

Protests continue across Bolivia as the MAS submits to coup

By Andrea Lobo
21 November 2019

As protests mount against the US-backed military overthrow of Bolivian president Evo Morales and the brutal repression escalates, the country's entire political establishment and trade unions are scrambling to suppress popular opposition.

Amid mass funerals of those bravely protesting the November 10 coup, Morales, his Movement toward Socialism (MAS) party and the Bolivian Workers Central (COB) are appealing for an end to the protests and for an agreement with the fascistic forces that took power under the former right-wing senator Jeanine Áñez, who was "sworn in" by the military and a handful of far-right politicians.

As stated by the MAS Senator, Omar Aguilar, "Our goal is to pacify the country, not block the transitional government of Jeanine Áñez."

On Saturday, the MAS presidents of the Senate and Chamber of Deputies, Eva Copa and Sergio Choque respectively, stated in a joint press conference: "social movements and other organizations must abandon their positions. We can't live grieving.... We have called upon those in power to meet and create the conditions to convene new elections."

From Mexico, where he sought asylum, Morales has called for a "great national meeting", including the coup regime, to "pacify" the country and call new elections. This is even after Arturo Murillo, the new interior minister, threatened to persecute and detain MAS politicians, including Morales. Murillo charged Morales yesterday with "terrorism" for allegedly calling for blockades around La Paz.

The COB union confederation, which had backed the MAS administration until November 10, when it demanded that Morales resign, abandoned a previous threat of a general strike against the Áñez government and instead met with its representatives. It released a

statement on November 15 declaring, "We call for the pacification of the country and a sincere dialogue with all sectors to immediately find a true and honest social peace among all Bolivians."

As the military continued to shoot down demonstrators—protected by a November 14 decree granting total impunity to soldiers—the COB head, Carlos Huarachi, went further Monday, claiming to be "very worried" by the decree and asking Áñez to "enter a dialogue with the sectors in conflict." He added: "I ask those in power and the opposition to shake hands."

The Bolivian Ombudsman's Office reported last night that eight people were killed in a military-police operation to break up a siege that anti-coup demonstrators had mounted around the Senkata state-owned gas plant in El Alto. More than 30 others were injured, many from gunfire. However, after the police escorted 40 gasoline trucks out of the facility, the demonstrators bravely blockaded it again.

The latest killings have brought the total number of the coup's victims to at least 32. The Ombudsman's Office reported on November 16 that over 500 demonstrators have been arrested, "with a significant number since November 10 presenting notorious signs of cruel treatment," i.e. torture.

The office's report also highlights another massacre that occurred on November 15 in a suburb of Cochabamba as thousands of workers were peacefully marching to La Paz: "What happened yesterday in Huayllani was not a clash, but police-military repression that today has left seven people confirmed dead, one about to lose their life, five facing delicate surgeries and more than one hundred people [injured], most of them from gunfire." Two more have died since.

Family members of the victims told the media that some were shot from the back from helicopters as they fled. The following day, tens of thousands responded by marching across Cochabamba repudiating the massacre.

Alison Coronel, an outspoken young demonstrator in El Alto, an impoverished working class region whose standard of living had continued to plummet under Morales' MAS government, told reporters that the coup was aimed against "us, the proletariat, the people who work each day.... Let me clarify something, we are not MAS supporters here, a few may be, but the majority of us here are angry people. How can you carry out such a barbarity? Do you think we are ignorant? Where do you think we are?"

The positions taken by the MAS and the trade union bureaucracy demonstrate that no section of the ruling establishment is willing to oppose US imperialism's installation of a puppet regime and the rise of fascistic forces committed to an even greater looting of natural resources and imposition of austerity. Fundamentally, this reflects the underlying capitalist interests that the MAS and the trade unions represent and have loyally defended.

Last December, Vice President Álvaro García Linera boasted that, under the nearly 14-year reign of the MAS, the economy grew four-fold, with the "greatest achievement" being an almost five-fold increase in private earnings. He also cited the fall of Bolivia's foreign debt from 51.6 percent of GDP to 23.1 percent. The ruling class dedicated a sliver of this wealth derived from higher commodity prices to contain mass social upheavals. Increased corporate taxes and a partial nationalizations of gas allowed for limited social programs, largely based on cash transfers, that lessened poverty levels that still remained the highest in South America.

Since commodity prices began to fall around 2014, social spending, jobs and wages have been the casualties, pushing poverty rates up again. As opposition grew, including mass strikes in 2013, workers were met with repression and denunciations by MAS authorities of being "tools of the right."

Meanwhile, the government was handing benefits to the mining companies and the landed oligarchy. As described in 2017 by the London University economist Jeffery R. Webber, through tax benefits and permits to

penetrate into natural and indigenous protected areas, Morales "consolidated agro-industrial capital, national as well as foreign, in the soy sector, integrating in a subordinated fashion the rich peasants." Along with the military, which was also wooed by the MAS, the political representatives of these oligarchic layers spearheaded the coup.

In terms of the COB, its inability to advance a struggle independent of all factions of the bourgeoisie, now legitimizing the far-right coup, derives not from the personal corruption of its leaders, but rather the character of the trade unions themselves, whose role as enforcers of capitalist exploitation and defenders of the nation-state system led them to integrate themselves into the capitalist state—a process continued under the MAS.

Workers must organize independently of and in opposition to the bourgeois nationalist MAS, the trade unions and all nationalist and pro-capitalist organizations. This requires the development of a new revolutionary leadership in the working class that assimilates the history of the fight for Trotskyism in Bolivia and internationally, today embodied in the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI).

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