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Bolivia

Will Evo's resignation lead to Pinochet or resistance?

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The coup d'état against Bolivian president Evo Morales has generated the kind of anguish that great defeats of revolutionary struggles evoke: Allende's fall, Che's death in combat, defeat in the Spanish Civil War. "Criticism is no passion of the head, it is the head of passion," Marx once said. We do not have to put aside the sentiments that envelope us today, rather, we must mobilize them for positive ends.

We still do not know the scope of the events taking place in Bolivia, if the revolution can avoid being shot down, if it can escape heaps of dead among the social movements, the indigenous peoples, and the social base of Morales' political party, the Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS). Evo's social defenses are powerful and the ruling classes know they will have to break through them in order to move forward with their plans. The latest news is disturbing - burning houses, persecutions, arrests.

More big shocks lay ahead and the outcome is unwritten. El Alto - a one-million-strong, indigenous-majority city close by the capital city La Paz - has a heroic insurrectionary tradition that has brought down several governments in the past. It embodies the traditions of struggle in which Evo himself was trained.

I am interested to see what kind of polarization develops among left-wing militants and activists in the face of these facts. The left's positions are grouped into two major poles. Some are unable to position themselves properly in the fight against the coup because they stick to warnings or slogans that are already out of date. For example, the Argentine Partido de los Trabajadores para el Socialismo (PTS) published an article a couple weeks ago titled: "Neither with Evo nor with Mesa (the right-wing forces). For an independent political solution!" even as preparations for the coup were underway and the government had to be defended. Others defend Evo and renounce their "right to criticize" a government that has just been overturned without a fight, even though it won nearly half of the votes in recent elections. It felt like a house of cards, upending what seemed to be the most stable progressive process in the region. Evo went down to defeat without putting up a fight and that fact forms part of our anguish, and should be part of our balance sheet.

We fight to win, and in order to win we must extract the proper lessons from our experiences. What Evo did yesterday, it must be said, is analogous to the actions taken by Juan Perón in 1955 in the face of a coup or those of Salvador Allende in 1973 (and the opposite of what Chavez did in 2002). Obviously these resignations and retreats, like Evo's, did not prevent any bloodshed, on the contrary they left social and political organizations and movements and the popular classes at the mercy of brutal reactionary violence. The executions of 1955 and Pinochet's genocide testify eloquently to this reality. Counter-revolutions produce violence, not revolutions. There is no comparing the social and human cost between the two.

Evo's resignation (and that of his vice president Garcia Linera) was based on a belief that there was no other alternative. But if that were the case, it is the result of a naïve policy that was not prepared for a test of strength with the kind of authoritarian reaction that every progressive process provokes on the part of the ruling classes. It is the naivety of "class conciliation." The lessons of history in this field are incontrovertible - Allende's example remains too close to us to play with fire in this way.

Hopefully, it is not too late to avoid a historic defeat and the liquidation of one of the most notable experiences of the Latin American peoples of the last decades.

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