

Bolivia: National Revolution and “Communitarian Socialism”

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Forward

During the last two weeks, the Bolivian people have won two significant victories toward implementing their new constitution. On April 9, Evo Morales went on a hunger strike while thousands rallied in the streets to protest the refusal of the Opposition-dominated Senate to ratify constitutional provisions for new elections. A compromise was reached after five days of the strike, and the bill was passed.

Following this event, federal police foiled a plot to murder Morales. Police broke in on a mercenary group who launched a 30-minute gun battle. Three of the right-wing plotters were killed and two arrested. State prosecutor Jorge Gutierrez issued a statement which said the terrorists included men of Croatian and Irish, Romanian, and Hungarian, nationality abetted by members of Bolivia’s “far right,” including a Bolivian who may have also held Hungarian and Croatian passports, and who fought in separatist movements during the Balkan wars.

This plot comes on the heels of events last September, when, prior to the overwhelming 61% vote on the new constitution, rioters seized state buildings in a battle that took eleven lives. At that time, Morales accused Gov. Ruben Costas of Santa Cruz, of fomenting anti-government violence. A United Nations report found Pres. Morales’ political opponents responsible.

At that time, Morales ejected the U.S. ambassador and Drug Enforcement Administration officials who had championed the opposition. He also claimed that the U.S. organized groups to assassinate him. Washington denies those charges.

As the following article from Green Left Weekly reports, the Bolivian struggle for indigenous democracy continues.

Suzanne Weiss

The historic enactment of Bolivia’s new constitution that grants unprecedented rights to the country’s indigenous majority, approved by over 61% of the vote on January 25, represented the beginning of “communitarian socialism”, according to President Evo Morales.

This was not the first time Bolivia’s first indigenous president had raised the concept of “communitarian socialism”. In his April 2008 speech to the United Nations, Morales spoke of the need for “a communitarian socialism in harmony with Mother Earth”.

While Morales's political party is officially known as Movement Towards Socialism–Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples (MAS-IPSP), it was originally simply IPSP.

Blocked from registering itself as an electoral party, the IPSP took up the offer of the then-existing MAS party to use its registered name to run in elections.

While individual socialists were involved from the beginning with the IPSP, they were a tiny minority within a party that was formed as a “political instrument” of Bolivia's largest peasant organisations.

Forged through the struggles of the coca growers and the other peasant organisations, against US military intervention and neoliberal policies, the MAS developed a strong anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal character.

As the social struggles intensified, and the MAS's weight began to grow in the electoral sphere, this political instrument increasingly became an outlet for growing disillusionment with the corrupt traditional party system.

The election of Morales as president in 2005, with a historic 53.7% of the vote, consolidated the MAS as the leadership of a broad-based national liberation movement — in which the peasant and indigenous majority led urban and middle class sectors.

The dominant ideology was a militant indigenous nationalism, whose vision involves promoting the inclusion and empowerment of the indigenous majority.

Since being elected, the Morales government has focused on modernising the country, promoting industrialisation, increasing state intervention in the economy, promoting social and cultural inclusion, and a more democratic distribution of revenue from natural resources through various social programs.

A major achievement has been the successful drafting of a new constitution by an elected constituent assembly — with the draft adopted by referendum — to refound the nation on the basis of justice for the indigenous majority.

In early 2008, Morales began to develop some underlying principles of what “communitarian socialism” might entail, according to sources within and close to the MAS leadership.

Differences, and then the onslaught by the right-wing opposition against the government, put this discussion on the backburner.

However, the crushing defeat of the right-wing attempts to bring down the government in 2008 greatly weakened the power of the opposition.

In this context, the MAS-IPSP held its seventh national congress on January 10-12, where it approved the document “Communitarian socialism to liberate Bolivia from the colonial state”.

The document provides a picture of how the MAS views the current revolutionary process and its direction.

According to the document, quoted by the March 2 Opinion, the inauguration of the MAS

government marked the beginning of a “democratic and cultural revolution” that “reflects, due to the nature of its historic subject (indigenous), a communitarian and socialist conception orientated towards surpassing capitalist relations of production”.

The MAS “is not proposing that we deny the possibility of utilising the institutions or mechanisms provided by bourgeois democracy”, but nonetheless seeks to “ideologically [prepare] our people for the path of the revolutionary struggle”.

“That is, a revolutionary has to utilise to the maximum effect the democratic institutions, not to consolidate them, but rather to unmask the essence of capitalist democracy and prepare the masses for the qualitative leap.

“With concrete political proposals that correctly interpret the mood of the oppressed people and correctly characterise the existing balance of social forces, it will be the people themselves who draw the conclusions and the people who will decide — if leadership exists, of course — the transformation of society via the revolutionary struggle.

“In conclusion, in determined conjunctures and not at all times, it is possible to utilise the democratic struggle to prepare for the revolutionary struggle.”

The document argued that in “a dependent [country] like ours, it is essential that the people and its vanguard accomplish and develop a series of bourgeois democratic tasks that have not been carried out by the bourgeoisie.

“All the experiences of the international revolutionary movement, above all in Latin America, have demonstrated that the socialist revolution can not be realised if the democratic and anti-imperialist banners are not raised.

“But neither can the democratic and anti-imperialist [tasks be] carried out to the end, if it is not through a socialist revolution.”

The goal of the “historic project” of the indigenous peoples and popular movements is “a social formation where large private property of the means of production will give way to communitarian social property; the political power of the ‘colonial-imperialist oligarchic bloc’ will be substituted by the revolutionary construction of a new power by the ‘indigenous nations, revolutionary classes and urban sector bloc’.”

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