

The Threat of a Military Coup in Bolivia?

Paramilitary forces occupy government buildings

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The situation in Bolivia remains one of confrontation between the oligarchy, backed by U.S. imperialism on the one side, and the masses who support the Evo Morales government on the other. Tuesday, September 9th, marked a high point in the reactionary offensive of the oligarchy in Santa Cruz and the other departments in the East of the country, where they control the regional prefects. (see Renewed offensive of the oligarchy - time to strike back!).

On Thursday, September 11, 9 people were killed and 50 were injured in clashes in the department of Pando. A group of peasants was travelling to Cobija, the department capital, to attend a mass meeting called to organise the resistance against the right wing offensive. They were intercepted by a group of employees of the regional prefect, travelling in a car belonging to the road maintenance service, and armed with assault rifles. As a result of the subsequent clashes, 9 people died. This is the highest death toll in the recent violence so far.

Meanwhile, in Santa Cruz, armed gangs of the fascist Union Juvenil Cruceñista (UJC) attempted for the second night to take over the main public squares in the 300,000-strong working class neighbourhood of Plan 3000. Throughout the night there were running battles, but the UJC was repelled by the people of Plan 3000. Comrades present report that although the people in the neighbourhood heavily outnumber the UJC thugs, the problem is that the UJC are heavily armed with tear gas grenades, bullet proof vests, assault rifles, machine guns, pistols, etc.

We have also received reports from Santa Cruz that local MAS leaders dissuaded the workers and peasants of San Julian (the department's second largest city and a stronghold of the MAS) from marching to the capital Santa Cruz to counter the fascist gangs. The argument was that "we should not fall for provocations", "what the prefects want is for people to die so they can have their martyrs", etc.

www.Econoticiasbolivia.com published a full report of all the public buildings taken over by paramilitary forces in the last few days:

In Santa Cruz, the offices of the Agrarian Reform Institute, telecommunications company Entel, Tax Revenue, Graco, Caja Nacional de Salud, the state oil company Yacimientos, Terminal Bimodal, Education Department, Labour Directorate, Forestry Commission, Almacenes Bolivianos, Migration Office and the Import Duty.

In Cobija also Import Duty, Agrarian Reform, Roads, Forrestry and the airport

In Beni the airport, AASANA, post office Ecobol, Entel, Migration and other airports

In Tarija, Digecco, Agrarian Reform, Tax Office, Hydrocarbons, Migration and Import Duty.

In Sucre, Entel and Tax Office

In most of the cases, police and army units that were protecting these building were overrun by the violent gangs of fascists, because they were under strict orders not to shoot and not to use violence to protect them.

The mood in factories and peasant communities throughout the country is one of rage and at the same time impotence, as the oligarchy is allowed to attack government offices, social organisation offices, airports, gas fields, border crossing points, etc., with no response by the government. They are seething with discontent, but no lead is being given. A number of mass organisations in El Alto, Cochabamaba and other parts of the country are calling on the government to declare a state of siege and use its powers against this “slow motion” coup. A national march on La Paz is being planned, to being on September 16th, but that might be too late.

The government’s inaction, and even in some cases its stopping of the initiative of the masses, could have the effect of demoralising the workers and peasants who support it.

The government’s inaction and the threat of a military coup

Vice-president Alvaro García Linera correctly characterised what is happening in the country as a “civic bosses’ coup” and called on Bolivians to remain vigilant to “defend democracy and national unity”. The problem is that he did not explain how the Bolivian masses are supposed to “defend democracy”. As we have seen in the massacre in Pando and the clashes in Plan 3000, the unarmed masses can do little against the heavily armed gangs of fascists.

Once again, government ministers are calling for respect for the rule of law, for the judges to implement the laws and the prosecutors to prosecute those who break them. But these are just words when the oligarchy is tearing up the law in defence of their interests.

To add to the confusion, at the same time that several government ministers rightly blamed the deaths and the violence on the prefects of Santa Cruz, Pando, Beni and Tarija and the civic committees, others called again for negotiations, and a meeting with the prefect of Tarija has been set up for today, Friday, even putting a government plane at his disposal so that he can go to the capital La Paz.

In Beni, the regional army command has signed a truce with the regional prefect. The agreement involved the army withdrawing from the public institutions they were protecting (!!), while the prefect agrees not to take them over.

This situation of constant zig-zags by the government is creating the feeling that power is slipping away from its hands. This is very dangerous. Amongst the military officers, many of whom are opposed to the government anyway, there is already talk of the need for a coup to restore law and order. From their point of view, the institution of the military has been humiliated, having been over-run by civilians, while carrying out their duties loyally. How can they continue to obey a government that seems to be giving up ruling the country? This is probably what many think already.

That a military coup is being discussed is also clear from Hugo Chávez's statement on Thursday night. After revealing that a coup plot had been uncovered in Venezuela and making an appeal for mass mobilisations, he said that in solidarity with the Bolivian people and government he was also expelling the US ambassador in Venezuela and recalling the Venezuelan ambassador in Washington. He then added a warning to the Bolivian military. He said: "Any movement by the oligarchy, the yanquis, or the army to overthrow the Bolivian government or kill Evo Morales, would give us carte blanche to intervene and support any armed movement to restore the people in power".

A plan of struggle is needed

Today, the national enlarged meeting of the COB (its national leadership and representatives from all regions and unions) is taking place in La Paz, and they will report back on their decisions at similar meetings in all departments tomorrow. This is a crucial meeting.

In the present situation, a clear plan of struggle is needed. The COB should organise for an indefinite general strike, the holding of cabildos abiertos (mass meetings) in all cities and towns, the setting up of Popular Assemblies (committees of action), the creation of self-defence organisations based on these assemblies, call for and implement the immediate arrest of all those involved in the violent and illegal activities of the last few days, and mobilize to expropriate of the property of the oligarchy.

The onslaught of the oligarchy can only be stopped by the action of the masses in the streets, but they must be armed. 35 years ago, a few days before the military coup in Chile, a million workers marched in Santiago, demanding weapons to defend against the coup that everybody knew was coming. Salvador Allende believed until the very last minute that the army and the oligarchy were going to respect the democratic institutionality. As a result, he was assassinated along with thousands of workers, peasants and youth. The country was plunged into decades of ferocious dictatorship. That should be a powerful lesson.

Evo Morales and Garcia Linera have correctly identified the threat as a "civic bosses coup", but now they should act accordingly. They received the support of 67% of the vote in the recall referendum on August 10th. More than 2 million Bolivians support them and the idea of a fundamental transformation in the country. The oligarchy is only a minority, but they have economic power, weapons, links to the military and support from imperialism. But even with all of these things in their favour, they can only control the streets and appear strong because of the inaction of the government and the leaders of the mass movement.

If Evo Morales were to issue an appeal to the workers and peasants to come out in the streets to smash the counter-revolutionary conspiracy, the coup plotters would flee, nothing could stop the mobilized masses. He should give immediate orders to arrest the coup conspirators. If the police and the army refuse to obey these orders, he should appeal to the rank and file soldiers to put their officers under arrest, distribute arms to the workers and peasants and carry out the arrests themselves. He should issue a decree for the immediate expropriation of the property of the coup plotters and appeal directly to the mass organisations of workers and peasants to carry it out. And if the government is not prepared to do so, then the COB and the CONALCAM must take the initiative.

The situation is very dangerous. This is no time for words or negotiations. This is the time for action, to put an end once and for all to the power of the oligarchy. There is no time to

waste.

No coups in Bolivia or Venezuela!

No to U.S. interference!

Defend the Bolivian and Bolivarian revolutions!

Smash the counter-revolutionary oligarchy!

Forward to socialism!

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