

Bolivia: Is Evo in Danger after the August 10 referendum ? The US prepares a civil war

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Bolivia has certainly changed. In La Paz, I attended a large reception given by the Cuban ambassador. Mojitos, buffet, dances... Where was it held? In the ceremonial hall of... the Bolivian army. Yes, the one that killed Ché.

Bolivia has certainly changed, but not everyone wishes it well. We had come to get an idea first hand with some progressive intellectuals from about 15 countries. Frei Betto, Ernesto Cardenal, Ramsey Clark, François Houtart, Luis Britto Garcia, Pascual Serrano... A few days of meetings and exchanges with Bolivian intellectuals, representatives of the Indian communities, artists...

It's a sensitive moment. The rightwing is trying to split away the wealthy regions of the country's East. To frustrate this operation, President Evo Morales, in the middle of his mandate, has called for a revocatory referendum, this Aug. 10. It's a sort of vote of confidence. It puts his legitimacy in play, but also that of the prefects of departments, including those who belong to his opposition. The rightwing is trying to sabotage the referendum and people fear incidents...

We will see who is behind these incidents, which role the United States plays, and the CIA, and a really strange ambassador, and also Europe...

Strong impressions

Strong impressions. Physically, first of all. La Paz is at an altitude of 11,800 feet. Its airport at 13,100. We arrived in the night, short of oxygen, at the brink of passing out. Very attentive, the young people who welcome us have us sit down calmly, while they deal with our luggage and let us catch our breath.

The first day will be devoted to rest and acclimatization. With Luis, a Venezuelan friend, we take a small tour, taking small steps from one bench to the next, in one of the most beautiful capitals of the world. Imagine an immense basin, bordered by the imposing mountains Huayna Potosí (20,000 ft.) and Nevado Illimani (21,200 ft.), not far from the lake Titicaca, the highest navigable lake of the world. Here, water boils at 176° F instead of 212° F at sea level. And no street is flat.

What is striking about La Paz, in winter in any case, is the gentle climate, sunny and fresh. And the gentle people. Everywhere, you are welcomed with kindness, with a kind of quiet serenity. Indians wear heavy clothing with superb multi-coloured shawls. And of curious small "bolo" hats, black, brown or gray. Sometimes, they also carry impressive loads. Two-thirds of the population are Indians.

The importance of the Indian communities

“An Indian president? The white racist oligarchy still won’t accept it,” Evo confides to us. I began to understand all the wealth of this Indian heritage while visiting with Bolivian friends in Tiwanaku, the capital of an old Incan empire...

We are on the very high plateau of the Altiplano, bordered by mountains. Here, Indians live under difficult conditions, from farming and raising animals. Not a cloud in the sky, an incredibly pure air, you can still feel the nighttime chill.

Tiwanaku was an immense city, whose excavations have hardly begun. A hundred local Indians are busy restoring the temple, an enormous pyramid in terraces. It was a very advanced civilization, which constructed its buildings based on a thorough knowledge of astronomy. It had created a metallurgical and textile industry. It cultivated more than 200 different kinds of corn and 400 kinds of potatoes, of which one species could be frozen and remain edible for ten years. The system of irrigation was very sophisticated with a very precise slope so that the stones would heat the water enough to prevent it from freezing. This system was so sophisticated that today the Agriculture Ministry will revive it to develop agriculture on the terraces. Water is rare here, a treasure.

An Indian elder carries out a ritual ceremony with our group, a sort of sacrifice of small symbolic objects, to celebrate the unity with the cosmos and to gather the wishes that we form. Emotion.

It is no about glorifying the past for its own sake, but to preserve the common memories and values and integrate them into the new society. A Bolivian journalist explains the importance of community here: “It is a strong element of Bolivia. Look here, according to international statistics, a Bolivian peasant has an average income of 50 dollars per year. You may as well say that he is dead! Except if one understands that the communal economy is the basis of our life here. “

In short, it’s an invaluable heritage that must not be lost.

One Bolivian in four must emigrate

Strong impressions also regarding social realities in this country. In La Paz, the upper classes live at the lower end of the city, below 10,000 feet, where one breathes more easily. Lower classes, on the other hand, in El Alto: at over 13,000 feet. Small trade, small craft industries, a little animal husbandry in the high plateaus... Life is hard.

The second poorest country of Latin America, Bolivia has seen one of four of its children emigrate. Why? For centuries, this land was colonized by Spain. And all the benefit of its mining wealth, extracted at the cost of a murderous labor in semi-slavery, were carried to Europe. For decades, its gas and its oil benefited only a handful of rich people, but most of all some transnational corporations, especially European-based. The North bled the South thoroughly, leaving behind only misery.

And conflicts. Evo Morales, president for two-and-a-half years, did not fall from the sky. His presidency is the fruit of long years of worker and peasant resistance. The Indian communities have always been exploited, excluded and scorned by a white racist elite, dependent on the United States and Europe.

That's where poverty and underdevelopment arise. But when the Bolivians, to survive, take care of housework in Europe, they are treated like criminals and thrown into prison. Even children! Evo Morales courageously denounced the recent "Directive of Shame" which will make it possible all European countries to imprison the criminals, sorry, the immigrants, for up to 18 months.

Precisely, before leaving, I met with immigrant workers in Brussels, in particular the Latinos and Latinas. In struggle for months to obtain papers, i.e., their rights, their dignity. Confronting ministers who completely ignored them, they had to risk their lives: hunger strike, climbing cranes... Since they greatly appreciated Evo's letter to the E.U., they asked me to give a small message of gratitude to the Bolivian president. I did. It brought a smile to his face.

In fact, when you see the poverty here, the very low wages, the lack of industry, one understands why so many Bolivians must emigrate. But, when investigating further, one also understands that Europe is a dirty hypocrite who bears a heavy responsibility for this emigration. We will return to this later...

What has Evo accomplished?

But first of all let us take a look at what Evo accomplished in two-and-a-half years ... He nationalized oil and gas. Would you like to know why the corporate media calls the Colombian President Uribe "good" and Evo Morales "bad"? Very simple. The former cut the taxes of the transnational corporations from 14 percent to... 0.4 percent. To help these transnationals get installed locally under optimum conditions, the Colombian paramilitaries drove four million peasants off their land. The latter, Morales, in order to combat poverty, dared to return to the Bolivian nation the wealth it owned.

By nationalizing its hydrocarbon resources, Evo multiplied the public revenues by five and gave himself the means for relieving the most urgent evils: illiteracy has dropped by 80 percent, a part of the children working in the streets have returned to school, schools teaching in the Indian languages Aymara and Quechua have been established (20,000 graduates), free health care is already available for half of the Bolivians, a "Dignity" pension for those over 60, credit with zero-percent interest for products like corn, wheat, soy and rice. Thanks to Venezuelan aid, 6,000 computers were made available, especially at schools. Thanks to Cuban aid, 260,000 people had eye operations. Elsewhere in Latin America, they would be condemned to be blind, because they are poor.

Moreover, the public investments to develop the economy increased greatly. Bolivia eliminated its fiscal deficit, repaid half of its foreign debt (now down from \$5.0 to 2.2 billion), reconstituted a small financial reserve, multiplied employment in the mines and the metal industries by four, and doubled the production and the incomes of these industries. The industrial GDP passed from \$4.1 to \$7.1 billion in three years. A thousand tractors were distributed to peasants. New roads were built.

In short, Bolivia advances. Not quick enough, some say. For these people, Evo is not moving hard enough against the rightwing and the big landowners. It is a debate that must be carried out among those who live on the spot and can appreciate the situation, with all its possibilities and dangers. And by understanding that it is not enough to say "Do it" to bring a country out of poverty and dependence. By knowing that it is necessary to take account of

the relationship of forces with the rightwing, which is agitating and sabotaging. By taking account of the army (Will all its generals be loyal to the government under all conditions?).

Another negative factor: "The legal system remains completely corrupted," was confided to me by... the highest ranking magistrate in La Paz. "It is an old caste that protects itself and the interests of the rich. It's a business, truly. However, we have threatened the immediate recall of any judge caught in an obvious crime. But it is a difficult battle."

And precisely, when I was there, the courts came rushing to help the rightwing by trying to prevent by a legal battle the holding of the referendum.

But there is danger much greater than the legal system...

Behind the rightwing, the United States prepares a civil war

It is the new tactic of the United States. Finding themselves unable to win a war of occupation, Washington is resorting to indirect war, war by proxies. Currently, strategy of Washington is to try to foment a civil war in Bolivia. For that, the provinces controlled by the rightwing and which contain the greater part of the oil and gas reserves along with the large agricultural properties tied to the transnationals, these provincial regimes are multiplying their provocations to prepare to secede.

Having personally studied the secret actions of the great powers to break up Yugoslavia (1), I made a point of drawing the attention of the Bolivians, during some interviews: today, Washington will try to transform their country into a new Yugoslavia.

Here are the ingredients needed for this deed: 1. Massive CIA investments. 2. An ambassador specialized in destabilization. 3. Experienced fascists. With these ingredients, you can prepare a coup d'état or a civil war. Or both.

First ingredient. As in Venezuela, the CIA is investing a lot in Bolivia. Through its usual covers: USAID, National Endowment for Democracy, Republican International Institute, etc. The right-wing separatist organizations are abundantly subsidized. USAID, for example, financed Juan Carlos Orenda, adviser of the extreme right Civic Committee of Santa Cruz and author of a plan envisaging the secession of this province.

But they also support the more discreet organizations charged to sow confusion and to prepare an anti-Evo propaganda. At the University of San Simon of Cochabamba, the Thousand-year Foundation received \$155,000 to criticize the nationalization of gas and defend neoliberalism. Thirteen young Bolivian right-wing leaders were invited for training in Washington: \$110,000. In the popular districts of El Alto, USAID launched programs "to reduce the tensions in the zones prone to social conflicts." Read: to discredit the left.

In all, millions of dollars have been handed out to all kinds of organizations, student groups, journalists, politicians, judges, intellectuals, businesspeople. The Spanish Popular Party, around Jose Maria Aznar, takes part in these operations.

Second ingredient. Where does Philip Goldberg, the current ambassador of the United States to Bolivia, come from? From Yugoslavia. Where he accumulated a rich personal experience in how to split a country apart. From 1994 to 1996, he worked in Bosnia for Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, one of the strategists of disintegration. Then, he stirred up conflict in Kosovo and fomented the split between Serbia and Montenegro. An expert, you could say.

And not inactive. As the Argentinian journalist Roberto Bardini tells it: "On June 28, 2007, a 20-year-old U.S. citizen, Donna Thi of Miami, was held at the airport of La Paz for trying to bring into the country 500 45-caliber bullets that she had declared to customs were 'cheese.' Waiting for her at the terminal was the wife of Colonel James Campbell, the chief of the military mission of the U.S. Embassy in Bolivia. U.S. Ambassador Philip Goldberg immediately intervened to obtain her release, saying that it was only an 'innocent error.' The ammunition, he declared, was to be used only for sport and show. In March 2006, another U.S. citizen, Triston Jay Amero, alias Lestat Claudius, a 25-year-old Californian, carrying 15 different identity documents, set off 660 pounds of dynamite in two La Paz hotels." (2)

Why did the U.S. export Goldberg from the Balkans to Bolivia? To transform, I am sure, this country into a new Yugoslavia. Washington favors the method of promoting separatism to retake control of natural resources or strategic areas when governments act too independent, too resistant to the transnationals.

Third ingredient. Experienced fascists. In Bolivia, Goldberg openly supported and collaborated with Croatian-origin businesspeople in the leadership of the secessionist movement. Particularly with Branko Marinkovic, member of Federation of Free Entrepreneurs of Santa Cruz (the secessionist province). A very big landowner, Marinkovic also pulls the strings of the Transporte de Hidrocarbures Transredes (which works for Shell). He manages the 3,750 miles of oil and gas pipelines that feed out to Chile, Brazil and Argentina.

And when did these people come from Croatia? It should be recalled that, during World War II, the German leader, Nazi Adolf Hitler established fascist Greater Croatia where his collaborators, the Ustashis, set up death camps (including one especially for children!) that carried out a terrible genocide aimed at Serbs, Jews and Roma ("gypsy") people. (3) After the Nazi defeat, the Croatian Catholic Church and the Vatican organized "ratlines," paths for the Croatian fascist criminals (and for German Nazi Klaus Barbie) to escape. From Croatia in Austria, then onto Rome. And from there towards Argentina, Bolivia or the United States. (4)

When it became known that Franjo Tudjman and the leaders of the "new" Croatia born in 1991 had rehabilitated the former Croatian World War II criminals, one would like to know if Mr. Marinkovic disavows all this past or if, quite simply, he employs the same methods where he is now. As for the United States, one knows that it rehabilitated and recycled a large quantity of Nazi criminals and spies of World War II. The networks are always useful.

What hides behind separatism

There. All the ingredients are ready to blow Bolivia apart... The dollars of the CIA, plus the experts in provoking civil wars, plus the fascists recycled as businesspeople. A civil war that would serve the interests of the multinationals, but that international public opinion must absolutely prevent. The Bolivians have the right to decide their fate themselves. Without the CIA.

Because a secession would benefit only the elite. The Brazilian writer Emir Sader has just written very precisely: "Today, one of the methods that includes racism is separatism, the attempt to delimit the lands controlled by the white race, by adapting and privatizing the wealth that belongs to the nation and its people. We already knew these intentions in the form of the rich districts that sought to be defined as municipalities, with the goal that a

share of the taxes taken by law from their immense riches remains under their control to increase the revenue to their split-off districts, behind which they sought to insulate and to use a privately controlled security apparatus to guard their privileged life styles.(...) The separatist referendum is an oligarchic, racist and economic device used because they want to keep the greatest part of the wealth of Santa Cruz for their own benefit and because the oligarchs want, moreover, to prevent the government of Evo Morales from continuing the process of land reform and extending all over the country." (5)

This autonomy, indeed, that means that the rich white people who have always controlled Bolivia refuse to listen to the non-white majority in its West. When one speaks about autonomy, Evo Morales answers: "Let us speak about autonomy, not for the oligarchy, but for the people with whom we struggle. These separatist groups which have just lost their privileges were for a long time in the palace, they controlled the country and allowed the plundering of our country, our natural resources, including its natural resources, and the same with the privatization of our companies, and now they once again want to reestablish this system which exposes their true interest: economic control."

But it's not only the United States that intervenes in Bolivia...

The hypocrisy of Europe : who thereby caused, "all the misery of the world"?

While hunting down undocumented workers, Europe slips into a sigh from the genteel nobility: "We cannot after all give succor to all the suffering of the world." Ah, well? But, actually, this misery, it is you who created it! Your Charles the Fifth, your Louis XIV, your Elisabeth I and your Léopold II happily massacred the "savages" to steal their wealth! This plundering was the basis of European capitalism's rapid economic growth. And today still your mining, agricultural and other corporations have not ceased to plunder the raw materials without paying for them, have not ceased dominating and deforming the local economies and blocking their development! Isn't it you who have the debt-to repay the South?

Would this be dredging up the past? In the media, the Europeans in charge like to say that today, they want only the best for Latin America and the Third World...

"Completely false," confided to me with indignation Pablo Solon, who represents Bolivia in the trade negotiations between Latin America and the E.U: "Bolivia explained it to the E.U. Before the negotiations, we had said that we would not negotiate a Free-Trade-style treaty. And we had communicated our points of divergence regarding services, investments, intellectual property and public property. The commission promised us that these points would be on the table during the negotiations. That in contrast with the "others," they would not try to impose a unique format on us. But, when we met with Peter Mandelson, European commerce official, he told us in a categorical and imperative way: 'This is a Free Trade Agreement. Accept it or you're out of the talks.' I answered personally that we were not going to exclude ourselves and that we were going to defend our points of view until the end. Because Bolivia has many industries which it must defend: steel, plastic, paper, which need mechanisms to protect themselves, as was done for the emergent European industries in the past."

Indeed, Europe showed that it is hyper-dominating and arrogant. It claims it will impose on all of Latin America and the Caribbean the end of subsidies that help to develop the local products, the suppression of the import duties (but it refuses to do the same at home!),

suppression of every limit for European exports (refusing the reverse), the transfer without limits of the qualified European labor, and the modification of all laws protecting the local economies.

And moreover, the E.U. wants to impose the privatization of all state services, goods and enterprises. Although already in 2000, out of the 500 largest companies of Latin America and of the Caribbean, 46 percent already belonged to foreign corporations.

And moreover, the E.U. wants to impose patents on living things (Bolivia has a very rich biodiversity coveted by the chemical and pharmaceutical transnationals). But aren't living things, and water also, goods essential for survival, an innate property that should remain with those who always protected them and used them with care?

Ultimately, the E.U. wants to impose completely unbalanced treaties which will wipe out the Bolivian companies. All that it seeks is that the European companies can invade the markets freely. Thus they will ruin these countries. Thus they will provoke emigration. An absurd system, no?

Who chooses immigration and why?

I wrote that Europe drove out the Latino immigrants. That is less than accurate. Europe does not treat them all the same way.

On the one hand, European bosses import the best brains of the Third World, and also the very qualified technicians. They are under-paid to increase company profits. It is what Sarkozy and others call "selected immigration". The boss selects those who will be likely to work for him. But this brain-drain deprives the Third World of people whom it taught (at great cost) and who would be necessary to its development. A new form of plundering.

On the other hand, Europe also welcomes a part of the non-qualified workers. By leaving them without papers, therefore without rights, it forces them to live in fear, to accept wages and working conditions that constitute social reverses. It's an effective way to divide the working class and pressure the other workers. That's how the "competitiveness" of this virtuous Europe is manufactured. How Europe treats undocumented workers is no aberration, but an essential moving part of an economic system.

To sum up: Europe stole from Latin America. Europe continues to steal from Latin America. It stops the continent from nourishing its children. But when those children are forced to emigrate, it imprisons them. Then, it offers lessons of democracy and morality to the whole world.

The time has come

I could not remain in Bolivia a long time, but these people deeply impressed me. I remember the thousands of demonstrators who went down, this Sunday, towards the center of La Paz, crammed into their minibuses, cars or taxis, Indians and whites, from the fairest to the darkest.

With astonishing calm and much less noise than in any demonstration in any other part of the world. With a simple and noble determination. And in their eyes you could read a determination: the time has come to put an end to centuries of humiliations, the time has come for dignity for all, the time has come to make misery disappear.

And I thought once again of those undocumented friends in Brussels, who also demonstrated for their future and their dignity. The problem is obviously the same one, in Brussels and La Paz: for whom must the wealth of a country be used? And if this problem is not resolved in La Paz, the millions of undocumented workers will continue to knock on Europe's doors.

And tomorrow?

How will this evolve? For August 10, an pro-U.S. polling institute, like the majority of my contacts in La Paz, predicted a victory of Evo with 60 percent. On the other hand, some feared the influence of the problem of the inflation and the increase in the cost of living. Still others fear that the rightwing will launch violent provocations.

Whatever happens, the referendum itself will resolve nothing, neither in one direction, nor the other. Evo Morales will still face the same problem: the government is on the left, but it does not control the country's economy, nor its media (which is in the hands of the big landowners and the Spanish multinational Prisa), nor its universities, nor the Church, which is on the side of the rich as usual on this continent. One cannot do everything in two-and-a-half years. But, to advance, Evo will have to succeed more than even in mobilizing the popular masses. His only strength.

In any event, after the referendum, the question will remain the same: will the wealth of the country be used to enrich the wealthy and the transnational corporations or to develop the country and overcome poverty?

To resolve this question in its favor, Washington is ready to do anything. And the international progressive movement? How will it react against disinformation and the preparation of a civil war?

The answer depends on all of us.

Translation from French: John Catalinotto

If you want to send to your friends, French and Spanish versions available at :

[1] Test-media Yugoslavia y Kosovo, http://www.michelcollon.info/archives_testm.php

[2] Roberto Bardini, el embajador de la secesión, traducción francesa vuelta a ver B.I., nº 133, junio de 2008.

[3] Michel Collon, Liars' Poker, IAC, New York, 2002, p. 78

[4] Operación Ratlines, documental de David Young amargo Chanel 4 TVES, 1991. Citado en El Juego de la mentira, p. 83.

[5] CEPRID, la CIA allí la oligarquía en contubernio contradijo a Bolivia, ww.nodo50.org/ceprid/spip.php?article169

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