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Bolivia

"If Evo doesn't nationalize the gas, he will fall like Lozada"

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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.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/Jaime-Solares_Evo-Morales-1.jpg] Jaime Solares (left) with Evo Morales

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?

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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 [\[2\]](#) 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 Working 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?

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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 [3] 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 [4]. 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'etat 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'etat. 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.. [5] .

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 Chonchocorro, 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 [6].

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.

[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.

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[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.