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Bolivia

Unity and Perspectives of Bolivian Left

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In this article, written before the electoral victory of Evo Morales and the MAS, Remberto Arias (a militant of the POR-Combate (Revolutionary Workers' Party - Combat, Bolivian section of the Fourth International) deals with the question of the unity of the Bolivian Left. He recalls the sort-lived Unity Pact of March 2005, which involved the whole Left, including the MAS, and outlines the National Workers' and People's Summit, due to be held in January 2006, involving forces that are critical of the MAS.

The Pact of Unity of the Left, signed on March 9th, 2005 at the headquarters of the COB, didn't last long. But this unity can be renewed at any time, through a new pact. Nevertheless, it should in the future adopt a serious perspective, which would enable it to become a real lasting alternative, as the next National Workers and People's Summit could become for the social movements who will be involved in it.

Panorama of the recent political situation

The executive power put an end to the "war of parliamentary seats" by promulgating a decree to enable general and prefectural elections to take place on December 18th, 2005.

This conflict over seats provoked a series of protests which were to say the least peculiar, in the departmental capitals of La Paz, Oruro and Potosi; no massive mobilization of the population, but hard-line reactions from political elites who were ready to do everything to defend additional sources of revenue.

So these parliamentarians engaged more vigorously in the struggle for seats than they had done in the struggle for hydrocarbons some months earlier. Cochabamba turned against the departments of the West, all this in a climate of potential separatism.

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Because the objective that was sought after was to launch an attack against the centralism of the state, on the basis of regional interests, of the interests of the oligarchies, and if possible to prevent Evo Morales, the leader of the MAS, from becoming head of state.

The MAS today, in spite of its name, does not claim to defend socialism and presents itself rather as a nationalist party. Evo describes the nationalism of his party as "new nationalism", very different from that of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR), and intends to promote forms of participation very different from those of the indigenous peoples.

This tendency to combine several ideologies within the MAS has increased with the arrival of Alvaro Garcia Linera as candidate for the vice-presidency. While proclaiming himself "Gramscian", Garcia Linera is in reality taking a position in favour of an "Andean capitalism".

However, that has not prevented the MAS from attracting the support of some left parties such as the pro-Chinese Marxist-Leninist Communist Party of Bolivia (PCMLB), the Democratic Socialist Party of Rene Morales, Guevarist groups... These parties, while signing agreements formalising their support for Evo, maintain a critical attitude and do not hesitate to formulate their reservations.

The Pact of Revolutionary Unity

The participation of the COB in the unity, in the consolidation of a popular and social movement against the oligarchy, was concretised through the document of the Pact for the Dignity and the Sovereignty of the Bolivian People, signed on March 9th, 2005.

This agreement was broken, mainly because of the insults and personal attacks that were launched against each other by two of the greatest leaders of the Bolivian popular movement: Jaime Solares and Evo Morales. The disagreements over nationalisation and over the role of soldiers in a revolutionary process represented fundamental principles, in relation to the strategy of taking power, that justified the dissensions between them.

Today, it seems unquestionable that the majority of votes in the country will be in favour of the MAS, unless there is electoral fraud on the part of the Right, in order to avoid it losing control of the hydrocarbons. If a "political instrument" of the COB had stood, no doubt the vote in favour of the MAS would have been affected as a result, inasmuch as the party of Evo Morales seems capable of attracting all the left votes.

The transnationals, the traditional neo-liberal parties such as the MNR, the MIR (Movement of the Revolutionary Left), ADN (Nationalist Democratic Action), the UCS (Civic Solidarity Union) and the NFR (New Republican Force), the oligarchies, in particular of Santa Cruz, did not succeed in sabotaging the elections by the "war of parliamentary seats".

The Right will not be able to oppose the new social force that is emerging, and behind it, the Bolivian social movements, unless they try to impose a military coup d'etat as some people are already predicting, with the aim of re-establishing neo-liberal economic policies, subjected to the interests of capitalism and imperialism.

Some members of parliament wanted to avoid the holding of elections, the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, the prosecution of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada and his ministers for the events of October 2003, [1] in order to stay in power and thus continue to plunder the country's wealth, in order to pursue the "Gonist" [2] experience. These are the reasons that drove some people to take advantage of this "war of parliamentary seats" to destabilise and divide the country.

The programme of the Pact

The first point of the Pact for Dignity stipulates that it is a politico-social agreement which goes beyond political divisions and ideological dogmatism. The organisations taking part in it will be the opponents of the bourgeoisie and its lackeys. The Pact also stipulates that El Alto and Chapare are the headquarters of the movement of the country's poor and excluded. This point thus recognises the role played by the city of El Alto during the recent social crises that the country has experienced.

The second point declares a permanent struggle against the interference of imperialism and of its neo-liberal economic model which, through privatisation, "capitalisation", the "transnationalisation" of the Bolivian economy and the imposition of the Treaty of Free Trade and the Zone of Free Trade of the Americas (ALCA), leaves the majority of Bolivians to suffer from grinding poverty, hunger, social exclusion and unemployment. Despite the present divisions in the popular movement, we are continuing to struggle in this direction.

The third point makes the taking of power a strategic objective to be accomplished starting from the Constituent, and

thanks to the consolidation of the leadership established by the pact, which acts against the government, against the financial, mining, banking, agricultural, etc., oligarchy.

This point gave rise to an intense debate over the nature of the Constituent Assembly, certain radical currents arguing for a Popular Workers' Assembly, fighting for social liberation, inasmuch as the Constituent Assembly can appear as simply a means for the capitalist state to reorganise itself.

The fourth point establishes unity to attain the recovery of the country's national resources and all the hydrocarbons, towards the national liberation of the Bolivian state and the respect for its sovereignty, in particular by rejecting the immunity that North American soldiers enjoy.

The fifth point is an analysis of the conjuncture, standing up against the humiliating conditions that the racist government in the pay of foreigners imposes, facilitating by its action the fraudulent operations of the transnationals and the plunder of our natural wealth.

Finally, the seventh point deals with the prosecution of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, his ministers, the police and the Army, all of whom refuse, one after the other, to take responsibility for the dead of October 2003. This point commits the signatories to fight for the trial to take place as soon as possible. The COB, as the central entity of the workers and of the defence of the exploited people, is strongly engaged in this task.

The MAS and the COB, but also the other political and social organisations, [3] signed and sealed this pact, with the aim of accomplishing the historic tasks outlined above, by means of a leadership called "Peoples' Revolutionary Political Command". Unfortunately it didn't last. It is necessary for the reformists and the revolutionaries, the nationalists and the socialists to analyse and discuss together, first of all about the role that the proletariat must play and what alliances it can establish, then about the strategy for the taking of power and the building of socialism. All the rest is just errors and irrelevancies. Today, the forces of the MAS and of the COB are unfortunately very far from the objectives laid out by this document and this tactic.

On the coming Summit

The first National Workers' and Peoples' Summit, from which the MAS is today standing aside, includes the social sectors who took part in the heroic struggles in defence of hydrocarbons against Goni and Mesa, who prevented the coming to power of Hormando Vaca Diez, president of the Senate, and of Mario Cossio, president of the Assembly, during the crisis of May-June 2003.

The objective of this Summit is to build a "revolutionary political instrument", against hunger, unemployment and poverty and for the defence of hydrocarbons and natural resources. To create this instrument, the COB, the Trade Union Federation of Miners of Bolivia (FSTMB) and the Regional Workers' Confederation (COR) of El Alto, [4] have come to a common agreement, thus filling the vacuum left by the absence of a political and social leadership for these sectors. The principal demands of the unitary platform are the following:

- 1) Struggle for the nationalisation of hydrocarbons and of the country's natural resources.
- 2) Analysis of the general and prefectural elections, and evaluation of the challenges that face the social movements after the elections.

- 3) Articulation and consolidation of the Indigenous Popular Assembly [5] as an instrument of power.
- 4) Evaluation of the accomplishments, of the nature and of the perspectives of the Constituent Assembly.
- 5) Evaluation of the challenges concerning the strengthening of the COB and of the trade union and people's organisations of Bolivia.
- 6) Conclusions and declaration of the National Workers' and People's Summit.

This Summit will begin with a big demonstration regrouping the organisations and social sectors, the "living forces", the parties of the Left, etc., on January 8th, 2006 which will go from the Ceja in the city of El Alto to the Public Autonomous University of El Alto (UPEA) where the plenary sessions will take place.

From the signature of the Pact for Dignity and the Sovereignty of the Bolivian People to the Summit planned for El Alto, a process is underway of the recomposition of the forces of the Left with the aim of giving the social movements and the exploited workers a revolutionary leadership capable of integrating all of these movements into a project of social transformation, in order to fight effectively against capital and the multinational companies who are exploiting the people and plundering the wealth of the country, with the help of the corrupt state bureaucracy...

In the immediate future, the popular political forces which are participating in the elections must unite to drive the enemy from power once and for all and, by what would unquestionably be a popular victory, take forward the perspective of the exercise of political power by the workers, the building of socialism, a society without exploited or exploiters. [6]

[1] It has been established that Sanchez de Lozada gave the order to open fire on the people, leading to the death of more than 60 people. Now a refugee in the United States, he cannot be tried as long as he does not return to Bolivia.

[2] From Sanchez de Lozada's nickname, "Goni".

[3] The main organisations who were signatories, apart from the MAS and the COB, are the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement (MIP) of Felipe Quispe, the United Union Confederation of Working Peasants of Bolivia (CSUTCB) led by the MAS senator, Roman Loayza, the coordination in Defence of Water and Gas of Oscar Olivera, the Regional Workers' Confederation (COR) and the Federation of Neighbourhood Committees (FEJUVE) of El Alto.

[4] The nomination by the government of Eduardo Rodriguez Veltze of the executive secretary of the COR of El Alto, Edgar Patana, to the organising committee for the Constituent Assembly, along with other Bolivian citizens, at once affects the organisation of the Summit, insofar as all the sectors who will take part will have to commit themselves to the autonomous elaboration of a programme of revolutionary struggle. That means that comrade Patana will have to refuse this appointment.

[5] The Indigenous Popular Assembly was set up in El Alto and Cochabamba during the crisis of May-June 2005.

[6] *Editors note: The POR-Combate (Revolutionary Workers' Party - Combat) of which the author is a member is the historic section of the Fourth International. It played an important role during the 1952 Revolution and afterwards went through the numerous splits of the international Trotskyist movement. Under the leadership of Hugo Gonzalez Moscoso, the POR-Combate remained the Bolivian section of the Fourth International. During the 1980s, while underground, it took part in a recomposition of the Bolivian revolutionary Left, which gave birth to the POR-United, Bolivian section of the Fourth International. The recomposed organisation did not manage to survive and the 12th World Congress of*

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the Fourth International in 1995 could only take note of the disappearance of the section. The present POR-Combate was re-established by a group of militants loyal to the Fourth International when the POR-U collapsed. Its militants are mainly active in the COB and are in favour of the unity of the Left.