

Talk of the Revolutionary Communist Party of Bolivia at the
23rd International Seminar: Problems of the Revolution in Latin America, Quito, July 2019

The Bolivian Peoples Are Standing Up in the Fight against Populism, Authoritarianism and Repression

*If you give away the country
and talk about sovereignty
who will doubt that you are
sovereign crap
do not waste words on me
do not change the meaning, look what I want
I have made it quite clear
do not dirty the words
do not take away their flavor
and clean your mouth well
if you say revolution.*

– Mario Benedetti

Bolivia is a country with a rich history of social struggles against all forms of domination, exploitation and oppression. The government of Evo Morales that took office in 2006 with overwhelming popular support came into conflict with the financial and landowner oligarchy during his first years of government until the negotiation of the new State Political Constitution, which represents the beginning of agreements between the MAS [Movement for Socialism, Morales's party – *translator's note*] and the oligarchy. As of 2009, the State had been aiming its repressive apparatus against the popular movements that are protesting against the extractive model and in defense of their collective rights. The movement to the right and the sell-out by MAS, while maintaining a 'leftist' discourse, presents a complex political picture in which we revolutionaries must reclaim our historical banners that have been stolen from us, we must defend and promote the independent social organization and build a patriotic and popular alternative.

The First Years of the "Process of Change"

The Evo Morales government took office on January 22, 2006, as a result of the historical accumulation of the forces of social unrest and anti-neoliberal resistance. The potential danger that it represented at the time of taking office, due to its popular origin, led to the polarization of the country during its first years in office, between the so-called 'half moon' governed by the right-wing opposition and the central government. In April of 2006, elections were held for the Constituent Assembly, in which the MAS-IPSP [Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples] won a simple majority but not the two-thirds necessary to approve [changes to the Constitution – *translator's note*]. The Constituent Assembly became a focus of conflicts and, despite having been established in the city of Sucre, it was transferred to a military barracks in the city of Oruro where in December of 2007 it approved the first version of the constitutional

text. This was the result of agreements between the MAS-IPSP, UN [National Unity] and other organizations with regional representation. The text was subsequently modified by a Senate commission with the participation of MAS-IPSP and PODEMOS {Social Democratic Power}. The negotiations over the text of the constitution in fact represented the process of negotiation between the government and the financial and landowner oligarchy of the ‘half moon’. The polarization with the ‘half moon’ was characterized by its racist and regionalist discourse and reached its greatest intensity with the social conflicts of 2007-2008. The confrontation of January 11, 2007 in Cochabamba left three people dead, the Calancha in Sucre between November 24 and 26, 2007 left three dead, and the Porvenir Massacre on September 11, 2008 left 19 dead. Although the State Political Constitution, approved by a referendum on January 25, 2009 and promulgated on February 7, 2009, included a progressive advance in social rights, its essence was respect for large private property in the means of production, that is, for the capitalist system. After the approval of the newly agreed-upon Constitution, the final blow to force the most radicalized sectors of the oligarchy to come to a consensus with the national government was the surrounding and subsequent assault by the government on the Hotel Las Americas (April 16, 2009), resulting in the death of three supposed international hit-men hired by civic-prefectural groups for the murder of the head of state. Since the approval of the new Constitution, the bourgeois opposition has not been able to articulate a national political project, but this lack of articulation was not only due to the inability of the political operatives but was also due to a phenomenon of organic split between the extra-parliamentary bourgeoisie and the bourgeois opposition nationwide. The bourgeoisie still maintains its political structures in the municipal and departmental political administration; however it does not consider it necessary to contend with the executive power since its economic interests are being protected by the MAS government; a clear evidence of this is the unprecedented growth in the agro-industrial sectors and banking.

New State Political Constitution: MAS Pact with the Oligarchy

The constant repressions by the MAS-IPSP government after the approval of the new Constitution have been unleashed against the social movements; we will mention some of the main ones. In 2010, the conflict between the residents of Alto Beni and Caranavi over the electoral promises to build a citrus fruit processing plant resulted in brutal repression, with two dead and dozens arrested. In 2011, police repression against leaders in Mallku Khota (North Potosí) resulted in the criminal prosecution of the curaca [local indigenous chief – *translator’s note*] of Sacaca. In September of the same year, one of the most emblematic repressions of Evo’s government took place: while an indigenous march in TIPNIS [Isiboro Secure National Park and Indigenous Territory] advanced against the road project, at least 40 leaders were arrested at Chaparina and at least 70 marchers were injured. At the end of the year the government raised the price of oil, which caused a wave of indignation and protests. The government was forced to take a step back and cancel the measure; however the rise in prices of public transport and other items was not reversed. In 2012, the repression in the town hall in Yapacaní demanding the resignation of a MAS mayor left three dead. The same year the Vigil of Social Fighters against

impunity, for justice and historical memory was set up, demanding reparation for state violence carried out since the military dictatorships; so far the vigil has been maintained with more than 25 activists killed and without achieving the reparations demanded. The repression unleashed by the government in order to eradicate coca in Apolo (October 2013) with the Joint Task Forces resulted in four dead, 30 wounded and 17 arrested, with more than 100 children taking refuge in the church. The year 2014 began with the taking over of offices of the CONAMAQ (National Council of Ayllus and Markas) and the attempt to take over the offices of the APDHB (Permanent Assembly of Human Rights of Bolivia), consistent with the policy of eliminating social organizations in opposition to or critical of the ruling party. At the end of the year the elections resulted in the third presidential term of Evo Morales, with an electoral support of 61.4%, controlling both houses of congress with more than two thirds (after annulling the election victories of two opposition candidates). The local and regional elections of 2015, on the other hand, were an electoral setback for the ruling party, since the opposition won 8 of the 10 main mayoralities in the country.

The university movement marked the year 2015 with conflicts that arose in the UMSS (Greater University of San Simon) created by the granting of diplomas to teachers without exams; this led to the taking over of the University and the formation of a Transitional University Council. The protest expanded to a national scale for almost seven months; the repression left thirteen wounded. The civic movement of Potosí began in July of 2015, with the demands for greater attention to its department; after an extended civic strike, the march toward La Paz began and it was greeted with strong repression. In August of the same year the government intervened in Captania Takovo Mora (Guarani) in the face of protests against oil exploration; more than 18 people were arrested. The year ended with the biggest corruption scandal that the MAS government faced, the FONDIOC (Indigenous Fund) exceeding \$187 million and involving more than 200 government leaders.

In 2016, the proposed amendment to article 168 of the Constitution was submitted to a Referendum to enable a second presidential re-election; on February 21 the voters rejected it by 51.3%; this was a defeat for the government amid the CAMCE-Zapata [CAMC Engineering is a Chinese contracting company – *translator's note*] corruption scandal. The socio-economic situation of people with disabilities led them to carry out a series of protests culminating in a national march on La Paz and the establishment of vigils that were met by great repression. The bankruptcy and closure of ENATEX (National Textile Company) due to economic mismanagement left hundreds of workers out in the street and led to a massive factory protest under the leadership of the COB [Bolivian Workers Federation]. At the start of 2017, the national urban teaching staff led a national march to La Paz, demanding better working conditions and a better quality of education. Since August of 2017, protests by the population of Achacachi against their corrupt mayor (affiliated with the government) were targeted for police repression and prosecution. The controversial Criminal Code approved by the government that undermined the rights of professionals, the right to protest and others led to a strong mobilization of the health sector together with the COB; in these protests the government violated university

autonomy, were able to twist Morales' arm and the MAS Criminal Code was completely repealed. These protests along with the demand for respect for the referendum of February 21 led to an atmosphere of mobilizations in La Paz in the middle of the Dakar Rally and resulted in the formation of spaces for coordinating the struggles, such as CONADE [Committee for the Defense of Democracy] and the Inter-Institutional Coordinator. The government's response was to hold a trumped-up Congress of the COB to ensure total control of the largest union organization in the country. Popular rejection was again expressed in the judicial elections of December 2017, with more than 66% blank and null votes, and more than 15% abstentions.

Amid protests for a higher university budget in May 2018, the police forces murdered Jonathan Quispe, a student at the UPEA [Public University of El Alto], which unleashed a wave of intense protests at the government headquarters. The new Coca Law triggered protests by coca growers from the Yungas, leaving three dead and the top leader of ADEPCOCA {Departmental Association of Producers of Coca}, Franklin Gutiérrez, arrested. The Law on Political Organizations, approved in September 2018, led to protests by the citizens' movement due to the law's anti-democratic nature; it established mandatory primary elections for presidential candidates, whose first application in early 2019 was a resounding failure due to the very small participation. The student youth stormed the national scene with the rejection of attempts at governmental intervention at the FES [Federation of Secondary Students] in La Paz and sought to regain union independence and demonstrate that the youth are not limited to the servile and vulgar expressions found in the MAS- IPSP. The proposal for a new Law for Artists, together with the current Law for Cinema, are signs of the attempt at artistic censorship by the central government due to the limitations they impose. Throughout his government, Evo Morales has expressed his sexist, misogynist and homophobic nature, based on denigrating 'jokes' that the president made in his speeches; this has led to cases of senior government officials, police and military enjoying impunity for their acts of domestic violence, rape and femicide. In 2018, 111 feminicides were recorded in the country, and there is no effective state policy to fight gender violence. In the last 10 years in Bolivia no one has been sentenced for hate crimes against LGBT people.

The Evo Morales government took a significant turn in its political alignment at the regional level in early 2019 with the extradition of the Italian fighter, Cesare Battisti, as a gift for Bolsonaro when he took office. The rapprochement between the governments of Bolivia and Brazil, motivated by the need to secure markets for gas exports, was seen in Bolsonaro's statements placing conditions on Bolivia's entry into Mercosur to Bolivia leaving the Sao Paulo Forum. The political context of 2019 is marked by a great deal of electioneering and the lack of organizations that would unify the social struggles. The electoral opposition in its various forms centers its discourse on democracy, without specifying the essence or characteristics of the democracy that they seek. Yankee imperialism through the Secretary General of the OAS shows that it approves of Evo's bid for re-re-re-election, since it guarantees the stability of the economic interests of the transnational companies.

The "nationalizations" made by the government were in fact a purchase of the majority shares and the re-negotiation of service contracts with transnational companies. Examples of this practice are the composition of shares of YPFB Andina (48.3% of its shares are owned by REPSOL [a Spanish oil company – *translator's note*]) and YPFB Transierra S.A. (21.49% of its shares are owned by REPSOL); there are service contracts with transnational companies such as Shell, Matpetrol, Petrobras, Pluspetrol, Repsol E&P, Vintage Petroleum, and Total E&P oriented towards the exploration and exploitation of hydrocarbons, even in national parks and indigenous territories. The stability provided by the Evo Morales government for its transnational 'partners' and international creditors, together with the good prices for hydrocarbons and minerals enjoyed at the beginning of the Morales government, allowed the necessary income for economic redistribution policies (bonuses, etc.).

Large private mining represents 63.6% of the value of mineral production in the country, through the presence of large transnationals such as Glencore (Sinchi Wayra), Sumitomo (San Cristobal), Manquiri and Pan American Silver. In mining production, 27.7% corresponds to the cooperative sector, whose composition varies from small subsistence groups to large cooperatives in which the members hire employees without minimum labor rights and do not comply with tax obligations. The state participation in mining production is just 8.7% through COMIBOL.

The high international prices of raw materials that benefited the country during the first years of the MAS administration were squandered without having industrialized the country. Now, in order to maintain public spending, it must resort to using its international reserves (which have dropped from \$15 billion U.S. in 2014 to \$8 billion in 2018) and the increase in external debt (which was \$2 billion dollars in 2007 and exceeds \$10 billion in 2018).

The role of revolutionaries in the face of escalating repression

We revolutionaries have to face various political situations, with a scientific understanding of the characteristics of each one, in order to be able to take up correct tactics at all times. The escalating repression that the MAS government has unleashed against the popular movement since the new Constitution, together with the corporatization of the popular movement and the prosecution of protests, are forcing the consistent left-wing forces in the country into positions of resistance and defense of democratic freedoms. The traditional right has taken the results of the February 21st referendum as a banner of struggle (against the presidential re-election) and is trying to position itself with a discourse that revolves around democracy in the abstract. We Bolivian communists raise the need to discuss the very meaning of democracy and its class essence; we consider that the dichotomy between government authoritarianism and bourgeois liberal democracy is false. We Bolivian peoples have rich experiences of democratic organization from the grassroots, such as the councils, the Popular Assembly (1970-71) and the Water Coordinator (2000), which point towards the building of a popular democracy. We must strengthen the social organizations that maintain their independence towards the government and promote the rescuing of the Bolivian Workers Federation at the service of the popular struggles.

The leftist discourse of the MAS government has served to disorient the people. The objective of the acts of homage organized by the government (50 years of Che Guevara, 100 years of the Russian Revolution, 200 years of Marx, etc.) is not to reclaim the anti-capitalist essence of these important milestones, but to destroy their essence and leave them as empty historical dates. The ruling party is seeking to make the political organizations of the left invisible, to appropriate for itself the "revolutionary" discourse, Marxist terms and concepts, and to legitimize itself in the international arena as supposed "anti-imperialists". They have robbed us in broad daylight, they have taken away our words, our slogans, our banners. They have dirtied the beautiful, just and noble causes for which we have been fighting for centuries; they have taken away their flavor. We cannot remain quiet and conform; we must reclaim what is ours; we must recover it. We must show that we Marxist-Leninists stand firm together with our people in the revolutionary fight against the populist farce of the government in power, for a true transformation of our country, for the democratic, popular, anti-imperialist, anti-fascist and anti-patriarchal demands.