Latin America
2006: A Continent Turns Left

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Alvaro García Linera
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Herve do Alto
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Fourth International meeting

A continent turns left

Notes on the situation in Latin America
François Sabado

a) Latin America has veered left. The combined outcome of a rejection of liberalism and mass movement resistance - some forms of which have opened onto pre-revolutionary situations in recent years, as in Venezuela, Argentina, Ecuador and Bolivia - the traditional right has undergone a series of electoral defeats. The next will most likely be the Mexican, Peruvian and Nicaraguan rights. Colombia is the only major country where the reactionary right will in all likelihood continue to govern, with paramilitary support.

b) This situation is provoking new inter-capitalist contradictions, in particular new tensions with US imperialism. There is an option of "confrontation", which remains the choice of the Bush administration, of the reactionary right of most countries, and which can even take the path of military interventions, in particular around Plan Colombia, a country where "US military advisers" are already present. But, at the present juncture, the US presence in Latin America is weakened by US strategic involvement in Iraq, in the Middle East and in Central Asia. Despite the US military power, it is proving hard to occupy Iraq through military means ... along with another country, in Latin America!

c) There is a “second choice” for the ruling classes: reorganizing their system of class rule by using the new left governments that follow the path of liberalism or social-liberalism. This is the case in Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile and Ecuador. Relying on the interests of an agro-exporting bourgeoisie with its own policies as we have seen in the case of Brazil at the WTO, seeking to use its strengths to reorganize resource markets - petroleum, gas, water - with a more integrated Latin American policy, benefiting from the high rate of growth between and 9% in recent years, and defusing the subversive charge of social movements with the help of the Brazilian PT, neo-Peronism in Argentina, the Frente Amplio in Uruguay, these new governments have achieved a degree of "stabilization" of the social and political situation. The most significant example is Kirchner in Argentina.

These governments do not succeed in resolving the main contradictions of capitalism: the liberal counter-reform continues, social inequalities are growing and there have been no noteworthy changes in the situation of the popular masses. Moreover, in the framework of capitalist globalization, these governments have not succeeded in carrying out policies of autonomy with respect to imperialism in the middle or long term, in the vein of those implemented by Cardenas in Mexico or Peron in Argentina.

Nevertheless, while respecting financial market, IMF and World Bank dictates, and attempting to implement regional policies as in the case of Mercosur, these governments are trying to conquer new positions for the benefit of local ruling classes.

d) The “confrontation” and the "social-liberal option" both run up against a major impediment, the reality of social movements that can resurface in particular forms at any movement: trade unions and piqueteros in Argentina, landless movements in Brazil and Brazilian trade unionism that can wake up despite CUT leadership policies, Indigenous peoples and their organizations in Ecuador.

But the two main obstacles to stabilization on the continent are the “Bolivarian revolution” and the Bolivian situation. Beyond State diplomacy and the need to bring all countries of the continent into a Latin American integration project such as ALBA, there are indeed two positions debated within the Latin American left: the social-liberalism represented by Lula and Kirchner and the Chavez Bolivarian process. Whether via a policy of confronting US imperialism, or the application of a series of social and democratic measures: health, education, plan against hunger, occupation of certain firms and lands, housing policy, co-operatives, and especially a high degree of mobilization and polarization of millions of Venezuelans, the Venezuelan situation is the hot spot on the continent.

All of this effervescence is now stimulated by the debate launched by Chavez on socialism in the 21st century. Those are the positive aspects. However, there are a series of problems in the Bolivarian process, first of all tied to the “bonapartist” features of Chavez’s power: the concentration of power, the direct relations between Chavez and the people, the absence of real parties: these are often merely electoral apparatuses, the calls to mass mobilization and organization are often thwarted by the limits imposed on mass democ-
racy and self-organization by those in power.

For example, the progress achieved in terms of self-management of the PVDSA - the national petroleum corporation - after the petroleum management strike - had no follow-up. On the contrary, the technocrats have returned. The political representatives of the Cuban CP are playing a negative role in terms of everything relating to the development of democracy, control and co-management. If bold objectives have been achieved in the struggle to meet the people's basic needs in terms of health, education and food - policies funded by petroleum revenue - the socio-economic structure of Venezuelan capitalism has not been substantially transformed or overstepped.

The two coming years will be decisive to the revolutionary process in Venezuela. Chavez is in the habit of quoting Trotsky, explaining, "Every revolution needs the whip of the counter-revolution." The Bolivarian revolutionary process was indeed marked by reactions to the right-wing counterrevolution and US imperialism, which radicalized the process each time.

Nobody doubts that if there is another confrontation and new provocations by the "putschist right", that this will mean further radicalization. But the right and the Bush administration can also draw the lessons from their failed coups and, on the one hand, seek to delegitimize the Chavez regime by refusing to take part in the upcoming presidential elections late in 2006, while seeking to mire down the process by blocking all socio-economic progress. In that case, Chavez, and all protagonists in the Bolivarian process must find forces to deepen the process, in terms of mass democracy and socio-economic content. And for that, income from the petroleum windfall may not be enough. It calls for new political choices.

e) But one of the dimensions of the scenario is international. It will play out in Venezuela. Many commentators depict Evo Morales as "between Lula and Chavez". In fact, although the Bolivian vice-president has made statements on the "need for a plan for Andean capitalism", Evo Morales' initial measures put him closer to Chavez: booting out the old Army staff, put out to pasture, a self-imposed 57% cut in the presidential salary, which should entail similar cuts for all high-level government officials, negotiations with one of the landless movements and land reform.

We can even say that relations have been inverted between Venezuela and Bolivia, in terms of the leadership of the process and the masses. In Venezuela, although Chavez is the product of an entire historical process, his political weight stimulated and also limits spaces for the mass movement.

In Bolivia, the mass movement has heretofore determined the course taken by Morales, such as his position on calling a Constituent Assembly and nationalizing hydrocarbon resources is the direct outcome of mass movement demands. Will he respect his commitments? In any event, in this country, we find one of the apexes of social and political revolt in Latin America. The coming weeks and months will tell the story. The situation is open, but mass movement pressure is such, in the political, administrative and institutional chaos in Bolivia, that alongside Venezuela, one of the keys to the Latin American situation can be found in this country.

f) From an international viewpoint, this means there is a series of issues at stake, with a dual polarization: between US imperialism, the traditional rights and on the other side, the peoples and anti-imperialist governments: Cuba, Venezuela and Bolivia and a second, more subtle polarization between social-liberal governments - Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay, Chile, Ecuador - and the aforementioned anti-imperialist governments. Lula and Kirchner are on the offensive to put rightwards pressure on Chavez and Morales.

There is also a fight between Lula, Kirchner and Chavez, to "win over" Morales. The Latin American left is currently going through this choice of going along with liberal counter-reform or breaking with imperialism: Lula or Chavez? All of this will depend on US policies of confrontation and the dynamics of the mass movement vs. those of the ruling classes, defending their own interests in these countries.

g) This situation has several consequences in political and programmatic terms:

Put it, along the struggle against the war in Iraq, at the centre of our solidarity actions, develop an international solidarity campaign with the Bolivarian process in Venezuela: Venezuelan collectives, solidarity meetings, sending aid and solidarity brigades. The International and FI organizations must be at the forefront of this campaign.

In programmatic terms, combine a program of social and democratic demands backed by the demand for national and popular sovereignty over natural resources, lands and wealth of each country, linked to land reform, of course. The needs for public appropriation, and nationalization of hydrocarbon resources must also be at the heart of social and political demands in these countries.

The question of democracy is also central, whether it is getting rid of corrupt politicians - this is the meaning of demands such as the constituent assembly - or to deepen processes of social appropriation - demands for control, co-management and management of firms are a priority, as in Venezuela or Bolivia.
Finally, there is a notable chance linked to the tilt in the social and political situation, the opening of a debate on socialism in Venezuela but also throughout the continent, launched by Chavez.

Despite the limits dictates by the country’s place in the world and in Latin America, the Bolivarian experience makes it possible to resume discussion of socialism. This debate is taking place in all organizations today, and it is only beginning. Of course there are all sorts of socialism, but in an ideological environment which had been first marked by themes such as “liberal democracy as the end of history” in the early 1990s, the themes of anti-liberalism in 1990 and the early 2000s, the way Chavez is positing the problem of socialism vs. liberalism and capitalism bear witness to a deepening development of consciousness among sectors of the Latin American social and political vanguard, and above all the repercussions of a series of strategic questions.

This is a significant fulcrum against social liberalism in the left. It posits the satisfaction of popular demands as a central question in a strategy of opposition of liberal capitalism and not taking part in counter-reform.

It enables progress on co-operative experiences linked to a dynamics of control, and in acute crisis situation or pre-revolutionary situations, to move forward on this theme of control linked to co-management between workers and public authorities. It posits the need for another logic, another system, centred on social needs and another form of property - public and social appropriation - as a central question.

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The Morales government

Herve do Alto

Following on his analysis of the victory of Evo Morales and the MAS and its implications, “After the electoral triumph of the MAS, the challenges facing a government that has emerged from social struggles”, which we publish in this issue, 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 Tiwanaku; 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.

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, cooperative 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’ Confederation (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 cruceño private sector, but who has however been involved in the MAS for several years. 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 a long time opposed to the MAS, which he reapproached 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.

*Herve Do Alto is International Viewpoint's correspondent in Bolivia.
What will the victory of Morales mean?

The MAS at the threshold of power

Herve do Alto

Evó Morales, leader of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), won the December 18 presidential election with surprising ease. With 51% of the vote on the first round - more than 15% more than the polls predicted - Morales won outright on the first round. But what is the MAS? What does its victory mean?

The general elections of December 18th, 2005, was a result of a compromise between President Rodríguez and the social movements at the end of the crisis of May-June. Calling the election was key in getting the mobilizations called off.

They have now led to the victory of the president of the MAS-IPSP (Movement Towards Socialism-Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples), who embodies for many people the social struggles that the Republic has experienced since 2000 and the “water war” in Cochabamba.

If the victory of the MAS means the coming to power of a Left that has been excluded from it since the failure of the government of the UDP (Popular Democratic Union) faced with the economic crisis of 1985, it is nevertheless a Left whose background, sources, traditions and contemporary reality are complex and varied.

The MAS-IPSP, a party at the crossroads between the indigenous, left and nationalist traditions.

The electoral successes of the MAS at the general elections of 2002, then at the municipal elections in 2004 (in spite of not winning control of any major city), although they expressed the undeniable popularity of Evó Morales, were also and above all the symbol of the irruption into the political field of a peasant and indigenous movement that is consolidating itself.

This movement, born at the beginning of the 1990s, is in a certain sense the result of a process of the creation of a “political instrument” that made possible the direct representation of Bolivian peasant and indigenous organisations [1].

The unions of coca growers, engaged since the end of the 1980s in a conflict with the Bolivian Army, which has the support of the American DEA (Drug enforcement Agency), were among its founders.

Evo Morales

The aim of this “political instrument” is among other things, to favour a representation that is called “organic” of these union militants, through the collective adherence of their organisations. The establishment of such a structural mechanism can be interpreted, in view of the history of this movement, as a double precaution. First of all in relation to the Katarist movement.

Katarism, in reference to the indigenous leader Tupac Katari who led an uprising around La Paz at the end of 18th century, is a current that contributed to the renewal of a peasant unionism that had up to then been allied to the military regimes. It leaders sought to fight against the cooptation of union leaders and to elaborate an Indianist ideology which they could use as a support for struggles. [2]. Initially a cultural movement which emerged at the beginning of the 1970s, whose main objective was to rehabilitate an indigenous identity that was perceived to be oppressed and denied.

The Katarist leaders, among them Genaro Flores and Victor Hugo Cardenas, succeeded in making peasant unionism a bastion of the resistance to the military dictatorships, whereas up till then it had been one of their most loyal supports [3].

However, after democratisation, the entry into politics of the Katarist leaders led to a continual division of this movement and only generated a long line of small, sectarian political parties, whose forces were infinitely smaller than those of the United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB). Ideologically influenced by Katarism, in particular in its defence of a multi-ethnic and multicultural Bolivia, the leaders of the MAS never ceased to consider this current as a negative example from the organisational point of view.

The other decisive factor was the desire to build up a relationship of forces with the Left, which saw and still sees the peasant movement as a stepping-stone to its own emancipation. This virtually systematic disdain for a movement considered to be incapable of leading the social struggles of the country is illustrated by the statutes, still in force, of the Bolivian Workers’ Confederation (COB), which attribute the leading role of the trade
union entity to the miners, enshrined as the vanguard of the Bolivian proletariat (see the interview with Jaime Solares in this issue).

This is a paradox, when we know today that the miners, crushed by the neo-liberal reforms of 1985, have been reduced to a shadow of their former selves, while the peasants, reinforced numerically by the coca growers of whom many come from...the mines, have a representation within the COB that is inversely proportional to their weight in the political arena.

The virtual absence of a party apparatus, desired and theorised by the leaders of the “political instrument” in the name of the “organic” relations between the MAS and the organisations that are part of it, had however unexpected consequences on the social composition of the party and its leading bodies. As the general elections of 2002 approached [4] the lack of political cadres as well as the desire to attract the votes of the “urban middle classes” pushed Evo Morales in person to launch numerous invitations to intellectuals who came from the Left.

As a symbol, he chose Antonio Peredo, journalist and former Guer various of the Communist Party, brother of Inti and Coco Peredo who had taken part in Che’s guerrilla movement, as candidate for the vice-presidency.

The success obtained in 2002 (the MAS won more than 20 per cent of the votes and 35 members of parliament, thus becoming the second biggest party in Bolivia) therefore had the unexpected consequence of pushing into prominence personalities from the classical Left, foreign to the indigenist currents, within a party which mixes together in an atypical way two political traditions that had up to then carefully maintained independence from each other.

These two traditions nevertheless remain solidly attached to each other by a strong nationalist feeling, born among the peasants from opposition to the interference of the United States in Bolivian political life in general, and on the question of coca in particular, and coming from the anti-imperialist tradition within the Left.

In a certain fashion, the MAS took over the “revolutionary nationalism” that was defended for many years by the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) up until its conversion to neo-liberalism in 1985, while expressing Katarist and to a lesser extent, Marxist ideas [5].

The social movements are still divided as the elections approach

Despite the preponderant weight of the MAS in the field of left politics, the Bolivian social movement remains strongly divided, in particular because of corporatist logics linked to local issues, and some of them sometimes appear to be radically critical of the party of Evo Morales.

However, it is the unity of the social movements, through the signing of a pact of revolutionary unity regrouping the MAS, the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP), the COB, the two CSUTCBs [6] and the organisations of El Alto, in March 2005, that was at the origin of the fall of the government of Carlos Mesa [7].

This unity quickly broke up, because of dissensions concerning the nationalisation of gas (the MAS was for a long time favourable to a “50-50” solution, before becoming a late convert to nationalisation) and from the traditional competition between leaderships that is so characteristic of Bolivian social movements.

To confront this problem, Evo Morales thought he had found the candidate who would make it possible to draw towards him the last movements who remained reticent, in the person of Alvaro Garcia Linera. This sociologist, who had become popular thanks in particular to his television appearances as a political analyst, is in fact a former comrade in struggle of Felipe Quispe, the leader of the MIP, who was imprisoned at the beginning of the 1990s for his activities in the Tupac Katari Guerrilla Army (EGTK).

Since then, he has basically confined himself to academic activities, while maintaining contacts with all the Bolivian social movements, without exception. When he agreed in mid-August to be the candidate of the MAS, it was with the ambition of regrouping on the same list, but behind Evo Morales, all the movements, with the aim of guaranteeing the broadest unity of the working-class, indigenous and intellectual Left.

Today this attempt by Alvaro Garcia and Evo Morales seems to have only half succeeded. The alliances achieved by the leadership of the MAS do in fact go beyond the traditional allies of the party: thus, among them we can count the Movement Without Fear (MSM) of the mayor of La Paz, Juan del Granado; many small left parties such as the Democratic Socialist Party (PSD) or the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Bolivia (PCMLB, Maoist) which has a base in El Alto, and working-class sectors like the Confederation of Pensioners of Bolivia, the National Confederation of Micro and Small Businessmen (CONAMYPE) and also the co-operativist miners (FENCOMIN).

However, although this electoral unity of the Left is undoubtedly the broadest since the unity achieved by the UDP in 1982, the most important social leaders have remained outside it. Felipe Quispe is standing again for the MIP, but without much hope of repeating the result he got in 2002, 6 per cent. The division of the CSUTCB...
seems to have considerably weakened it, and Roman Loayza now comes across as the legitimate leader of the peasants, including in the Altiplano that was traditionally loyal to the “Maliku” [8].

As for Jaime Solares, the executive secretary of the COB, he almost became the vice-presidential candidate of the MIP, but the risk of losing his position in the Confederation seems to have convinced him to change his mind. Furthermore, he seems to be aiming to build a “political instrument of the workers” attached to the COB and the workers’ movement, considering, following a very orthodox Marxist vision, that “the working class remains the only class capable of leading the Bolivian people towards its emancipation, not the peasantry” [9].

Both of them were approached by Alvaro Garcia to join the MAS lists. But the failure of such an alliance does not have the same causes according to each side. While Quispe and Solares stress the differences that were expressed during the May-June crisis, Garcia speaks of a simple problem of positions on the lists...A version that does after all remain quite credible, when you see how the negotiations with the Regional Workers’ Confederation (COR) and the Federation of Neighbourhood Committees (FEJUVE) of El Alto, which were largely commented on by the media, failed [10].

Whereas they almost stood for the party of Evo Morales, the leaders of the COR and the FEJUVE are now launching more and more criticisms of the MAS, reproaching it in particular with not according sufficient importance to the creation of a Constituent Assembly. This attitude is not understood on the side of the MAS, as the member of parliament and candidate Gustavo Torrico explains: “a law to convocate the Constituent Assembly that was drawn up by the present parliament would in all likelihood favour maintaining the presence of the most conservative sectors of society in the seats of power”.

The incessant criticisms against the MAS have even led certain leaders to relativise the opposition between Evo Morales and the candidates of the Right, Samuel Doria Medina (National Unity UN) and Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga (Democratic Social Power, PODEMOS), in this way giving the impression that the radicalism of their discourse is not necessarily followed up by a consistent attitude in practice. Such is the case of Edgar Patana, leader of the COR of El Alto, who will vote “neither for Tuto nor for Evo. Both of them will have to prove themselves”.

This position is not however shared by everyone, as is demonstrated by Jaime Solares, who, although not supporting Morales, nevertheless declares that “the main enemies of the Bolivian people are the neo-liberals and the pro-imperialists, represented by the candidacies of Doria Medina and ‘Tuto’ Quiroga”.

An electoral programme with ambiguous outlines.

If Alvaro Garcia failed somewhat in his attempt to win the favours of the leaders of the most significant social movements outside the MAS, on the other hand he succeeded in what was in a certain fashion the second objective of his candidacy: to involve the intellectuals and the “urban middle class” in the campaign of the MAS.

Around Alvaro Garcia a team of economists and sociologists has taken shape (Carlos Villegas, Juan Ramon Quintana, Elisabeth Salguero...) responsible for drawing up the most important parts of the MAS’s programme, under the leadership of the vice-presidential candidate. So although they are integrated into the working commissions on the programme, it is not the principal leaders of the party who have taken charge of this task.

Thus, the phenomenon of “delegation” of political work to individuals whose origins are foreign to the party, which was already present in 2002, seems to have become further accentuated on the occasion of this 2005 campaign. There are very few “organic intellectuals” who come from the peasant and indigenous movement.

On the other hand, the inflow of intellectuals, some coming from the Left like Alvaro Garcia, is tending to modify, sometimes substantially, the programmatic orientations of the MAS, often giving them a “technocratic touch”. We cannot however conclude that there is a kind of “sleight of hand” on the part of intellectuals who are taking over the party. It’s more a question of what you might call a “reciprocal exchange of legitimacies”: Evo Morales, who in his speeches, unceasingly celebrates “the alliance between the peasants and the intellectuals” is trying in this way to make credible the perspective of a MAS government; for the intellectuals, it is a question of legitimising in the political field a learning that is often purely “technical”, because it is often disconnected, as a result of their own lack of militant experience, from any political involvement (in particular in the economic sphere).

The programme of the party takes up many of the aspirations of the majority of social movements: convocation of a Constituent Assembly, nationalisation of hydrocarbons and natural resources, defence and industrialisation of the coca leaf, definition of policies, national as well as foreign, independently of the United States (a demand that is expressed in the slogan: “nationalise the government!”). All of these are points that, as such, conflict with the interests of the North American neighbour, as they
conflict with those of the multinationals involved in the business of gas, wood or water (in particular the French companies Total and Suez-Lyonnaise des Eaux).

However, in spite of this apparent radicalism, the MAS is constantly, in the person of Alvaro Garcia, bringing nuances into the positions it takes and frequently proclaiming that no one need fear a Masista government, "except those who hav really swindled the people". This sometimes gave rise to tensions or misunderstandings in the MAS's own campaign: while Morales was demonstrating against the ALCA (Free Trade Agreement of the Americas) alongside Hugo Chavez in Mar del Plata, Alvaro Garcia was explaining that that didn't affect possible bilateral negotiations with the United States for a Free Trade treaty (TLC), a treaty that was desirable "as long as it does not infringe on the economic sovereignty of Bolivia" [11]: While Morales celebrates the fraternity that links him to Chavez or to Fidel Castro, Alvaro confesses his "admiration for European social democracy" and thinks that Venezuela, like "any other state, is above all seeking to satisfy its own interests in the framework of interstate relations".

So there is no "revolution" in view, nor very radical measures like a new agrarian reform or an ambitious programme of social aid, which could however seem to be "socially necessary" in a country where extreme poverty reigns. All the more so as Evo Morales has indicated that in spite of the mention in the programme of the repeal of supreme decrees 21060, responsible for the massive privatisations of 1985, a Masista government would nevertheless begin to act with neo-liberal laws...

The main radical changes that the programme puts forward are above all in the sphere of production, through the rehabilitation of the state, whose role would be to coordinate the various platforms that comprise the Bolivian economy (large enterprises, communities and artisanal micro-enterprises), what Alvaro Garcia calls "Andean-Amazonian capitalism", with the aim of producing a "productive shock" that would generate employment and wealth.

But in spite of the apparent moderation of the programme and the pledges constantly given to national and foreign capital by the presidential ticket, it would be a mistake to announce in advance a "Lula-type" scenario in Bolivia in the event of a victory of the MAS.

Some questions, such as the depenalisation of coca that is proposed by Morales, in fact polarise the political landscape and push the US embassy to intervene, certainly discreetly, but effectively, in local political life, as was demonstrated recently by the "missile scandal" [2].

What is more, the polarisation that also intervenes at a regional level should not be without its effects on the MAS government, which, we can imagine, will quickly be forced to choose between Washington and the Caracas-Havana axis [13].

What seems sure today is that the Masista government, unlike the cases of Gutierrez or Lula, will have no respite either from its opposition or from the United States. For them, the victory for Evo is a nightmare, because it calls into question the structures of a colonial state that have always been profitable for them since the Republic was installed in 1825 [14]. The Masista government also has the responsibility of not disappointing the hopes that the popular movements, the poorest and the excluded have placed in it.

* Herve Do Alto is the correspondent in Bolivia of Rouge, weekly paper of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International).

NOTES

[1] These organisations are the United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB), the Union Confederation of Settlers of Bolivia (CSCB) and the National Federation of Peasant Women of Bolivia (FNCMB), as well as the Confederation of the Indigenous of the East of Bolivia (CIDOB).

[2] Katarism "rebuilt" an indigenous identity, where the Army as well as the MNR governments only saw "peasants". From that flows an ideology that theorises the double oppression of the peasants, by their economic condition, but also by their condition as indigenous people who are victims of discrimination within a colonial state. Its principal leaders, such as Genaro Flores, subsequently played a key role in the struggle for the re-establishment of democracy. The links with the Army were definitively broken with the founding of the CSUTCB in 1979 and its affiliation to the COB the following year, the first stage in the building of a peasant unionism of struggle in Bolivia.

[3] Implicit from the beginning of the 1960s, this alliance was concretised in 1964 with the signing of the military-peasant pact (PMC) which tied the union leaders to the regime of General Barrientos. The frustration engendered by the absence of a thorough agrarian reform after the 1952 revolution was one of the causes of this alliance, at first sight unexpected.

[4] Thanks to the acquisition of the name "MAS", recognised by the National Electoral Court, the IPSP was able to participate independently in elections from 2002 onwards, whereas it had previously had to resort to alliances with the left coalitions, in 1993 (with Eje Pachakuti) and in 1997 (with Izquierda Unida).

[5] See Pablo Stefanoni, "MAS-IPSP: la emergencia del nacionalismo plebe-
The CSUTCB, led by Felipe Quispe since 1998, suffered a split - for which the members of the MAS were responsible - at its congress in Sucre in June 2003. There are now two peasant confederations, one led by Quispe and under the influence of the MIP, the other, the majority, led by a MAS senator, Roman Loayza.

See the article by Remberto Arias in this issue.

The "Maliku", which corresponds to a title in the Aymara communities, is the nickname of Felipe Quispe.

See the interview with Jaime Solares in this issue.

Close to Abel Mamani, the secretary of the neighbourhood organisation, Alvaro Garcia hoped to make the El Alto leader the MAS's candidate for prefect of La Paz.

But the COR and the FEJUVE, adopting an intransigent attitude that has echoes of old practices, demanded the four single-member constituencies that make up El Alto, two multi-member constituencies (for one of which Edgar Patana, the leader of the COR, wanted to be candidate) and one senator, on top of the candidacy of Mamani for prefect. (See "Por sus alianzas, el MAS tiene problemas con sus candidatos", La Razon, September 8th, 2005). Confronted with these demands, the MAS finally preferred to break off the negotiations, at the risk of seeing its support in the city somewhat eroded.


On November 18th, 2005, the newspaper Pulso revealed that 28 missiles belonging to the Bolivian Army, bought from China at the beginning of the 1990s, had been delivered in the greatest secrecy to the United States, supposedly to be destroyed because of their obsolete character, on the orders of the Rodriguez government.

After the president had denied having delivered the missiles to the North American neighbour, the Minister of Defence, Gonzalo Mendez, finally revealed that the newspaper’s version was true, justifying the decision with technical arguments that astonished specialists of the military institution. (See Abdel Padilla and Pablo Stefanoni, "Historia secreta de los misiles", Pulso, November 18th, 2005; and A. Padilla and P. Stefanoni, “Operacion Camuflaje”, Pulso, November 25th, 2005). Apart from the fact that it tarnished the supposed neutrality of a Rodriguez government that finally was not content just to ensure a "smooth transition" until the elections, this scandal allows us to formulate a number of hypotheses as to what the United States and certain sectors of Bolivian society are ready to do to neutralise as far as possible a future government led by Evo Morales.

Although the way the recent Summit of the Americas at Mar del Plata in Argentina went, because of the attitude of Nestor Kirchner and Lula Da Silva, could lead us to moderate such a dichotomy.

"El Presidente colonial", in Horizontes y limites del estado y el poder, Muela del Diablo, La Paz, 2005, pp 77-110.
I am the bad conscience of Evo Morales

Interview with Felipe Quispe

Herve do Alto

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.

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?

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.

In these conditions, to compete with the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), Democratic and Social Power (PODEMAS) or the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MINR) 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 the 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 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 for 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.

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.
**The MAS is of the Centre-Left**

*Interview with Alvaro Garcia Linera, newly elected Bolivian vice-president*

**Pablo Stefanoni**

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, Alvaro Garcia 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.

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 organization 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 organizations 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?**

All the organizations 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 organization wants to carry through cannot be described as either communist or socialist or even ‘communitarian’ [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.

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.

* Pablo Stefanoni is a Bolivian journalist and researcher in social sciences.

NOTES

[1] Fausto Reinaga was the fundamental thinker of “Indianism”. Rene Zavaleta could be described as a Marxist revolutionary nationalist.
"If Evo doesn’t nationalize the gas, he will fall like Lozada"

Interview with Jaime Solares, leader of the COB.

Interview by Herve do Alto.

Permanently confronted by serious accusations concerning his past, the polemical executive secretary of the Bolivian Workers Confederation (COB), Jaime Solares, has, whatever might be said about him, the merit of having put the union confederation back in the centre of the social stage, since the first “gas war” of October 2003. On the occasion of these elections, he was for a long time envisaged as candidate for the vice-presidency for the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP) of Felipe Quispe, before renouncing the idea a few days before the closing date for nominations.

Felipe Quispe invited you on to his list as candidate for the vice-presidency, which you finally refused. Why?

What Felipe wanted was to appropriate the name of the COB. He didn’t want me to come in my own name. That was a kind of condition for my participation. Now the COB cannot act like a political party, it’s an instrument in the service of the workers and we cannot commit it as such. That’s why I refused.

Alvaro Garcia has revealed that negotiations had taken place between the COB and the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) with a view to a possible alliance. For your part, you have remained very discreet on the subject...

You have to understand that for ten years, Evo Morales as well as Felipe Quispe have no longer been concerned by the fact that the working class is the vanguard of the proletariat. They would like to lead the COB, but they can’t because it’s called the Bolivian Workers’ Confederation. But they are only leaders of the countryside and so they can’t claim to lead it.

The COB was created as an organ of the proletariat, whose objective is to defend the workers of this country. Evo, Felipe and now even Alvaro Garcia say: “The COB is now just a small movement with a big history”. As far as I’m concerned, I think they are making a big mistake, because the working class remains an important social force in the country, even if we are not as numerous as in the past.

So we are not with any political party and we won’t support anybody. We don’t want to bear the responsibility of having supported a government that will attack the workers tomorrow, even if it’s a government of the MAS.

How exactly do you analyse the possibility of an indigenous government coming to power?

If Evo comes to power, he will have difficulties, faced with a tough Right, because he is not a revolutionary but a reformist. If he was a revolutionary, we would be with him. But his perspective is not one of a worker-peasant government working for the revolution.

So we want to maintain a position of observers in relation to an indigenous government, to see how it will evolve. It is obvious that if Evo doesn’t nationalize the gas and the hydrocarbons, he will fall like Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada [1]. On the other hand, we will not obstruct the action of a government which satisfies the demands of the people, even though we may stand aside from it.

Is it the breaking of the Pact of Revolutionary Unity of March 2005 that is the cause of this situation?

In March, we committed ourselves before the people to proceed to nationalize hydrocarbons, without compensation for the oil companies. When the MAS demonstrated in May, it was not around this demand but for a modification of the law on hydrocarbons that did not call into question the illegal contracts linking the state to the oil companies. Subsequently, it was the first to defend the idea that the only way out of the crisis in June was through elections, whereas what was really at stake was the gas!

It was a betrayal, because he did not respect the pact. He did not want this nationalization. The proof of it is that in the course of his campaign, he has already explained that he would not expel any oil company. Now, what we agreed on was a programme with a revolutionary orientation. And he, like the good reformist he is, is finally proposing to cohabit with private foreign capital.

Today, many unions belonging to the COB have allied as such with the MAS for these elections. What is the impact of that at the trade union level?
Each person knows what they are doing. Within the COB, we have a line and we will maintain it. If there are trade unionists who want to support this or that party, it's their problem, not ours. The COB cannot ally with the MAS.

What are the relations between the two CSUTCBs and the COB today?

For us the leader of the CSUTCB is Felipe Quispe. Evo has nothing to do with us. Quispe has an organic relationship with the COB. Roman Loayza has never done anything on this level. He has always devoted more of his life to his party than to his union responsibilities.

There has been talk for some time of establishing the COB's own political instrument...

This instrument has already existed for several months already, following a decision taken during a general assembly of the COB. It represents the political arm of the COB in order to take power and its provisional name is “political instrument of the workers”. Our political work will consist of consolidating this instrument around a revolutionary programme based on the nationalisation of hydrocarbons without compensation and the establishment of a revolutionary and indigenous Constituent Assembly where representation will be through organisations and not constituencies, which would be an approach in conformity with the bourgeois parliamentary model.

It will also be necessary to reinforce the Indigenous Popular Assembly that came out of the May-June crisis, as a form of popular self-organisation that will make it possible to lay the foundations of a worker-peasant revolution of a socialist character.

Wouldn’t a better coordination of the workers and peasant movement be achieved through a more realistic representation of the peasants within the COB?

Yes, that’s the argument of the MAS for taking power within the COB! Because the present statutes indicate that the vanguard of the proletariat is the miners, and we must maintain that because our organisation is a workers' confederation. The United Union Confederation of Woking Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB), as far as I know, doesn’t mention workers! They are the proprietors of their confederation and they are our allies.

What is at stake in the Workers’ and Peoples’ Summit in January and the COB congress in February?

The Summit will have, among other things, the function of preparing the congress of the COB. What is at stake in this congress is to confront the divisions that affect many sectors: the peasants, the miners, the oil workers, the departmental confederation in Cochabamba, where Oscar Olivera has been ousted from the executive committee.

It will also be a question of discussing the attitude of certain unions who collaborate with the employers, as for example in the departmental confederation of Santa Cruz. Faced with this serious crisis, our guiding line is the class struggle orientation of our confederation. The COB no longer sells itself to successive governments, as it did in the past. Today the COB is poor, but it is honest.

Certain media accuse you of having called for a military coup d'état during the May-June crisis. Can you clarify what your position was?

Ninety-eight per cent of the media here belong to private groups, which have deformed what I said as much as they could.

I never called on soldiers to carry out a coup d'état. I simply said that if a soldier who was patriotic and committed to the people, like Chavez in Venezuela, took power in Bolivia, I would be the first to support him, to end social injustice and dire poverty. All that is nothing but a campaign of slander against me, which Evo Morales has an unfortunate tendency to repeat.

For some people, there is a kind of coherence between such an attitude and the suspicions that hang over your so-called past as a paramilitary working for the regime of general Luis Garcia Meza...

This campaign of slander that is conducted against me serves the interests of imperialism and all its lackeys in Bolivia. Luis Garcia Meza, who is today imprisoned in Chonchocororo, says that he remembers me.

But he obviously has a selective memory, because when he is asked where he buried the victims of his regime, he says he cannot remember, not even in the case of Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz.

Several sources affirm that 10,000 dollars was given to Garcia Meza to formulate these accusations against me. When he said that for the first time, the prison authorities and the press put on a real media show.

It is a real manipulation whose only aim is to put me out of action. All those who know me laughed on hearing the news. As for my comrades in the COB, up to now they are supporting me in spite of the slanders, because I defend a correct line for the workers.

NOTES

[1] Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, known as “Goni”, was the President of the Republic who was forced to resign during the first “gas war” in October 2003.
[2] In El Alto, such a Popular Assembly came into being at the beginning of June 2005, called by the COB, the COR and the FEJUVE. Its appeal was then taken up by the Coordination in Cochabamba, which set up a similar structure. However these embryonic forms of popular power remained largely on paper and were limited to a coordination of the leaders of the principal social movements.

[3] Oscar Olivera was one of the leaders of the “water war” in 2000.

[4] The executive secretary of the COD of Santa Cruz, Gabriel Helbing, is a candidate on the lists of the right-wing coalition PODEMOS in Santa Cruz.

[5] Since the election of Jaime Solares to lead the COB, at its 13th Congress in August 2003, he has been regularly attacked by the press and by his opponents. According to several journalists, Solares was a paramilitary working for the political police of the military regimes, the DOP (Department of Public Order) at the end of the 1970s, and he did this work for six years, while he was employed in the Mining Police (which is responsible for preventing the theft of raw materials and tools) in the Hunani mine. Up now Solares has always denied these accusations.

[6] Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz, leader of the Socialist Party and historic leader of the Bolivian Left, the circumstances of whose assassination have to this day not been cleared up.
Electoral polarization and crisis of the state

Pablo Stefanoni

June 9th, 2005, saw the conclusion of the acute political crisis which put an early end to the government of Carlos Mesa (2003-2005). Mesa himself had succeeded Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, driven from power by a popular uprising, the bloody repression of which led to the deaths of 60 people in October 2003 [1].

A parliamentary agreement then enabled the president of the Supreme Court of Justice, Eduardo Rodriguez Veltze, to become President of the Republic. This political agreement was the origin of the calling of early general elections for December 18th 2005 [2], and included the convoking of a Constituent Assembly and the holding of a referendum on departmental autonomy in July 2006.

By this agreement, it was intended to put an end by electoral means to the “catastrophic equality” that has lasted for five years now between conservative and progressive forces, five years in the course of which neither the indigenous-popular leaders of the West (neo-nationalists) nor the leaders who come from the private sector of the East (neo-liberals) succeeded in imposing their project of society, each of them settling for putting in check the project of the opposing camp.

In the course of these years of political crisis and social convulsions, Bolivian political life has been marked by the emergence onto the national political stage of peasant and indigenous movements, as well as by the politicization of ethnicity as an element of self-expression of the popular sectors, particularly in the context of the weakening of traditional class identity, which, in the case of Bolivia, was rooted in the mines (to such an extent that some people spoke of a “miners’ Marxism”).

However, this “ethnic” construction of the people was associated with a selective - re-appropriation of the old lines of cleavage that were characteristic of the revolutionary nationalism of the 1950s which, once the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) went into crisis at the beginning of the 21st century, remained “available”. Among these cleavages is the classical antagonism between the “nation” and the “anti-nation”.

The Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) is the force that has best succeeded in taking advantage of the deep crisis of the traditional parties which have administered the neo-liberal model since 1985. It is a “New Left”, distant from the traditional Left, both on the level of its discourse and from the point of view of its organisational structure, much more comparable to a “confederation of unions” than to a classical left party.

Today, its candidate for the presidency, Evo Morales, is riding high in the opinion polls, in a context of polarisation with the right-wing coalition, Democratic and Social Power (PODEMOS), led by ex-President Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga, who is stubbornly waging a “dirty war” of rare intensity against the Left, playing on the fear of “the country being isolated” in the event of a victory of Morales.

This polarisation is condemning Samuel Doria Medina, who is in the cement business, to third place, in spite of his repeated attempts to come across as the representative of a “rational centre”, faced with a Left and a Right whose actions are portrayed as contrary to the interests of the country.

For its part, the MNR, still led by Sanchez de Lozada from Washington, has put its money on a virtually unknown son of Japanese immigrants, Michiaki Nagatani, to try and at least reach the threshold of 5 per cent of the vote. An objective that is very far from the traditional results of this party, which controlled, for more than half a century, the political life of the country.

Despite the scale of the anti-neoliberal social mobilisations, the Right is weakened, but not beaten, which means that a left government must not expect to be navigating in calm waters. According to the same polls which make Evo the future president of Bolivia, the Right would control the Senate and almost all the prefectures [3], in a context where there are demands for autonomy in two strategic regions of the country: Santa Cruz de la Sierra (in the East) and Tarija (in the South), two departments where the principal reserves of gas and oil are concentrated.

Two “agendas” were imposed in the course of the crisis that began in 2003: the “October agenda”, whose objectives are the nationalisation of hydrocarbons and the calling of a Constituent Assembly, and which is defended by the social movements, and the “January agenda”, whose principal demand is the winning of regional autonomy, and which is carried by the civic committees [4] of Santa Cruz and Tarija.

The nationalisation of gas

The product of social pressure - in a climate that is ever more nationalist - the new law on hydrocarbons was
adopted in June 2005. This law increases the taxes that the oil companies have to pay, [5], enables the state to get back the ownership of the hydrocarbons “on the surface” and promotes the “re-founding” of the national oil company (YPFB). A year before, in July 2004, Bolivians voted massively in a referendum in favour of more state regulation of the oil industry.

And during the crisis of May-June 2005, the social wave that was favourable to nationalisation spread to the whole country, thus canalising a series of accumulated frustrations, associated with the desire to put an end to the permanent pillage of the country’s natural resources by the multinationals, who only left crumbs, and this in midst of an ocean of hardship and of chronic poverty.

The majority of Bolivians see the regaining of the income from oil as the “last chance” for the country to take off economically and to accede to a socially inclusive modernisation.

However, in spite of the “moderation” of the juridical norm that was finally adopted, and at a moment when the demands for nationalisation of the exploitation and management of oil were stronger and stronger, the oil companies, the international institutions and the multilateral credit organisms nevertheless opposed these new juridical dispositions, considered as “confiscatory”.

The pressures that resulted - which included, for example, threats of judgements by arbitration tribunals, judgments that were made possible by investment protection agreements - have succeeded up to now in preventing the signature of any new contract between the Bolivian state and the multinationals enterprises who profit from this new system of exploitation (however the law established a delay of 180 days for the conclusion of these new contracts).

The demands concerning autonomy

To the demands for nationalisation have already been added the demands for departmental autonomy, formulated essentially by the elites of Santa Cruz, elites who nevertheless enjoy broad support among the population.

The inhabitants of Santa Cruz have already obtained the election of prefects by universal suffrage, at the same time as the general elections of December 18th [6], and also succeeded in rallying behind them the departments of Beni, Pando and Tarija.

The Civic Committee - which includes within it a strong business component, but which is nonetheless considered by the population as representative - gained legitimacy for its demands thanks to a massive general assembly organised in January 2005 (which mobilised more than 200,000 people), as well as by a petition carrying 300,000 signatures recognised by the National Electoral Court (CNE), whose aim was to demand the convocation of a referendum on autonomy by citizens’ initiative.

Many people make the point that during the neo-liberal era, the elites of Santa Cruz controlled the strategic places in the state apparatus [7] (among others, the National Institute of Agrarian Reform), operating directly from La Paz to take advantage of public policies that were favourable to their interests, policies such as the abolition of debts.

Today, these same elites are afraid that the coming Constituent Assembly and a possible triumph of the MAS would lead to the scenario of the “revenge of the indigenous”, which would put on the table a certain number of sensitive subjects such as land ownership (in a region where ownership of land is strongly concentrated in the hands of a handful of people). For this reason, the demand for autonomy can be understood as taking refuge on the “local level”, so as to protect the region from the conflicts that are taking place at national level, and from the potential economic and social transformations that a triumph of the MAS on 18th December could lead to.

Since the 1960s, the economy of the region of Santa Cruz has seen its contribution to Bolivia’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increase constantly and today, its economic activity seems more dynamic, more technically efficient, and more open to business and trade, than that of other regions of the country. This economy is characterised by a particularly important service sector and mining and agro-export activities (in the case of soja, for example).

The sociologist and MAS candidate for the vice-presidency, Alvaro García Linera, notes that in recent decades, “the rising economic power has shifted from the West to the East, but the power of socio-economic mobilisation has been reinforced in the West, thus giving rise to a new geographical uncertainty in the country”. And he concludes that “whereas in the West discursive constructions have emerged which have associated the economic crisis with neo-liberalism, in the East - where the hegemony of a business culture has continued - the difficulties have been associated with La Paz centralism and not with the economic model”.

We should add to this that openly racist attitudes, such as the attempts of the Youth Union of Santa Cruz to prevent, wielding clubs, a peasant demonstration from entering the city in June 2005, have turned regional cleavages into cleavages that are also ethnic, in the absence of national leaderships that are capable of giving expression to the ethnic and social diversity that are, however, constitutive of this Andean-Amazonian nation.
Towards a "Venezuelanisation" of Bolivia?

A few days away from the December 18th elections, it seems obvious that the fall of the neo-liberal ancien régime has allowed some key ideas, of a nationalist bent, to be expressed, but without however engendering a new national hegemony. The “counter-hegemonic” camp finds itself today accidentally associated with the MAS, but is having great difficulty in imagining a “post-liberal” scenario.

The post-electoral panorama - with a possible triumph of the Right in at least five of the nine departments - underlines the geographical limits of the present cycle of political renovation of the country. Quiroga was sharply criticised when presented his lists of candidates for the Assembly and the Senate, which were immediately seen as a “machine for recycling” the old, discredited traditional politicians. Despite that, the candidacy of the conservative ex-President - who is curiously using a red star as his logo - is condensing the “anti-Evo” and “anti-blockade” vote.

A vote that regroups not only the elites who are reticent to lose the power they have enjoyed since the foundation of the Republic, but also sectors from the middle, and even popular, classes, who are afraid of seeing an indigenous “illiterate” receive the tricolour scarf and the commander’s baton which symbolise the power of the head of the Bolivian state. Others fear that the aid coming from international cooperation will be suppressed, whereas it has become a vital resource for the economic stability of the country, because of the rickety state that public finances are in today.

In relation to this conjuncture, the challenges that the MAS has to confront are considerable: first of all it has to win the elections, then to guarantee that the country can be governed. Several analysts underline the potential dangers that a government headed by the indigenous Left could encounter, in the event of a “Venezuelanisation” of Bolivia: a coming together of possible sabotage on the part of local elites from the private sector and operations of destabilisation organised by a United States diplomacy that distrusts Morales, who is in the habit of saying that Fidel Castro and Hugo Chavez are “the commanders of the liberation forces of the continent”.

Demonstrating an exemplary lucidity, the leader of the MAS has remarked on this subject “that it is a question not only of succeeding in forming a government, but of taking power”.

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NOTES

[1] What has become known as the “gas war”, against the exporting of this raw material via Chilean ports (during the Pacific War of 1879, Chile annexed the Bolivian seacoast) had a macabre balance sheet of 60 dead and around a hundred wounded.

[2] The confrontation between regions over the number of seats in parliament that corresponded to their population (in line with the 2001 census), led to the postponing of the elections from the initial date of December 4th to December 18th.

[3] The prefectures are the departmental governments.

[4] The Civic Committee includes the “living forces”, which are the union organisations and the business groups, the latter having, in these two regions, a preponderant political weight. In Tarija and in Santa Cruz, the civic committees are considered by some of their members as the “moral government” and as legitimate in these regions.

[5] The new law instituted the Direct Tax on Hydrocarbons (IDH), which enables the state to recover 32 per cent of the profits produced by the exploitation of oil.

This 32 per cent is to be added to the 18 per cent of royalties which the Bolivian state received up till then, which means that it recovers a total of 50 per cent of overall profits.

[6] The prefects were previously appointed by the President of the Republic. Elected, they will have increased legitimacy...

[7] The director of the Centre of Juridical Research and Research in Social Sciences (CEJIS), Carlos Romero, explains that “since the 1960s and 1970s, Santa Cruz benefited from a substantial transfer of the mining surplus of Oruro and Potosí through the central government, via credits, the building of agricultural complexes, roads, etc.” He also affirms that “rather than being marginalised, Santa Cruz has been privileged, with surpluses that have enabled it to integrate into the export market. That is why the arguments about ‘andinocentrism’ should be relativised”.

Electoral polarization and crisis of the state
Unity and Perspectives of Bolivian Left

Remberto Arias

In this article, written before the electoral victory of Evo Morales and the MAS, Remberto Arias (a militant of the POR-Combate (Revolutionary Workers’ Party - Combat, Bolivian section of the Fourth International) deals with the question of the unity of the Bolivian Left. He recalls the sort-lived Unity Pact of March 2005, which involved the whole Left, including the MAS, and outlines the National Workers’ and People’s Summit, due to be held in January 2006, involving forces that are critical of the MAS.

The Pact of Unity of the Left, signed on March 9th, 2005 at the headquarters of the COB, didn’t last long. But this unity can be renewed at any time, through a new pact. Nevertheless, it should in the future adopt a serious perspective, which would enable it to become a real lasting alternative, as the next National Workers and People’s Summit could become for the social movements who will be involved in it.

Panorama of the recent political situation

The executive power put an end to the “war of parliamentary seats” by promulgating a decree to enable general and prefectoral elections to take place on December 18th, 2005.

This conflict over seats provoked a series of protests which were to say the least peculiar, in the departmental capitals of La Paz, Oruro and Potosi: no massive mobilization of the population, but hard-line reactions from political elites who were ready to do everything to defend additional sources of revenue.

So these parliamentarians engaged more vigorously in the struggle for seats than they had done in the struggle for hydrocarbons some months earlier. Cochabamba turned against the departments of the West, all this in a climate of potential separatism.

Because the objective that was sought after was to launch an attack against the centralism of the state, on the basis of regional interests, of the interests of the oligarchies, and if possible to prevent Evo Morales, the leader of the MAS, from becoming head of state.

The MAS today, in spite of its name, does not claim to defend socialism and presents itself rather as a nationalist party. Evo describes the nationalism of his party as “new nationalism”, very different from that of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR), and intends to promote forms of participation very different from those of the indigenous peoples.

This tendency to combine several ideologies within the MAS has increased with the arrival of Alvaro Garcia Linera as candidate for the vice-presidency. While proclaiming himself “Gramscian”, Garcia Linera is in reality taking a position in favour of an “Andean capitalism”.

However, that has not prevented the MAS from attracting the support of some left parties such as the pro-Chinese Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Bolivia (PCMLB), the Democratic Socialist Party of Rene Morales, Guerarist groups...These parties, while signing agreements formalising their support for Evo, maintain a critical attitude and do not hesitate to formulate their reservations.

The participation of the COB in the unity, in the consolidation of a popular and social movement against the oligarchy, was concretised through the document of the Pact for the Dignity and the Sovereignty of the Bolivian People, signed on March 9th, 2005.

This agreement was broken, mainly because of the insults and personal attacks that were launched against each other by two of the greatest leaders of the Bolivian popular movement: Jaime Solares and Evo Morales. The disagreements over nationalisation and over the role of soldiers in a revolutionary process represented fundamental principles, in relation to the strategy of taking power, that justified the dissensions between them.

Today, it seems unquestionable that the majority of votes in the country will be in favour of the MAS, unless there is electoral fraud on the part of the Right, in order to avoid it losing control of the hydrocarbons. If a “political instrument” of the COB had stood, no doubt the vote in favour of the MAS would have been affected as a result, inasmuch as the party of Evo Morales seems capable of attracting all the left votes.

The transnationals, the traditional neo-liberal parties such as the MNR, the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left), ADN (Nationalist Democratic Action), the UC5 (Civic Solidarity Unity) and the NFR (New Republican Force), the oligarchies, in particular of Santa Cruz, did not succeed in sabotaging the elections by the “war of parliamentary seats”.

The Pact of Revolutionary Unity

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The Right will not be able to oppose the new social force that is emerging, and behind it, the Bolivian social movements, unless they try to impose a military coup d’etat as some people are already predicting, with the aim of re-establishing neo-liberal economic policies, subjected to the interests of capitalism and imperialism.

Some members of parliament wanted to avoid the holding of elections, the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, the prosecution of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada and his ministers for the events of October 2003, [1] in order to stay in power and thus continue to plunder the country’s wealth, in order to pursue the “Gonist” [2] experience. These are the reasons that drove some people to take advantage of this “war of parliamentary seats” to destabilise and divide the country.

The programme of the Pact

The first point of the Pact for Dignity stipulates that it is a politico-social agreement which goes beyond political divisions and ideological dogmatism. The organisations taking part in it will be the opponents of the bourgeoisie and its lackeys. The Pact also stipulates that El Alto and Chapare are the headquarters of the movement of the country’s poor and excluded. This point thus recognises the role played by the city of El Alto during the recent social crises that the country has experienced.

The second point declares a permanent struggle against the interference of imperialism and of its neo-liberal economic model which, through privatisation, “capitalisation”, the “transnationalisation” of the Bolivian economy and the imposition of the Treaty of Free Trade and the Zone of Free Trade of the Americas (ALCA), leaves the majority of Bolivians to suffer from grinding poverty, hunger, social exclusion and unemployment. Despite the present divisions in the popular movement, we are continuing to struggle in this direction.

The third point makes the taking of power a strategic objective to be accomplished starting from the Constituent, and thanks to the consolidation of the leadership established by the pact, which acts against the government, against the financial, mining, banking, agricultural, etc., oligarchy.

This point gave rise to an intense debate over the nature of the Constituent Assembly, certain radical currents arguing for a Popular Workers’ Assembly, fighting for social liberation, inasmuch as the Constituent Assembly can appear as simply a means for the capitalist state to reorganise itself.

The fourth point establishes unity to attain the recovery of the country’s national resources and all the hydrocarbons, towards the national liberation of the Bolivian state and the respect for its sovereignty, in particular by rejecting the immunity that North American soldiers enjoy.

The fifth point is an analysis of the conjuncture, standing up against the humiliating conditions that the racist government in the pay of foreigners imposes, facilitating by its action the fraudulent operations of the transnationals and the plunder of our natural wealth.

Finally, the seventh point deals with the prosecution of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, his ministers, the police and the Army, all of whom refuse, one after the other, to take responsibility for the dead of October 2003. This point commits the signatories to fight for the trial to take place as soon as possible. The COB, as the central entity of the workers and of the defence of the exploited people, is strongly engaged in this task.

The MAS and the COB, but also the other political and social organisations, [3] signed and sealed this pact, with the aim of accomplishing the historic tasks outlined above, by means of a leadership called “Peoples’ Revolutionary Political Command”. Unfortunately it didn’t last. It is necessary for the reformists and the revolutionaries, the nationalists and the socialists to analyse and discuss together, first of all about the role that the proletariat must play and what alliances it can establish, then about the strategy for the taking of power and the building of socialism. All the rest is just errors and irrelevancies. Today, the forces of the MAS and of the COB are unfortunately very far from the objectives laid out by this document and this tactic.

On the coming Summit

The first National Workers’ and Peoples’ Summit, from which the MAS is today standing aside, includes the social sectors who took part in the heroic struggles in defence of hydrocarbons against Goni and Mesa, who prevented the coming to power of Hernando Vaca Diez, president of the Senate, and of Mario Cossio, president of the Assembly, during the crisis of May-June 2005.

The objective of this Summit is to build a “revolutionary political instrument”, against hunger, unemployment and poverty and for the defence of hydrocarbons and natural resources. To create this instrument, the COB, the Trade Union Federation of Miners of Bolivia (FSTMB) and the Regional Workers’ Confederation (COR) of El Alto, [4] have come to a common agreement, thus filling the vacuum left by the absence of a political and social leadership for these sectors. The principal demands of the unitary platform are the following:

1) Struggle for the nationalisation of hydrocarbons and of the country’s natural resources.

2) Analysis of the general and prefectoral elections, and evaluation of the
challenges that face the social movements after the elections.


4) Evaluation of the accomplishments, of the nature and of the perspectives of the Constituent Assembly.

5) Evaluation of the challenges concerning the strengthening of the COB and of the trade union and people’s organisations of Bolivia.

6) Conclusions and declaration of the National Workers’ and People’s Summit.

This Summit will begin with a big demonstration regrouping the organisations and social sectors, the “living forces”, the parties of the Left, etc., on January 8th, 2006 which will go from the Ceja in the city of El Alto to the Public Autonomous University of El Alto (UPEA) where the plenary sessions will take place.

From the signature of the Pact for Dignity and the Sovereignty of the Bolivian People to the Summit planned for El Alto, a process is underway of the recomposition of the forces of the Left with the aim of giving the social movements and the exploited workers a revolutionary leadership capable of integrating all of these movements into a project of social transformation, in order to fight effectively against capital and the multinational companies who are exploiting the people and plundering the wealth of the country, with the help of the corrupt state bureaucracy...

In the immediate future, the popular political forces which are participating in the elections must unite to drive the enemy from power once and for all and, by what would unquestionably be a popular victory, take forward the perspective of the exercise of political power by the workers, the building of socialism, a society without exploited or exploiters. [6]

* Remberto Arias is a militant of the POR-Combate (Revolutionary Workers’ Party - Combat).

NOTES

[1] It has been established that Sanchez de Lozada gave the order to open fire on the people, leading to the death of more than 60 people. Now a refugee in the United States, he cannot be tried as long as he does not return to Bolivia.


[3] The main organisations who were signatories, apart from the MAS ad the COB, are the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP) of Felipe Quispe, the United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB) led by the MAS senator, Roman Loayza, the coordination in Defence of Water and Gas of Oscar Olivera, the Regional Workers’ Confederation (COR) and the Federation of Neighbourhood Committees (FEJUVE) of El Alto.

[4] The nomination by the government of Eduardo Rodriguez Veltze of the executive secretary of the COR of El Alto, Edgar Patana, to the organising committee for the Constituent Assembly, along with other Bolivian citizens, at once affects the organisation of the Summit, insofar as all the sectors who will take part will have to commit themselves to the autonomous elaboration of a programme of revolutionary struggle. That means that comrade Patana will have to refuse this appointment.

[5] The Indigenous Popular Assembly was set up in El Alto and Cochabamba during the crisis of May-June 2005.

[6] Editors note: The POR-Combate (Revolutionary Workers’ Party - Combat) of which the author is a member is the historic section of the Fourth International. It played an important role during the 1952 Revolution and afterwards went through the numerous splits of the international Trotskyist movement. Under the leadership of Hugo Gonzalez Moscoso, the POR-Combate remained the Bolivian section of the Fourth International. During the 1980s, while underground, it took part in a recomposition of the Bolivian revolutionary Left, which gave birth to the POR-United, Bolivian section of the Fourth International. The recomposed organisation did not manage to survive and the 12th World Congress of the Fourth International in 1995 could only take note of the disappearance of the section. The present POR-Combate was re-established by a group of militants loyal to the Fourth International when the POR-U collapsed. Its militants are mainly active in the COB and are in favour of the unity of the Left.
“The nationalisation of hyrdocarbons will be our first task”

IV interview with Evo Morales

Herve do Alto

After his unchallengeable victory in the presidential election of 18th December, the leader of the Bolivian peasants and indigenous people, president of the Movement towards socialism (MAS), Evo Morales, was interviewed in his campaign headquarter in La Paz by our correspondent in Bolivia, Herve Do Alto. The President-elect spoke of the challenges facing the future MAS government, and in so doing came back to the issues that have been at the centre of the social struggles of recent years, issues like the nationalization of hydrocarbons and the defence of the cultivation of the coca leaf.

After the results of the vote on Sunday evening, there is no longer any doubt that you will be elected president of the Republic of Bolivia. How do you feel personally about what has happened to you since Sunday?

I am very happy, because of the confidence that the Bolivian people have shown in me. I never thought I would be where I am now. To win with more 50% of the vote is something historic. We have broken a record in the entire history of Bolivian democracy. Furthermore, to represent the indigenous people, not only of Bolivia, but of the whole of Latin America is a source of great pride for me, as I hope it is for all those peoples.

I want to prove myself worthy of my brothers. I also feel proud of all those from the middle classes, all the intellectuals and even employers who have joined us. I want them to feel proud of the indigenous people and of Evo Morales, and I hope that together we will be able to change our Bolivia, thinking of unity and of the poor and of those who are excluded in this country.

What in your opinion is responsible for this unprecedented success in the history of Bolivian democracy?

It is the result of a lot of hard work. At 5 o’clock in the morning we met to start work, for the campaign or to prepare the future government. We worked in coordination with the social movements and we will continue to do that tomorrow (Wednesday) through a big general assembly in Cochabamba. There will always be differences within these movements, but dialogue must prevail.

The role of the social movements will not be to give us orders, we will have to build this power together through debate. We feel ready to change the country, to change our Bolivia, so as to have an influence on our history, as did Tupac Katari, Tupac Amaru, and all those indigenous leaders who fought for the Tawantinsuyo [the pre-Colombian Inca Republic], as did Simon Bolivar who fought for the great Latin American fatherland. So we are going to continue our struggle in government, with the support of the social movements, with which we can affirm that we are the big majority, since we won the election with more than 50% votes.

You are often associated with Latin American political personalities such as Fidel Castro or Hugo Chavez. Can we then say that you are a socialist?

Obviously. Socialism involves a personal change. I have always said that it was necessary for us to change ourselves in order to change Bolivia.

As far as I’m concerned, that means not being egoist, not being individualist, not thinking about what is in it for me, not being a manipulator, and always thinking of the interest of the big majority of Bolivians. It is through my experience of union struggles that I learned all that. That’s why we also have the will to change the MAS.

We are staking our future on communitarian socialism, organised around the activity of peasant communities. Where does communism come from? Well, from communities!

Where I lived there was no private property, it was an agricultural zone which belonged to the whole of the community. So we have to take over and strengthen these forms of organization, which are collective and based on solidarity, so as to better share out our riches, our wealth, in the whole of Bolivia.

What will be the first measure of your government concerning the cultivation of the coca leaf?

There will not be total eradication of coca. On the other hand, we want a rationalization of production that is destined for legal consumption. We must put a stop to cocaine, to the drug trade. That’s why I invite the North American government in particular to sign an effective pact to struggle against the drug trade, which would imply shared responsibility, so as to be able to control the
banking sector and the market. We don't just need a law 1008 [the law that is the legislative framework concerning coca in Bolivia] which would be concerned with treating "supply", we also need a law 1008 to deal with "demand".

We will only be able to end the drug trade when there is zero market, zero demand, and zero cocaine addicts. If there is an illegal market in coca leaves, the legal market will continue to be affected by it. That's why one of the keys to the struggle against the drug trade will also be the strengthening of the legal market.

**Does that mean that the surface cultivated is going to decrease?**

Our experience in Chapare [the coca producing region near Cochabamba] is of delimitation of cultivated surfaces by what we call the catu, 40 meters by 40 meters. This is undoubtedly the most important contribution of the movement of the peasant producers of the coca leaf to the struggle against the drug trade.

**Will the nationalization of hydrocarbons be the first measure of your government?**

Yes, as far as the economic domain is concerned. In the political domain, the priority will be the establishment of a Constituent Assembly, to put an end to the colonial state which has governed the Bolivian nation up until now.

**The oil companies seem to fear that radical measures will be taken towards them, in the framework of this nationalization. Should they expect to see drastic changes in the conditions in which they exploit these resources?**

For us it is not a question of confiscating or expropriating the property of the oil companies. However, they must not be able to have property right to the hydrocarbons, which really belong to us. From now on, it is our government which will exercise this right. We are going to nationalise the hydrocarbons, but not the property of the oil companies.

**How are you going to go about recovering the property rights for the Bolivian state?**

Simply by relying on the political Constitution of the state, which has up to now been trampled underfoot. From now on, whatever the oil company that wants to invest in the country, it will have to be subordinate to the Constitution. Many lawyers affirm that the contracts which at present govern the links between these enterprises and the Bolivian state are null and void in law, because they have not been ratified by the Congress.

Any contract has to be ratified by the Congress to be able to be implemented. That means that these contracts are anti-constitutional and have therefore been implemented illegally. From now on, it is the state that will be the owner of the hydrocarbons, on the surface as well as under the ground. In every case, with companies which demonstrate a responsible attitude, we will guarantee them a return on their investments, because any enterprise that invests is logically seeking to make profits. But these profits must be earned in a fair and transparent fashion, and the first beneficiary must remain the state.

We cannot continue with the kind of sharing where the state only earned 18 per cent of royalties and the companies 82 per cent.

That must change. If the people have voted for nationalisation, for me, the voice of the people is the voice of God, and so we have to respect it.

**Since the gas is governed by a fixed price, Bolivia sometimes sells it at a price inferior to the market price. Does that mean that your government will fix a minimum price for gas?**

There must first of all be a price for the domestic market. That must be one of our priorities. We have to put an end to this situation where, under the ground, we have all this wealth at our disposal, while in the daily life of the people, the majority continue to use wood for heating. That is why we need a special price for the domestic market, a price that is not subject to the demands of the international market. Secondly, the contracts that have governed the conditions of sale up to now, these same contracts which are marked as unconstitutional, are precisely the ones that force us to sell our barrels of oil at 16 or 17 dollars, whereas in fact the price is of the order of 60 dollar. So it really is the case that we have to put an end to these contracts and impose a revision of them.

**Argentina is at present paying a price that is much lower than that, as are a certain number of other neighbouring countries. What will be the consequences of such a policy for these countries?**

First of all we will have to solve our problems of domestic supply. Once that is done our priority objective will be to increase our exports to the countries of the region. I cannot say as of now what prices we will establish, but in any case, when I say that our exports must be guided by the principle of equilibrium, I mean that we now have to move towards interstate relations. It must no longer be Repsol Argentina that buys gas from Repsol Bolivia. It must be the Bolivian state, acting in a sovereign way, that sells its gas to the Argentinean state. That is the only viable way of making sure that the resources generated by the gas are beneficial to the big majority of people, rather than to the oil companies who are only a minority.
The day after you were elected, the United States sent you a rather chilly message of congratulations. How do you see relations between Bolivia and the United States evolving from now on?

We are ready to dialogue with all governments, including with the United States. If the North American government adopts a democratic attitude towards us and respects the choice of the Bolivian people, we will have relations with them, but relations that exclude any relationship of submission or subordination.

They will be relations whose aim is to resolve the problems of the people. If the Bush government respects and defends human rights, and also the struggle against poverty, it will be welcome. But we will not accept blackmail or any sort of horse-trading.

However, we are not alone. We are going to begin a foreign trip in January, a trip that will start with a visit to Nelson Mandela in South Africa, then one to Lula in Brazil. On top of that I have a meeting that has several times been postponed, with the Chinese government.

Two political personalities seem at present to polarise the political scene in Latin America, Nestor Kirchner and Vicente Fox. What are your relations with them?

Kirchner called me to congratulate me, but Fox didn't, nor for that matter the North American Embassy. But I'm not complaining. They have the right to call me or not call me, but in any case, we respect all governments and their policies and we are not going to interfere in debates about domestic policies.

We have allies in the social movements of the whole world, including those in the United States. We will continue as always to look for allies who are capable of advising us and guiding us in our struggle. I still have a lot to learn, from the Bolivian people as from the people of Latin America.

Jorge Quiroga [candidate of the right-wing alliance PODEMOS (Democratic and Social Power), who came second with 28 per cent of the vote] committed himself to signing the Free Trade Agreement (TLC) with the United States. The MAS seems on the other hand to have adopted a more ambiguous attitude concerning free-trade agreements and to be in favour of projects of regional integration. What is going to happen with the TLC and with Mercosur, where Bolivia at present has the status of an associate state?

Whatever commercial treaty we are talking about, the TLC, ALCA (the Free Trade Area of the Americas) or whatever, all must be directed towards a just and equitable vision of trade, a vision where the micro and small businesses, the small producers and even the Bolivian agro-alimentary industry, are the ones who resolve their own problems, in order to avoid the states that subsidise their agriculture flooding countries like ours with their exports. I believe that this is a central theme. That is why we must revise these treaties to enable these small structures to have guaranteed markets. Perhaps we will also be able to enter the North American market, who knows, maybe with coca! (laughs). If we find a market for quinoa or for lama meat, we will sign, but we will not get involved in that kind of thing if it is a question of agreements whose consequence could be to eliminate the small producers.

Interviewed on Tuesday December 20th, 2005.

* Herve Do Alto is the correspondent in Bolivia of Rouge, weekly paper of the LCR (French section of the Fourth International.)
Will Evo Morales Change Bolivia?

Jeffery R Webber

The results of the December 18 elections in Bolivia were surprising to everyone, including to Evo Morales himself, the leader of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) party. Morales won 54% of the vote, almost double the 29% for the nearest contender, right-wing Jorge “Tuto” Quiroga. A record 85% of eligible voters cast ballots, despite reports of widespread disqualification of mostly indigenous peasant supporters of Morales for technicalities. Since the return of electoral democracy to Bolivia in 1982, no presidential candidate has come close to achieving an absolute majority (over 50%). This makes Morales’ victory all the more remarkable.

It is also notable that Morales is the first indigenous president in South American history. MAS won a majority in the lower house, a near majority in the Senate, and three of nine governorships. There are, therefore, no institutional obstacles to blame if MAS fails to carry through the hopes of the exploited and oppressed popular classes and indigenous nations who voted it into office.

Evo Morales leads march demanding gas nationalisation, 2003

The electoral results in Bolivia were greeted with widespread euphoria across both the NGO (non-governmental organization) Left and large sections of the radical Left internationally. Important socialist intellectuals in other parts of Latin America, such as Atilio Boron in Argentina and Heinz Dieterich in Mexico, see anti-capitalist, revolutionary potential in Morales’s victory.

People with a more sceptical view of the new Bolivian government, such as the long-time socialist researcher on Latin America James Petras or journalists Luis A. Gomez and Jean Friedsky of Narconews, are frequently dismissed as ultra-leftists, sectarians, dogmatists, etc.

Although it is too early to pronounce confidently on the character of the new Bolivian government, the recent history of the MAS and its relationship to the wave of popular insurrection that began in 2000 and peaked in October 2003 and May-June 2005 supports the view of the sceptics. The optimistic view is based on a superficial understanding of the Bolivian situation.

The MAS and Popular-Indigenous Struggle

Bolivia entered a revolutionary cycle of near-constant popular insurrection in 2000, starting with the “Water War” of 2000 in the city of Cochabamba and its surrounding countryside. That popular revolt against the privatization of water also signified popular condemnation of the entire period of neoliberalism (1985-2000), with its rampant privatization, growing inequity, and ongoing poverty.

The Water War was followed by three weeks of mobilization and road blockades by the Aymara peasantry in the altiplano (high plateau region) in September-October 2000. The heights of the revolutionary cycle, however, came during the October 2003 Gas War that forced neoliberal president Gonzalo (Goni) Sanchez de Lozada to flee the country, and in May-June 2005 when Goni’s successor Carlos Mesa was forced to resign due to his refusal to break with the neoliberal economic model.

What do we know of the MAS during this period? The MAS grew out of the coca-growing, indigenous peasant resistance in the Chapare region of the country. During the late 1980s and 1990s the cocaleros (coca growers) were the most important force on the indigenous-Left.

They combined the revolutionary Marxist traditions of ex-miners forced to move to the Chapare region due to the privatization of the tin mines with traditions of indigenous peasant resistance. Facing brutal repression under the US-led “War on Drugs,” the cocaleros developed an anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal ideology directed primarily against the US.

For the first few years of its life, in the late 1990s, the MAS maintained organic ties with the cocaleros’ peasant unions. Evo Morales, of mixed Aymara-Quechua descent, was among the most important union leaders and would emerge as the front man of the MAS.

The MAS initially focused on extra-parliamentary activism and base-level democracy, but especially since the 2002 elections has moved away from mass struggle and towards electoral politics.

In the 2002 elections, Evo Morales came second to Sanchez de Lozada in the presidential race by less than 2%. This unexpectedly good result, following on the heels of inflammatory pre-election threats against Bolivians by the US ambassador, gave the party a sense that they could win electorally. The MAS began to shift away from street mobilizations and towards courting the “middle class.”
The leading sectors of the popular-indigenous mobilizations of September-October 2003 radicalized and brought into the streets hundreds of thousands of people despite MAS attempts to contain and soften their demands. The party’s vision was to win the scheduled 2007 elections and they would not let a revolution get in their way! Evo Morales supported the constitutional exit from the crisis in 2003, allowing Goni’s vice-president Carlos Mesa to come to power. Morales and the MAS were instrumental in supporting Mesa’s neoliberal government well into 2005.

During May-June 2005 the MAS did participate in a way they hadn’t in October 2003, leading a march from Caracollo to La Paz to demand a Constituent Assembly. Nonetheless, the party emphasized the need for a constitutional exit to the revolutionary situation and the supremacy of electoral politics.

At a massive rally in the central plaza of La Paz during the height of the May-June insurrection, I listened to a whole series of leaders of popular organizations calling for the nationalization of natural gas. Meanwhile, huge sections of the crowd chanted “Nationalization! Nationalization!” Morales was the only speaker to call instead for 50% taxes for transnational gas corporations exploiting natural gas resources in Bolivia.

In the early stages of the electoral campaign, before Alvaro Garcia Linera became the party’s vice-presidential candidate, the MAS attempted to form a broad alliance with the Movement without Fear municipal party, led by neoliberal La Paz mayor Juan del Granado.

James Petras is absolutely correct when he writes of October and May-June: “Morales succeeded in taking the peoples’ struggle out of the street and dismantling the nascent popular councils and channelling them into established bourgeois institutions. In both crises, Evo favored a neo-liberal replacement in opposition to the peoples’ demands for a new popularly controlled national assembly.”

The First Indigenous President

Much has been made of the fact that Evo Morales is the first indigenous president in South American history. To understand the significance of this, let’s look at the very different but nonetheless instructive national liberation struggles of southern Africa.

In his book The Next Liberation Struggle (2005), John Saul points out that the first series of national liberation struggles in southern Africa, from 1960 to 1990, were fought against European colonial occupation and white minority rule, and for Black majority rule. Winning Black majority rule is to be celebrated, but Saul’s book correctly calls for a new struggle in southern Africa, or “the next liberation struggle”: a revolutionary transition to socialism, because Black majority rule has not meant an end to capitalist exploitation in southern Africa.

Similarly, in Bolivia gains by indigenous peoples in Congress in 2002 and Morales’ victory in December 2005 are important steps towards bringing an end to white-mestizo (mixed race) minority control of the state in a country where the majority of the population is indigenous peoples. This is a democratic gain.

At the same time, however, the MAS has taken steps against the “next liberation struggle” for socialist transformation, just as the African National Congress did in South Africa after the defeat of apartheid.

Across Latin America, one of the central paradoxes of the 1990s has been the emergence of neoliberal multiculturalism. In reaction to massive indigenous mobilizations, states began to react to contain the radical potential of these movements through official “recognition” of cultural diversity, indigenous languages, and so on. At the same time, while the cultures of indigenous peoples are being “recognized” by neoliberal states, the living conditions of indigenous peoples are deteriorating!

In a recent interview with an Uruguayan radio station Petras pointed out that for a president to say “I’m indigenous, or I come from humble origins” does not guarantee anything. We need only look at the deplorable examples of Victor Hugo Cardenas who served as Bolivia’s vice-president from 1993-1997, President Toledo in Peru (who claims indigenous descent and wore a poncho in his first presidential electoral race) or Gutierrez in Ecuador. All three were indigenous - or indigenous-backed - leaders who did not break with neoliberalism and did not forge the path toward the next liberation struggle.

The New Administration and Social Movements

Since their victory, the MAS leadership has been playing to their different bases of support. Morales quickly made visits to Cuba and Venezuela, suggesting a united fight against “neoliberalism and imperialism.” At the same time, however, Morales and Garcia Linera were quick to visit the most reactionary sections of the Bolivian capitalist class in Santa Cruz, in particular the far right Civic Committee of Santa Cruz. This meeting was to reassure these capitalists that their interests would be protected under the new administration.

Early visits were also made to Brazil and Spain. Not coincidentally, the Brazilian state-owned multinational Petrobras and the Spanish oil and gas giant Repsol are the biggest investors in Bolivia’s natural gas industry. As the Spanish newspaper El Pais reported recently, “Bolivian
President-elect Evo Morales softened his tone... over plans to nationalize his country’s gas industry as he met with Spanish officials and business leaders in Madrid.”

The newspaper reports that according to Spanish Industry Minister Jose Montilla, Morales has adopted a “prudent” line with regard to the nationalization of natural gas resources. The minister stated bluntly: “There will be certain changes to the rules of the game... but I told him that companies need a stable and trustworthy environment in which to invest and I think he is conscious of that.”

This corresponds with the fact that while occasionally using the word “nationalization,” the MAS leadership has been nothing but ambiguous as to what they mean by nationalization.

Vice-president Garcia Linera has famously denounced a transition to socialism in Bolivia as impossible for at least 50 to 100 years. Instead, he argues for “Andean-Amazonian capitalism,” which through greater state intervention will supposedly be supportive of indigenous peoples. We should remember that the ANC’s Black capitalism has been anything but good for South Africa’s Black working class.

If the MAS radicalizes during its first months in office, it will not be a consequence of the benevolent leadership of Morales or Garcia Linera. If radicalization transpires, which is certainly not impossible, it will come from pressure from below, from the same sort of mass self-organization that we witnessed in Cochabamba in 2000, and throughout the country in October 2003 and May-June 2005.

The chances of success for mass struggle will probably be better in the first year of the MAS administration, before the Right has time to regroup and rebuild counterrevolutionary forces.

There are some signs of optimism in the social movements. Two popular meetings were held in El Alto in early December, just before the elections. The first was the Congress of the National Front for the Defence of Water and Basic Services and Life.

Neighbourhood councils from Oruro and Santa Cruz, FEJUVE-El Alto, and the La Coordinadora (the principal social movement organization in the Cochabamba Water War of 2000) held a rather successful meeting calling for a social-political front outside of the MAS to foster the self-organization of the masses on the Cochabamba model regardless of what party is in government. This movement may prove to have some capacity to mobilize against the MAS government if it does not meet popular expectations.

Oscar Olivera of La Coordinadora recently told Green Left Weekly, “we are also conscious of the fact that it does not depend on the capacity of manoeuvring, nor does it depend on the political capacity of the government, whoever it might be, to take us to our objective.

It depends fundamentally on continuing to develop and better the capacity of unity, of organisation, of proposals and of mobilizations of the social movements in front of the next government. I believe that is fundamental, and I reiterate that the elections are simply a space for the accumulation of forces.”

The second meeting was organized by the Bolivian Workers Central (COB), the Regional Workers Central of El Alto (COR-El Alto), and the central miners’ union (FSTMB). While this meeting produced much fiery rhetoric, attendance was low.

The organizations that took part in these meetings seem to be remaining independent from the MAS government. Most recently, Olivera was apparently offered a place in government by Garcia Linera. He has shown no interest. It is also unlikely that the mostly Aymara peasantry of the altiplano - a key force in October 2003 and May-June 2005 - will succumb to cooptation through petty handouts from the MAS. They are likely to play a key role in mobilizations that take on the MAS if the party does not fulfill basic expectations.

At the same time, the warnings of Luis Gomez and Jean Friedsky, writing just prior to the elections, need to be taken seriously: “The possibility of an Evo presidency makes many nervous, including us. Our fear is not that Evo’s broad bases will revolt should he not satisfy expectations, but that they won’t.

In recent years, Evo’s primary constituency (the cocaleros) and the more radical sectors (the Aymara of El Alto and the surrounding highland provinces) have risen up simultaneously when their interests overlap. But what happens if one group’s allegiance to an elected official over-rides their desire to protest?”

We can only hope that mobilization from below continues, beginning the next liberation struggle.

* Jeffery R. Webber is an editor of New Socialist and a PhD candidate in Political Science at the University of Toronto. He was in Bolivia most recently from January-September, 2005.
**“Co-management” in the Alcasa aluminium factory**

**Rafael Rodriguez**

At the beginning of 2005, president Chavez nominated Carlos Lanz a head of the nationalized aluminium company, Alcasa. This nomination was a surprise, since Lanz is a former guerrilla who is now a sociologist clearly identified with the revolutionary left.

From his arrival at the head of the company he began a process of “co-management” which has made this company a political symbol and this experience a national test. We interviewed a member of Lanz’s team, Rafael Rodriguez, in charge of economic development, who works for the development of co-management at Alcasa and in the communities.

**Can you tell us what is specific about co-management at Alcasa?**

Alcasa is a company manufacturing aluminium, which is well adapted to respond to import substitution policy and where we have the possibility of developing an experience. Alcasa has made losses for the past 17 years. For some years corruption and embezzlement have practically rendered it bankrupt.

For eight years (since Chavez became president) it has made losses which are very difficult to overcome without technological restructuring. Bankruptcy became a business for some: there have been many studies, projects and so on that have cost millions. There are gentlemen with attaché-cases who came, gave their opinion, left... and nothing changed.

We came here with the objective of salvaging Alcasa with the help of the workers. With Carlos Lanz we are convinced that the workers can build socialism in a practical manner, on the move. That is why we have proposed co-management here.

We have never had the intention of implementing a social-democratic and reformist co-management as in Germany, but tactically we have adopted this name. It amounts to indicating that we wished for co-management as transition towards self-management.

Here we have co-management with workers’ control and a factory council with a view to giving the workers all the power over production, distribution and commercialization. The goal is to develop and diversify the production of aluminium, finding foreign clients outside the USA - like the Japanese for space construction, for example - but also to develop national markets, like the construction of cheap quality housing.

For us co-management at Alcasa has its meaning in the peaceful and progressive construction of socialism. As Marxists and Gramscians we want to construct a counter-hegemony. For that we have set up a centre for socio-political training, so that the workers are involved in the process. We have been called every kind of name, Communist catechism and so on. But little by little the workers have become involved in this training and several hundred now attend. Now, according to the subject, it’s increasingly the workers themselves who provide the training.

**What is the situation as regards the ownership of the company?**

It remains state-owned. We are not for the kind of co-management that distributes capital to the workers, or associates the workers with capital, or divides the shares among them. And in Venezuela the problem is not really that of private ownership.

The state already possesses the essentials in this country: the majority of land, oil, the biggest companies... It is more a problem of the redistribution and restructuring of the state in a socialist sense. That’s why do not conceive of co-management as being confined to the company, for us it should extend to the entire social environment and to all the problems including the military question. But on this level we should say that we have not advanced very much.

**What powers do the workers and the directors have at their disposal?**

When we came here, some have said to us “we have to fire all the leaders, all the directors”. We replied “No, that is the last thing we will do”. At PDVSA (the national oil company) after the employers’ sabotage, they dismissed more than 2,000 managers at one fell swoop and that has created big difficulties for them to this day. If we had done the same thing and installed committed but untrained Chavistas in all the leadership posts that would have been a catastrophe.

We wanted a process from below, elections in each workshop, in each work group of “spokesperson delegates”. A system of direct election, control and accountability, revocability, rotation of tasks and so on. At the first meeting that we organized
26 workers came (out of 2,700 at the company).

We worked by every means to convince, meetings, leaflets, newspapers, debates and so on. After a few months the workers saw it was in their interest to participate, to “take power” in the company. And then, we proceeded to elections at the management level.

The leadership team was considerably enlarged; for each former leader, we elected three new ones. Then there are 300 spokesperson delegates elected at the rank and file level by the workers. Today each department has its “administrative council” with spokesperson elected in each team where all the problems of production are planned and discussed.

When there is a problem to settle an assembly of workers in the department is called. We proceed in the same way at the level of the company as a whole. At the central meeting the directorate submits its plans to the representatives of the workers and the latter raise their problems. It’s no longer the director alone who decides, he must take account of the will of the workers.

What future do you see for this type of co-management across the country as a whole?

We have been dismissed as “mad”, but we have the feeling that we are advancing. On the industrial level and on the political level. Production has grown, productivity also. We have ambitious industrial projects, the construction of a fifth production line, a redeployment and so on.

On the political level we have the feeling of being in tune with what president Chavez has said on the necessity of building socialism, of putting an end to capitalist relations.

In our state, in the industrial heart of the country in the basic industries, the process advances; co-management is advancing in several other companies. We have contacts with other enterprises which practice co-management in the country, there have been some meetings, there will be others. We are conscious of being observed with much attention.

But it’s conflictual because there are several conceptions of co-management and we are not in agreement with the totally reductive vision that is formulated in some ministries or in the draft legislation that is being discussed at the moment.

Interview conducted by Fabrice Thomas

* Rafael Rodriguez is a member of the central management team of ALCASA.
Revolution in the revolution?

Fabrice Thomas

The process underway in Venezuela is revolutionary in terms of breadth of social and political transformation, as well as the mobilization and politicization of a very significant fraction of the population. Neither president Hugo Chavez nor the Venezuelan workers have overthrown the state and capitalist social relations. But on two occasions the workers and the people have broken coup attempts where a coalition of bourgeois forces attempted economic sabotage with the support of imperialism and the big media. These victories for popular mobilization have allowed Chavez to deepen social transformation domestically and to make anti-imperialist gestures in foreign policy.

Above all, the workers and the inhabitants of the poor neighbourhoods have become conscious of their strength. They increasingly want to participate actively in the transformation of society. There lies the fundamental basis for the future deepening of the revolution in Venezuela.

This thirst for active participation manifests itself first and foremost in the popular neighbourhoods of the big cities, inside the activist networks that support and give life to the “missions”, the social campaigns sponsored by the government outside of the state structures. Some tens of thousands of the inhabitants of the poorer neighbourhoods - the “barrios” - devote their time and enthusiasm to furthering the success of the education and health programmes.

It is from the massive and determined support of the people of these neighbourhoods that Chavez draws his main strength.

However, the weaknesses of the process are also apparent here in these neighbourhoods, which account for more than half the population of a town like Caracas. Problems like unemployment, poverty, insanitary housing and lack of resources remain far from being settled.

Everyday there are neighbourhood mobilizations to demand that the parliamentary deputies, for the most part “chavista”, fulfill their electoral promises. Corruption and clientelism have not disappeared and the “missions” sometimes involve those associated with “chavismo” reviving some of the practices of the preceding regime.

What is new, however, is that the people of the neighbourhoods are rebelling against these practices. In the “barrios “ it is no longer enough to don a red beret (a Chavista symbol) to be untouchable.

This rise in discontent and demands does not only affect the cities. In July peasants demonstrated in their thousands in Caracas to demand the extension of the agrarian reform and the punishment of the armed bands of the landowners. The Indian communities in the west of the country, threatened with expulsion because of mining development, brandished their banners throughout the world festival of youth in Caracas in August.

The most significant phenomenon of recent months has been the rise in power of the trade union federation, the UNT. [1] The leadership of the old federation, the CTV, has passed bag and baggage to the side of the employers and reaction, so the union movement is in full recomposition.

In many workplaces new union activist networks are organizing, overthrowing by referendum the old bureaucratized union leaderships and mostly affiliating to the UNT. The latter is now the most important union federation in the country with perhaps more than a million members.

Militants of the revolutionary left, in particular the comrades of the former OIR [2] are at the forefront of this movement. With other currents which support the process, they fight for the structuring of the UNT as a class struggle trade union federation, independent of the government, even if, faced with reaction and imperialism, it is situated clearly in the camp of “Chavismo”.

For tens of thousands of workers in all branches, it is about recovering their unions and, with confidence regained, to struggle for improved rights, wages and working conditions. At the same time that the independent trade union movement is being reborn, conflicts are multiplying: against the bosses, often allied to the former trade union bureaucrats, but sometimes also against local notables.

In these conflicts the workers and union activists call on the governors, “Chavista” ministers, indeed Chavez himself. However, this supports is far from being automatic and often remains verbal, which give the new union networks even more incentive to conquer their independence.

The multiplication and impact of the experiences of “co-management” is another sign of the workers’ desire to play a greater role in the transformations underway. Behind the word “co-management” there are certainly
very different projects and realities. But the companies where the workers have acquired a real power are increasing and the debate on the content and the objectives of co-management has been launched across the country.

It is incontestably in the nationalized aluminium company Alcasa that the experience has been at its broadest. The directorate has been renewed by the vote of the workers and the strategic orientations of the company are subject to the approval of workshop delegates.

Alcasa has become a symbol that disturbs many. The resistance of employers or governmental sectors concerned by any idea of “workers’ control” has shown that this does not amount only to a theoretical debate but is about power inside the company. A law on the right to work is in preparation and is fiercely discussed.

These convergent phenomena have led revolutionary activists to throw themselves into the construction of a new political organization, the Revolution and Socialism Party (PRS). It is an initiative originating with Trotskyist militants, but not them alone.

It already has several hundred members, for the most part workers involved in the construction of the new union federation, the UNT. It seeks to rally all those who are not content to support the government of Chavez, but advocate the “revolution in the revolution” and the perspective of a socialist transformation of society. For these comrades the construction of such an organization is both necessary and opportune.

Necessary because the official parties that support Chavez do not respond to the need for political and class independence which grow among the workers and in the population. Necessary because the contradictions or conflicts inside the “Chavista” camp will profit reaction if they do not find an expression, a programme, which goes in the direction of the deepening of the revolution. Opportune, because the debate on socialism has been launched by Chavez himself and corresponds to the questions and expectations of thousands of militants involved in the process.

The first steps towards the construction of this organization (a meeting of 450 people in Caracas in July, the publication in August of the political declaration that can be read below) have raised hopes but also fears and criticisms. Which is not astonishing given what is at stake.

The existing political organizations that support the process in Venezuela do not offer guarantees as to their will to transform society and ensure that power genuinely passes into the hands of the workers. The “Chavista” parties - Fifth Republic Movement (MVR), “Podemos” or “Patria Para Todos” - are primarily electoral machines and suppliers of cadres, while others like the Venezuelan Communist Party show little autonomy in relation to the government.

The comrades of the PRS have begun the difficult task of construction of a new party, a tool for the workers. They have the right to all our solidarity and to all the support we can bring to them.

*N* Fabrice Thomas represented the LCR (French section of the Fourth International) at the first meeting of the Constituent Committee of the PRS.

NOTES

[1] The National Union of Workers (UNT), created in February 2003 is the new independent union federation which had supported the employers’ attempts to overthrow Chavez.

We publish here in full the political declaration drawn up in August 2005 by the comrades who undertook the foundation of the PRS. This document is conceived as a basis for discussion. At the invitation of the PRS comrades the Fourth International will participate in this discussion and forthcoming issues of International Viewpoint will reflect this.

We, the workers, peasants, students and inhabitants of the neighbourhoods and rural communities of Venezuela, are conscious of the great advances and successes won through tenacious struggle over the past six years of the revolutionary process.

We are conscious of the meaning of the Missions [1] the broadening of democratic liberties, as well as the content of social and economic inclusion of the “leyes habilitantes” [2].

On the other hand, it is also clear that there is still much lacking in providing a structural response to the serious problems existing in the poorest sectors of our country.

The highest level of available oil resources in our history, in the hands of a government that counts on the sympathy of the great majority of our people, has not been enough to resolve the problems of poverty and exclusion, nor has it freed us from imperialist subjection and the power of the big monopolies.

There is no socialism without expropriation of the big private means of production.

The oil money alone cannot resolve the problem of capitalist exploitation, the origin of all our evils. To overcome it, the economy should cease to be in the hands of a handful of rich bosses, the conspiratorial oligarchy [3] and the multinational monopolies, and pass into the control of the workers and the people in power; it is necessary to take the step of expropriating the big companies which are in the hands of the bourgeoisie and imperialism. There is no socialism without expropriation of the big private means of production.

None of the parties which currently have ministers in the government or members of parliament have shown themselves ready to guarantee until the end the struggle for the Second Independence [4] in the face of imperialism, through the liquidation of the social relations of capitalist production and through socialism as a regime of ownership and collective government of the workers and the people.

Their practice is reduced to introducing timid reforms inside capitalism, or conjunctural policies, which have not resolved and will not resolve the problem of exploitation and oppression. They maintain intact the real centres of power and economic control of the oligarchy and imperialism in our country, and at the same time they show a clear tendency to engender new and corrupt bureaucratic castes in the state apparatus that they lead, opening the way to the reinstallation of the old elites, bogging down the revolutionary process.

It is clearer every day that under the leadership of these parties the revolution will be frozen and we will not advance towards socialism.

Facing this crossroads, we the revolutionaries must assume the unshakable commitment to envisage and propose to the workers and the people, a political alternative which gives free course to the most dynamic, progressive and combative forces of the organized people, in the perspective of fighting for socialism with democracy, without exploiter bosses, nor bureaucrats embedded in the state.

It becomes urgent to offer the popular sectors, workers, women, peasants, students, indigenous communities and middle layers of the population who sympathize with social change, a project of socialism, without ambiguities, which breaks with capitalism, the exploitation of man by man, and which fights for the definitive liberation of the human species from any form of oppression and exploitation, under the government of the workers.

While presenting this political alternative, it is also necessary to envisage the construction of tools that can win these basic changes that Venezuelan society and the world as a whole require.

The workers have advanced in building the UNT; the popular sectors, neighbourhoods, peasants and students organizing themselves in fronts and associations, and diverse forms of popular organization continue to proliferate.

They lack only the construction of the political tool of all these sectors, which organizes and strengthens, on the basis of a revolutionary programme and a political discipline,
revolutionary militant activity towards socialism. It is necessary to build a party of the workers, the popular and revolutionary sectors, which on the basis of national and international experience and in agreement with the short, medium and long-term demands of the people, elaborates a Transitional Programme to advance towards socialism.

This political party must necessarily be new and different from those that exist. Through the revolutionary experience of recent years, the people have broken definitively with AD, COPEI, MAS, Causa R, Bandera Roja, Primero Justicia, Proyecto Venezuela, and so on [5], which it has recognized as oligarchic, putchist and pro-imperialist political structures.

But it has also come to the conclusion that the parties of the Fifth Republic are electoral apparatuses, that reproduce the old vices of the politicking of the Fourth Republic [6] and which do not have as their perspective the struggle for socialism without bureaucrats or bosses.

It should be genuinely democratic and organize inside it the best fighters and activists of the revolutionary process. It should have as final end popular and workers’ mobilization and the struggle for the conquest of power for the workers and the people. A revolutionary party which:

- fights for socialism, shows solidarity with the struggles of the people, defends national sovereignty, confronts imperialism, demands non-payment of the foreign debt and fights for a general increase in wages.

- confronts day after day the bosses and the exploiting and oppressive landowners. Which has the internationalist vocation that the liberator Simon Bolivar bequeathed to us. A party that is in the front line of support for the expropriation of the companies so that they are controlled and administered directly by the workers. A party that fights for a new society, free from exploitation and humiliation, that fights for socialism and democracy.

We should help the people become conscious of the fact that the problems that face us are insurmountable if we do not put an end to capitalism and private ownership of the means of production and fight for social revolution on a world scale.

Socialism is incompatible with the idea that there are national or international bosses involved in the development of the nation. We cannot conciliate the interests of the exploited and the exploiters; by this road we will only arrive at a caricature of revolution. This strategic difference with the reformist discourse of class conciliation justifies the construction of the revolutionary party.

But it is also necessary to signal that beyond this difference, we are committed to defend to the end the government of president Chavez from any coup attempt or destabilization by imperialism and the Venezuelan bourgeois opposition. We will defend, at the sides of the Bolivarian people, as we have done on April 13 [2002] and during the oil sabotage [7] the government of president Chavez against the putchist conspiracy of the oligarchic right and US imperialism, as well as all the democratic conquests won through the process of the Bolivarian revolution.

We will accompany the workers and the people in the experience with this government but in seeking the perspective of the development of workers’ and peasants’ power, popular, participatory and active, until government is directly exercised in a democratic manner by the workers to adopt, without vacillation or bureaucratic obstacles, the anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist measures capable of leading us towards liberatory socialism.

This is the right time to launch the challenge of building that organization. The public meeting that we have organized on July 9 in the Teatro Imperial in the city of Caracas, in which delegations from all over the country and of diverse origins and political and organizational experiences participated, confirmed to us that hundreds and thousands of activists were seeking a revolutionary and socialist political structure that responds to their expectations and demands.

As a consequence of this reality, we have come together in the city of Valencia to set up the National Constituting Committee of the PAR-TIDO REVOLUCION Y SOCIALISMO (PRS), and to discuss the characteristics of the political conjuncture and stage that the country is going through, and have reached the following accords:

**POLITICAL ACCORDS**

**We support those who struggle**

We demand an immediate solution to the various conflicts which Venezuelan workers are currently experiencing. In particular those of Chrysler in Carabobo; those of the Social Security in Barquisimeto; the workers in the hydrologic sector, the mining industry and at Sidor in Bolivar state; the shipyard workers in the state of Sucre; those of the agrofoodstuffs company Guaca in Guaro; those of the multinational Coca-Cola in the state of Tachira and so on.

We support the thousands of peasants who mobilize before the Palace of Miraflores to demand that president Chavez applies the agrarian reform that finishes with the latifundio, and the investigation and punishment of the backers of the bands of thugs who wish to eliminate the most prominent peasant activists.
We are at the sides of the indigenous communities that oppose the development of coal in the sierra of Perija, which degrades its territories and violates the ancestral traditions of the communities.

Together with the revolutionary youth we repudiate the vile murders of students by police bodies that maintain an authoritarian and repressive presence, typical of the Fourth Republic. We demand investigation and punishment, while favouring the democratization of the police bodies, in a way that ends their vertical character and allows the election of commissioners by the communities and the police to organize unions to defend their economic, social and democratic rights.

We propose an emergency economic plan

For a better use of the resources coming from the bonanza in oil prices, we propose that a National Plan of Public Works and Housing is developed that generates employment worthy of the name for millions of Venezuelan workers.

We demand that president Chavez extends in the same proportion to all the workers and employees of the public and private companies the wage increase granted to the components of the armed forces. We oppose the payment of the fraudulent foreign debt and pronounce ourselves in favour of the realization of a National Referendum through which the people can pronounce themselves democratically on the foreign debt and the international reserve surpluses.

We urge president Chavez to institutionalize the Missions and to urgently resolve the grave crisis in the systems of health, social security and national education. We oppose the use of the Missions for clientelist means of introducing greater flexibility among the workforce.

We fight for unity of action, through the Fronts of Struggle of the workers, peasants, students, housewives, the rural and indigenous communities, to defend the rights of the people or the conquest of new demands.

We place ourselves at the side of the class-conscious and revolutionary sectors that fight against the parasites and the new bureaucracy that seeks to crystallize inside it.

We fight for the autonomy and full political independence of the UNT, with respect to the bosses, the state and the government. We demand that the workers and the communities are consulted for discussion and the adoption of laws. We pronounce ourselves against the restriction of the right to strike contemplated in the partial reform of the Penal Code.

We fight for the re-opening of any company closed in an arbitrary fashion by the bosses and we demand from the government its expropriation and restitution to the workers so that they can administer it and recommence production.

We fight for the elimination of the supposed “autonomy” of the Central Bank of Venezuela. We demand the nationalization of the private banking sector and the creation of a big national bank that concentrates all the resources originating from exports, renationalization of the banks currently in the hands of the transnational groups, with workers’ control and investigation and punishment of the financial groups and entrepreneurs that promote currency flight.

We fight for the calling of an Oil Constituent Assembly that allows discussion on cargo oil policy, the portfolio of businesses of the PDVSA and the cancellation of all the concessions granted to the multinationals.

We fight for revolutionary co-management, workers’ control and socialism. We understand co-management as a transitional stage towards socialism, during which the workers, in a free, democratic and revolutionary fashion, gain experience in administering public and private companies; advancing towards workers’ control of production, the accountability of enterprises and the elimination of the social relations of capitalist production, to replace them by those of the socialist model.

We demand investigation on cargo oil policy, the portfolio of businesses of the PDVSA and the cancellation of all the concessions granted to the multinationals.

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We fight for unity of action, through the Fronts of Struggle of the workers, peasants, students, housewives, the rural and indigenous communities, to defend the rights of the people or the conquest of new demands.

We defend the free right of trade union organization and support the indefinite extension of the Decree of Labour Irremovability and its application to all workers and employees who earn less than a million Bolivars as salary.

We condemn the employers’ repression and demand exemplary sanc-
We fight to democratize the professional, trade union, community and political structures that the workers and people adopt. Our commitment in relation to the rank and file is to struggle so that they decide.

We are internationalists. In insisting on our internationalist conviction we pronounce ourselves in solidarity with the peoples of the world under attack from imperialism. We commit ourselves to push forward and develop all the forms of self-organization adopted by the people to deepen the revolution.

The communities and the workers can only be satisfied if we, workers and people adopt. Our commitment in relation to the rank and file is to struggle so that they decide.

Organizational accords

1. To set up the National Constituting Committee of the new political organization, to which we give the acronym PRS.
2. To hold regional meetings in August and September, leading to the setting up of state committees for the building of the Partido Revolucionario Socialista.
3. To hold national constituent meetings in early 2006 to adopt political and ideological independence, the new organization will not depend on any institutional or international level to confront the enemies of the workers and people.
4. To form activist nuclei of the PRS in all the towns, neighbourhoods and workplaces.
5. To distribute the draft Political Programme and Statutes of the new organization among the activists and that the activists have an initial discussion to precise, complete or amend the draft Programme and Statutes for the drawing up of the Political Theses.
6. To hold a National Ideological Seminar on October 20, 21 and 22 so that the activists have an initial discussion to precise, complete or amend the draft Programme and Statutes for the drawing up of the Political Theses.
7. To demand basic solutions to the problems that Venezuelan working people face today.
8. To hold a National Constituent Congress in early 2006 to adopt political

We fight to democratize the professional, trade union, community and political structures that the workers and people adopt. Our commitment in relation to the rank and file is to struggle so that they decide.

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8. To hold a National Constituent Congress in early 2006 to adopt political
ical and organizational theses and the programme and statutes of the new party.

The National Constituting Committee of the PRS is made up of four national coordinators - Orlando Chirino, Gonzalo Gomez, Miguel Angel Hernandez A. and Stalin Perez Borges - and some state coordinators: in the state of Anzoategui - Jose Boda, Luis Diaz; in that of Aragua - Emilio Bastidas, Richard Gallardo, Humberto Lopez; in that of Bolivar - Edgar Caldera, Jose Melendez, Orlando Perez; in that of Carabobo - Jose Barreto, Ismael Hernandez, William Porras, Americo Tabata, Jesus Vargas; in that of Caracas - Roger Bonilla, Marco Tulio Diaz, Tony Leon, Jose Mendoza, Franklin Zambrano; in that of Falcon - Victor Garcia, Horacio Medina; in that of Miranda - Armando Guerra, Yan Marcano; in Tachira - Vilma Vivas, Javier Arellano; in Vargas - Antonio Jaspe; in Yaracuy - Hernandez Brito, Oswaldo Villegas.

NOTES

[1] The “Missions” are mass programmes of education and public health targeted on poorer neighbourhoods and organized outside of the state structures; they have been successfully implemented over the last three years.

[2] Laws that favour the activity of small producers and access to ownership, particularly in the areas of farming and fishing


[4] An expression referring to the need for the old Spanish colonies of Latin America to emancipate themselves from imperialist domination.

[5] Democratic Action (AD, social-democratic) and the Social Christian Party-Committee of Political Organization of Independent Elections (COPEI, Christian Democrat) are the two bourgeois parties which alternated in power between 1958 and 1998. The Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), Causa Radical (CR), Bandera Roja, Primero Justicia, Proyecto Venezuela are parties once classified as on the left, indeed the far left, which have moved into the camp of reaction.

[6] The Fourth Republic refers to the old regime of “representative democracy” beneficial to the rich and pitiless to the poor, which was replaced after the adoption of the “Bolivarian constitution” by the Fifth Republic.

[7] An allusion to the attempts of the bourgeoisie, supported by imperialism, to overthrow president Hugo Chavez on April 13 2002 through a putsch, in the course of which Pedro Carmona, head of the employers’ association, proclaimed himself “interim president” for a day while Chavez was arrested and deported to the Caribbean island of Orchilla - an immense popular mobilization put an end to this attempt and on April 14, 2002 Chavez resumed the presidency; from December 2002 the leadership of the oil company, with the support of the corrupt trade union bosses, organized the sabotage of production, which was reduced to 10%, supported by a lock-out in the big commercial enterprises (what the Venezuelan bourgeoisie - with the international media - dared to call a “strike”). In February 2003 the government put an end to this sabotage with the support of the workers, resuming production without the saboteur managers, who were dismissed.

[8] Danilo Anderson, who was responsible for prosecuting the authors of the coup and the oil sabotage, was assassinated in Autumn 2004.

[9] Carlos Ortega, a leader of the CTV trade union federation, participated in the coup in 2002 along with the head of the employers Pedro Carmona. Exiled, he secretly returned to Venezuela and was arrested in a casino in June 2005.