again, it is important that the social movements are capable of exerting their influence on political life, both to defend the government and to demand that it respect its campaign promises.

# A foreign policy that lies between Bolivarian radicalism and international realpolitik

One of the keys concerning the capacity of the Masista government to respond positively to the hopes placed in it will also be the position it will occupy on the international scene, and the allies that it will be capable of attracting. For the moment, the MAS as a whole, and Evo Morales in particular, have adopted an anti-imperialist attitude that makes no concessions to the United States. On the very evening of his victory, the new Bolivian president concluded his speech by the celebrated and radical slogan of the cocalero movement, "Kausachun coca, Aanuchun yankis!" ("Long live coca, Yankees out!"). This was slightly surprising considering the growing insistence on "moderation" in the course of the MAS's campaign. Subsequently, he made a series of statements in the media explaining that although he did not want to break off relations with the North American neighbour, he would nevertheless not hesitate to envisage doing so if the United States did not resign itself to no longer considering Bolivia as a colony. Juan Ramon Quintana, specialist on questions of national defence within the MAS, on declared his part that "the government is ready do without the financial aid of the United States if it is made in any way at all conditional".

Parallel to this approach, Morales has also shown strong signs of his desire to deepen relations between Bolivia and the Cuba-Venezuela axis. It was to Havana, on December 30th, 2005, that the Bolivian president undertook his first diplomatic visit, signing with Fidel Castro on this occasion an agreement reinforcing cooperation between the two countries. On January 4th, 2006, Morales was in Caracas to meet Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez. It was a signal that went in the direction of Bolivia becoming part of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), all the more so as the two leaders expressed the desire to consolidate the "axis of good" that passes through La Paz, Caracas and Havana. It was once again the occasion to sign, there too, an agreement linking Bolivia and Venezuela, an agreement which however assumes particular significance considering the tensions that have recently affected personal relations between Chavez and Morales. Indeed Morales took a dim view of Chavez backing the candidacy of the Chilean Insulza to head the OAS (Organisation of American States), a candidacy against which the entire Bolivian political class had coalesced, and of him replacing the Bolivian soya that Venezuela imported with soya from the United States. That is perhaps why the Bolivian president had not initially intended to stop over in Caracas in the course of his round of international visits. By promising Bolivia 30 million dollars of aid, with no conditions attached, for the year 2006, Hugo Chavez was no doubt forgiven by his new partner for these "strayings".

One of the challenges facing the future Bolivian government will undoubtedly be to maintain this anti-imperialist attitude beyond the Americas. Although Morales is not backward in commenting on the profits notched up by the European oil companies like the Spanish Repsol or the French Total, he adopts, on the other hand, a much smoother tone towards European heads of state. In this respect the case of French President Jacques Chirac is exemplary. Popular in many countries of the South since his opposition to the war against Iraq, Chirac had already been so in Bolivia, for having flattered Bolivian nationalism during a not very political conflict linked to the fact that the national football team could continue to play in La Paz, despite the altitude. [36] That allowed him to forge an image as a friend of Bolivia. This partly explains the prestige that he enjoys in La Paz, including with the leaders of the MAS!

Such an attitude is not however solely dictated by an inordinate love of football, or by unconstrained nationalism. In fact, the leadership of the MAS tends to consider Europe as a partner that could substitute for the United States, in case relations with the White House should rapidly deteriorate. Although the European countries are far from absent from Bolivia, if only on the level of projects of cooperation, there is no doubt at all that they are disposed to occupy an even more important place, particularly on the economic level.

The risk then is to see the Bolivian government adopt a diplomatic posture characterized by the absence of any significant criticism towards its new partners. Such a "realpolitik" can sometimes lead to serious errors of appreciation from a political point of view. Thus, it is quite probable that the friendship of Chavez and Castro for the French president played a considerable role in the unreserved condemnation by the two Latin American heads of state of the riots provoked by youth in the French suburbs in November 2005. What will Morales be like in this domain?

# Democratic revolution...or process still to be defined?

Morales's victory has aroused an incredible wave of enthusiasm, both among the indigenous peoples of Bolivia and Latin America and in the Left internationally, which can see in it the sign of a confirmation of a deep-seated movement against neo-liberalism on the scale of the planet. From there, to see in the process that is under way in Bolivia a "rupture" with the "ancien regime", there is only one step, which some commentators and analysts have gaily taken. Among them is the Mexican-Argentinean historian Adolfo Gilly, who sees no less that the "first revolution of the 21st century", [37] a revolution which he and many others have rushed to describe as "democratic". [38] We can only agree with Gilly when he affirms that the victory of Morales is the expression of a "violent and persistent groundswell against neo-liberal domination in a racist state with a colonial matrix, as the Bolivian state has always been". Where Gilly stands out, on the other hand, is in his readiness to justify the use of the term "revolution". One might have thought up to now that his purpose in using it was purely literary, as it seems to be with so many other writers. Such an analysis deserves to be discussed, from several points of view. First of all, the expression "democratic revolution" in itself poses a problem, because it leads to according legitimacy only to the electoral road as a method of social transformation. Indirectly, it tends to discredit any other form of action which, by the dichotomy that this expression in itself carries, would inevitably be condemned as "anti-democratic", independently of the political and social conditions in which those who had recourse to it were operating.

The use of the term "revolution" itself opens the debate on the reality of the social transformations that the sole victory of the MAS on the electoral level can lead to. By describing this as a "revolution", Gilly lets it be understood that this victory is in itself sufficient. This is, besides, the meaning of the conclusion of his text, when he indicates that after this success, "what happens afterwards, will happen afterwards". Could we not rather consider that it is precisely "what happens afterwards" that will make it possible to characterize the process opened by the electoral victory of December 18th, 2005, and eventually, perhaps, describe it as "revolutionary"?

Certainly, according to Gilly, "revolutions are violent shifts in the relationship of forces - dominant and subaltern - in a given society. These shifts throw into crisis the political form of the existing rule." In this sense, there is no doubt that the cycle of mobilisations that opened in 2000 in Bolivia constitutes a process that is potentially revolutionary, which has made it possible to put into question the existence of the Bolivian colonial state. It remains to be judged whether the "shift in the relationship of forces" really took on a concrete character on December 18th, 2005, or whether it still has to be concretised. An exercise that we can try and begin to undertake by employing the notion of "power".

As Evo Morales himself declared, what is really at stake in the coming months, indeed the coming years, is "not only to manage to constitute a government, but to take power". This affirmation by Morales allows us to pose some questions concerning the nature of what exactly is power. We can certainly reify it, by considering it to be won once the government palace has been occupied. But the challenges and the tensions that the government has immediately been confronted with clearly demonstrate that power, understood as a social relation between two or several individuals, or in this precise case, between the state and society, is not won, it is constructed. It is precisely through the construction of a relationship of forces with the United States embassy, the Pro-Santa Cruz Civic Committee, the army, and to a certain extent, even those who appear today to be its allies, such as the Cuban and Venezuelan governments, that we will really be able to judge the reality of the power that the MAS possesses. Not before. It is also by the modalities of the exercise of this power that will be adopted by this government, in particular through the place that will be conceded to the social movements, that we will be able to judge and to describe this process as "revolutionary"...or not.

The present "power" of Evo Morales appears all the more limited in that his electoral victory, although it will indeed make it possible to renew Bolivia's political personnel from top to bottom, has for the moment concrete effects only in the political sphere. Now, power is not confined to the political sphere, as Gilly so well reminds us by evoking the case of Mexican elected representatives forced to submit to the dictates of the local financial markets by respect for

the Chapultepec Pact, which he describes as a real “Capitalist Manifesto”. It is also defined through the relations that the political sphere has with the economic and social spheres.

As to the rupture with the previous neo-liberal policies which Gilly seems to consider as already assured, it is for the moment only an electoral promise, and will remain so as long as the MAS government does not apply certain measures such as the repeal of decree 21060 (which constitutes the legal framework of the privatisations). The case of Guiterrez in Ecuador shows that sharp turnarounds are possible, over and above speeches and promises.

Facing up to the enormous pressures that Morales will be subjected to, on both local and international levels, will make the task of his government particularly delicate, in spite of a relatively healthy economy and of a rather favourable international panorama, in particular on the continental level since the last summit of the Americas at Mar del Plata (Argentina, November 3-5, 2005). In this sense, the first months of the MAS at the head of the state, those very months which correspond to the first choices, to the first decisions, these first months will be crucial. Which goes to demonstrate precisely how important will be “what happens afterwards...”.

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[1] The following article was written between the victory of Evo Morales in the presidential election on December 18, 2005 and his inauguration on January 22.

[2] There are generally estimated to be 30 ethnic groups living on the territory of Bolivia. The most important among them are the Aymaras, who are concentrated on the Andean Altiplano, the Quechuas, who live in the Andean valleys of Cochabamba and Tarija, and the Guaranis, who are found in the Chaco and on the Amazonian plains, on the borders with Paraguay and Brazil.

[3] According to the 2001 census, more than 60 per cent of Bolivians define themselves as “indigenous”. In El Alto, the figure rises to more than 80 per cent.

[4] Previously, only two candidates had ever managed to get more than 30 per cent: Hernan Siles Zuazo, candidate of the left coalition UDP (Popular Democratic Union) in 1980, and Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada of the MNR (Revolutionary Nationalist Movement) in 1993, who each won 34 per cent of the vote.

[5] This appreciation goes for all the governments, with the exception of the one headed by Jaime Paz Zamora (MIR) in the context of a “patriotic agreement” with the ADN, from 1989 to 1993. Jaime Paz stood out on the question of coca, conducting a campaign in favour of its depenalisation during his term of office, with the slogan, coca no es cocaína (“coca is not cocaine”). This had the effect of provoking the hostility of the US administration towards him, and of making the MIR popular with the unions of coca growers for a certain time (see, on this question, Kevin Healy, “Political Ascent of Bolivia's Peasant Coca Leaf Producers”, in *Journal of Interamerican Studies*, no. 33, vol. 1, 1991).

[6] The MNR was formed in the 1940s, in opposition to the parties controlled by the oligarchy which lived off the exporting of tin and copper. It was a key participant in the revolution of 1952, which placed on the agenda the nationalization of the mines and the agrarian reform. It was converted to neo-liberalism under the influence of its historic leader, Victor Paz, and then especially under Sanchez de Lozada. The MIR was formed in the 1970s by a group of militants in exile in Chile, who took as their model the Chilean party of the same name. Though it fought against the Banzer dictatorship, its leadership ended up allying with him at the end of the 1990s. The names of these two parties, which represented projects of social transformation, are today more vestiges of the past than names that illustrate the ideology of these parties. As for the ADN, it is the party that Banzer built following democratisation in order to take part in the elections.

[7] Because of serious health problems, Banzer was forced to resign in 2001, being replaced by his vice-president Jorge Quiroga until 2002.

[8] “Goni” is the nickname of former president Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada.

[9] Violations of human rights did not only take place under the government of Sanchez de Lozada. Although the scale of the

massacres of October 2003 is without precedent in the history of Bolivian democracy, to which we should add the bloody crushing of the police mutiny in February 2003, the Banzer-Quiroga government was also held responsible by the Popular Assembly for Human Rights of Bolivia (APDHB) for the murders of more than thirty coca growers during the period 1997-2002. See Donna Lee Van Cott: "From Exclusion to Inclusion: Bolivia's 2002 Elections", in *Journal of Interamerican Studies*, Vol.35, Part 4, 2003.

[10] Some months before the 2005 elections, the population of the department of La Paz was affected by a gas shortage, whose cause remains relatively uncertain. Although the illicit trade in bottles of gas to Peru, where they are sold at a much higher price than in Bolivia, was undoubtedly a contributing factor, suspicion also fell on the oil companies, who were accused of wanting to blackmail the government in order to oppose the renegotiation of their contracts with it. This shortage gave rise to mobilizations of the residents, who blocked the streets of La Paz and El Alto, armed only with their empty gas bottles.

[11] See on this subject, Mirko Orgaz Garcia, *La Guerra del gas; Nacion versus Estado transnacional*, La Paz, Ofavin, 2002, and *La nacionalizacion del gas*, La Paz, C & C Editores, 2005.

[12] According to the MAS's specialist on the question, Manuel Morales Olivera, "these contracts are null and void in law inasmuch as they do not respect the Constitution". The Constitution does in fact stipulate that this type of contract must be ratified by the Congress, which has never happened.

[13] The Law on Hydrocarbons that was adopted in June 2005 provides for the addition of a direct tax on hydrocarbons (IDH), which concerns 32 per cent of the profits, increasing to 50 per cent the share of profits from gas that goes to the Bolivian state. On this subject, see Pablo Stefanoni, "[Electoral polarization and crisis of the state](#)", *International Viewpoint* 373, December 2005.

[14] Since the War of the Pacific in 1879, during which Chile seized the entire coastline that belonged to Bolivia, there has been very strong anti-Chilean feeling in the country, which is nourished by each new debate on Bolivia having access to the sea.

[15] On the MAS's turnaround in favour of nationalization, see Thierry Vermorel, "La seconde guerre du gaz: les mouvements sociaux renversent Carlos Mesa", *Inprecor* 507/508, July-August 2005.

[16] Thus, the main candidate of the Right, Jorge Quiroga, proposed a "nationalisation of hydrocarbon resources", which at first sight means nationalising resources which, de facto and de jure, already belong to the state! Behind the term "nationalisation", it is really a question of making transparent the redistribution of the resources generated by the gas. Which, it must be admitted, does not have much to do with real nationalisation of gas.

[17] Jorge Quiroga appointed himself spokesperson for a "revolution via democracy, against the strikers and the bloqueadores" (road blockers, a type of action that is very much used by the Bolivian social movements, comparables to the Argentinean piquetes), although it is difficult to see what revolution he is talking about, since his programme argued for continuity in the implementation of the neo-liberal model. To this phrase-mongering there was also added revolutionary imagery, since PODEMOS sported as its logo a white star on a red background. According to the party's spokesperson, this choice resulted from the conclusions of a market survey! Doria Medina, for his part, presented himself as the representative of a reasonable Centre-Left, portraying Morales and Quiroga as expressing two radical projects of society, and developing a moderate anti-liberal discourse, whose credibility was at once put in question by his status as a former minister of a liberal government.

[18] Jose Luis Paredes, former mayor of El Alto for the MIR, who has just been elected prefect of the department of La Paz, was the most perfect illustration of this: wanting to find a place as a candidate at the start of the campaign, on whatever list, he negotiated until the last minute with UN as well as PODEMOS, and even sought to make contact with the MAS. Towards the end of the campaign, visibly convinced of "Tuto's" coming defeat, he declared on a national radio station that the perspective of running the prefecture with Morales as president did not perturb him in the least (cf. *La Prensa*, 30/11/05). It seems that he was called to order by Quiroga, who is said to have forced him to appear in a televised spot calling on the electors to vote of La Paz to vote for him in the prefectoral election and for "Tuto" in the general election.

[19] *La Prensa*, "Giordano: En el MNR manda Goni y se erro con Nagatini", 18/09/05.

[20] Grouping together trade unions and employers' organisations (which are in the majority) of the region of Santa Cruz, the Civic Committee is

considered by some of its members as the “moral” and legitimate “government” of the Crucenos (inhabitants of Santa Cruz).

[21] Some days before the election, there appeared on the television channels of Santa Cruz a spot whose origin is to this day unknown, whose principal slogan was: “Only Santa Cruz can stop Evo”. In Trinidad, on the evening of his election, Ernesto Suarez, PODEMOS candidate for the prefecture of Beni, commented on his victory as follows: “People said that they didn't want the budget to be drawn up and implemented 3,600 metres above sea level [a reference to La Paz, where the government sits]”. La Razon, 19/12/05.

[22] The most favourable result attributed to Morales by a poll at the beginning of December “was only” 36 per cent.

[23] To give an example, PODEMOS broadcast a spot showing a textile worker who said that he was afraid of losing his job if Morales came to power. The MAS replied to this spot, revealing that the “textile worker” in question, apart from the fact that he had lied about his name, was in fact the personal chauffeur of Jorge Quiroga!

[24] The figures are those of the National Electoral Court (CNE), of December 28th, 2005.

[25] The prefects run the 9 departments that make up Bolivia. It is thanks to a decree of President Carlos Mesa in January 2005, promulgated under the pressure of the demands for autonomy coming from Santa Cruz, that in these elections prefects were for the first time elected. Up until then they had been appointed by the president.

[26] Mario Cosso was the president of the Chamber of Deputies during the crisis of May-June 2005. After Hormando Vaca Diez finally decided not to take on the post of president which was his by right, Cosso in his turn had to abandon the idea, accused as he was of by the social movements of being a right hand man of “Goni”. On the crisis of May-June 2005, see the article by Thierry Vermorel referred to in note 15, and also Jeffery R. Webber, “[Nationalisation! The first two days of Bolivia's Second Gas War](#)”, and “[Bolivia's Second Gas War: Hopes and limitations of the popular forces](#)”, International Viewpoint 368, June 2005.

[27] To take an example, Doria Medina, one of whose enterprises, Viacha, is the national market leader in cement production, and who is the owner of the country's Burger King chain, offered during the campaign sacks of cement to villages in the Potosi department, and each of his visits was accompanied by offering the crowd a meal of hamburgers and chips!

[28] See on this subject Herve Do Alto, “Entre utopie indigeniste et pragmatisme economique: le MAS aux portes du pouvoir”, Inprecor 511-512, November-December 2005.

[29] See the article by Thierry Vermorel referred to in note 15.

[30] This is illustrated by the results in the Chapare, the coca-producing region where Morales had his first experience as a union leader, where some results easily surpassed 90 per cent.

[31] On this point, see Pablo Stefanoni, “Hegemonia, discuso y poder: la emergencia del MAS-IPSP”, in Temas sociales, Revista de Sociologia de l'UMSA, no. 24, 2003, p. 23.

[32] See the article referred to in note 28.

[33] See Remberto Arias, “Unity and Perspectives of Bolivian Left”, International Viewpoint 374, January 2006.

[34] Mirko Orgaz Garcia, La nacionalizacion del gas, pp. 143-144.

[35] Alvaro Garcia Linera, “La lucha por el poder en Bolivia”, in Horizontes y limites des estado y el poder, La Paz, Muela des Diablo, 2004, pp. 11-74.

[36] When Bolivia was threatened by the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) of being deprived of the possibility of its national team being able to play in La Paz, in 1996, because of the altitude of which many opposing teams complained, Chirac employed incredible

## After the electoral triumph of the MAS

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diplomatic efforts to begin lobbying within the leading bodies of FIFA, with the aim of backing Bolivia and opposing this ban. According to revelations by the French satirical weekly *Le Canard Enchaîné*, the French president received by way of thanks the title of “Condor of the Andes”!

[37] Adolfo Gilly, “La violenta, prolongada y clara revolucion boliviana”, *La Jornada*, 24/12/05.

[38] To take an example, the Argentinean and Bolivian editions of *Le Monde Diplomatique* for January 2006 had as their headlines: “Democratic revolution in Bolivia”.