

# The US-backed coup in Bolivia

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Bolivia, South America's most impoverished nation, teeters on the brink of a civil war in the wake of a US-backed coup that led to the resignation Sunday of President Evo Morales, Vice President Álvaro García Linera and various ministers, state governors and government officials.

While Morales, García Linera and others have fled the country for asylum in Mexico, the Bolivian workers, peasants and indigenous majority that they purported to represent have been left behind to confront heavily armed troops and fascist gangs in the streets.

The bitter lesson that the Latin American working class can advance its interests not by means of "left" bourgeois nationalist regimes, but only through its own independent revolutionary struggle, is once again being written in blood.

Thousands of workers and youth have responded with courageous resistance to the coup, taking to the streets of La Paz and the neighboring working-class district of El Alto, where they burned down police stations and confronted security forces. Elsewhere, miners and peasants have blocked highways, and anti-coup protesters have confronted heavily armed troops firing live ammunition and tear gas grenades. In Cochabamba, the military brought in a helicopter to fire on crowds. The toll of dead and wounded has steadily risen.

The military-police violence has been accompanied by a reign of terror by the fascistic opponents of Morales, who have burned down homes of those linked to the government, kidnapped family members of officials and carried out violent assaults against those linked to Morales's Movement toward Socialism (MAS) party, as well as targeting indigenous people, especially women, for attacks. Headquarters of social organizations have been attacked, and radio stations invaded and taken off the air.

After three weeks of protests over the disputed October 20 presidential election, the coup was consummated Sunday with a televised address by Gen. Williams Kaliman, the chief of the armed forces, surrounded by the

entire military command, in which they "suggested" that "the president resign his presidential mandate and allow the pacification and reestablishment of stability for the good of Bolivia."

Morales and García Linera took the "suggestion," saying that they were doing so to "avoid bloodshed" and "guarantee peace." If that was their objective, their capitulation to the military and the Bolivian right has failed miserably.

US President Donald Trump celebrated the overthrow of Morales as a "significant moment for democracy in the Western Hemisphere," warning that Venezuela and Nicaragua are next.

But it wasn't only Trump. Both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post* published editorials Tuesday supporting the coup and suggesting that it was a blow for "democracy," and that the role of the military in forcing Morales out was merely incidental.

This reflects the fundamental continuity in Washington's imperialist policy in Latin America under Democrats and Republicans alike, from the abortive 2002 coup against Hugo Chavez in Venezuela under George W. Bush (prematurely celebrated by the *Times*), to the 2009 US-backed overthrow of President Manuel Zelaya in Honduras under Barack Obama, to today's ouster of Morales under Trump.

Underlying this continuity is the drive by US imperialism to reverse the decline of its global economic hegemony by means of military force and violence, particularly in the region that it has so long regarded as its "own backyard." This is driven both by the desire of US transnationals to lay unfettered claim on Latin America's resources and markets—not least Bolivia's vast energy and mineral reserves, including 70 percent of the world's lithium—and by the strategic confrontation between US imperialism and China, whose trade with the region rose to \$306 billion last year.

Morales's government was part of the so-called "Pink Tide" of left-posturing bourgeois nationalist governments that came to power in Latin America, beginning with that

of Hugo Chavez in 1998.

Like Chavez, Morales declared himself an adherent of the “Bolivarian Revolution” and socialism. He and the MAS were swept into office on the wave of revolutionary upheavals that shook Bolivia and brought down successive governments during the so-called water and gas “wars”—against water privatization and for the nationalization of gas—between 2000 and 2005.

The leader of the coca growers’ union and the first Bolivian president from the country’s long-oppressed indigenous population, Morales won broad popular support for a government that served as the vehicle for containing the revolutionary struggles of the Bolivian masses.

This government, however, soon allowed that its aim was not really socialism, but rather “Andean-Amazonian capitalism,” which consisted of “nationalizations” that imposed new taxes on transnational corporations that were guaranteed even greater access to the exploitation of Bolivia’s gas and other natural resources.

In addition to its alliance with transnational capital, the Morales government cemented a pact with the agricultural oligarchy. Both were granted rights to exploit lands that had previously been declared national parks to protect their indigenous populations.

The government also relied upon what it described as the “military-peasant alliance,” through which it sought to solidify support in the military command by offering it control over sections of the economy, resources for creating its own businesses and generous benefits. It created an “Anti-imperialist Military School” and had soldiers salute their officers with the Guevarist slogan of “Hasta la victoria siempre.” In the end, the bourgeois army, which Morales never disbanded, proved loyal to its roots in the fascist-military dictatorships of Generals Hugo Banzer and Luis García Meza and the national security state doctrine of the Pentagon’s School of the Americas.

The right-wing policies of the Morales government led to continuous confrontations with the working class and peasantry and steadily eroded its support. Its right-wing opponents in Bolivia’s traditional ruling oligarchy were able to exploit Morales’s attempt to secure himself another term as president—in violation of the constitution and the results of a 2016 referendum—to win a popular base for its counterrevolutionary objectives.

Morales and the MAS leadership bear criminal responsibility for the coup which they condemn. Its principal victims will be not Morales and his fellow

politicians, but the masses of Bolivian workers, peasants and oppressed.

Also sharing blame for the acute dangers now confronting the masses of workers and oppressed in Bolivia are the various pseudo-left groups that promoted the Bolivarian revolutionary pretensions of the Morales government and demanded that the working class subordinate itself to the leadership of the bourgeois nationalists. Chief among them are various revisionist tendencies that split from the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI), rejecting its struggle for the international unity and political independence of the working class based upon a revolutionary socialist program in order to adapt themselves to Stalinism and various forms of bourgeois nationalism, chief among them, Castroism.

The period in which these parties have been able to help suppress the class struggle is coming to an end, not only in Latin America, but internationally. The events in Bolivia, along with the mass uprisings of workers and youth in Chile and elsewhere on the Latin American continent, are demonstrating that the ruling class is no longer able to rule in the old way, and it has become impossible for the working class to live in the old way, creating the conditions for a new period of revolutionary upheavals.

The most urgent political task is the formation of a new revolutionary leadership in the working class based on an assimilation of the long struggle of Trotskyism against revisionism. This means building sections of the International Committee of the Fourth International throughout Latin America.

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