CONTROL CIUDADANO

DICIEMBRE 2019

CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS PARA EL DESARROLLO LABORAL Y AGRARIO

BOLETÍN DE SEGUIMIENTO A POLÍTICAS PÚBLICAS - SEGUNDA ÉPOCA - AÑO XIII - Nº 32

REQUIEM FOR THE "PROCESS OF CHANGE" IN BOLIVIA

VLADIMIR DIAZ CUELLAR
Geography and Environmental Studies / Carleton University / vladimirdiazcuellar@cmail.carleton.ca

How can we account for our sorrow? How can we account for the blood that has been spilled and the abrupt collapse of the government that promised a "process of change"? Understanding the events in Bolivia in October and November 2019 and learning from them can itself be a means of grieving and processing.

CHRONICLE OF A DEATH FORETOLD?

From October to October and from mutiny to mutiny. That is perhaps the superficial paradox of the period covered by the last political cycle in Bolivia. A police riot signaled the collapse of the neoliberal state in February 2003 and another police riot, alongside the Organization of American States' (OAS) preliminary auditor's report on the recent elections, gave the final push against the Movement Toward Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo, MAS) party, which ruled the country for almost 14 years. Social mobilizations also opened and closed the curtains.

Popular mobilizations in October 2003, accompanied by the loss of almost one hundred lives, had put an end to two decades rule by the mining (Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada) and agro-industrial (represented by Hugo Bánzer) elites, whose economic measures privatized publicly-owned companies, while the costs were paid at the expense of the living standards of Bolivia's majority. These mobilizations also opened the door for the electoral avalanche with which the

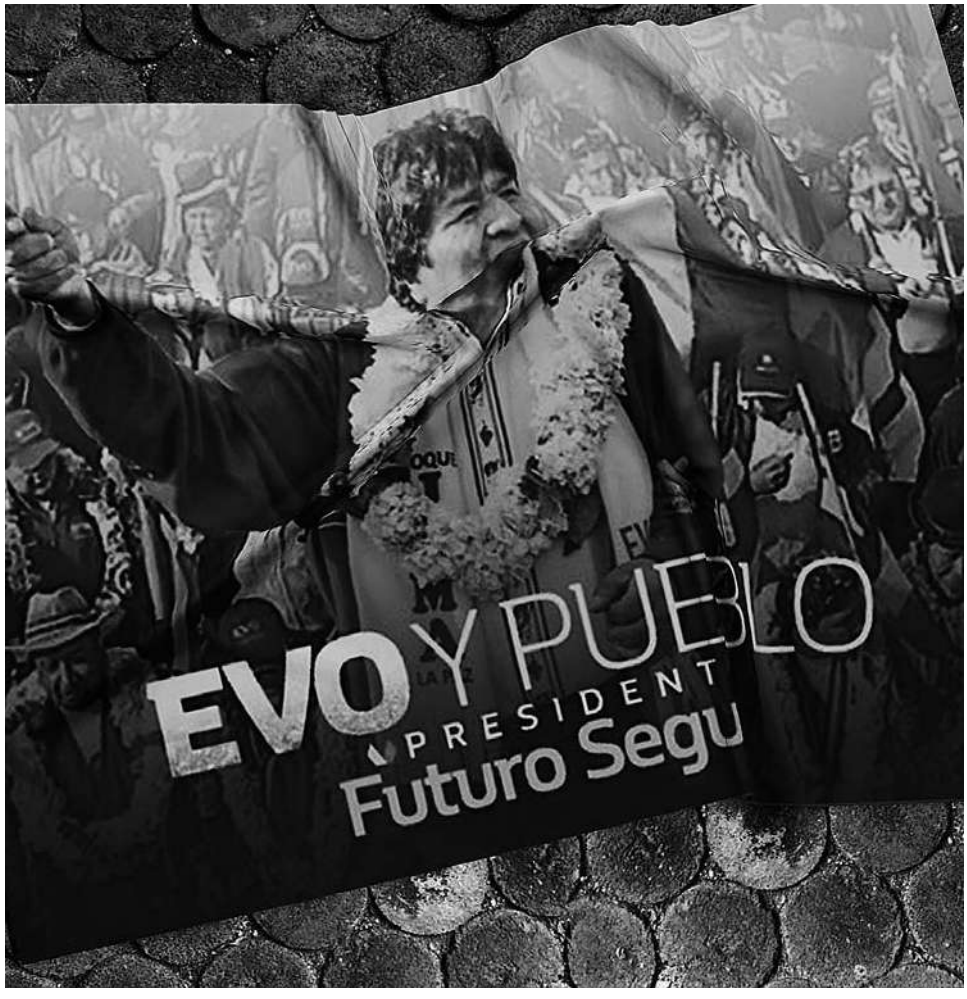
MAS won elections in 2005. Fourteen years later, it was mobilizations in "defense of democracy" between October and November that led to the fall of the MAS government.

Graphic courtesy of the Centre for Labour and Agricultural Development Studies, La Paz, Bolivia.

No one, not even the most recalcitrant adversaries of the MAS, could have imagined such a dramatic and rapid collapse of the party and its government. Despite nearly a decade and a half in power, pre-election polls —conducted over about a year— gave the MAS about 35 per cent of the decided vote, with a large portion of the electorate still undecided.

Only a few weeks before the election, amid the voracious fires that were consuming the Chiquitano forest, Carlos de Mesa emerged as a presidential candidate who could potentially force a second round. From that moment on, a landslide of events dramatically unfolded.

On Sunday, October 20, the night of the election, incomprehensibly and in an unprecedented act (at least in the most recent elections), the authorities of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) paralyzed the rapid vote-count. Up until that moment, and with 83.85 per cent of the votes counted, Evo Morales had 44 per cent to Carlos de Mesa's 39 per cent, which would have forced a second round. Indeed, the 2009 Constitution establishes that there will be a second round if a candidate wins with more than 50 per cent of the votes, or with more than 40 per cent provided there is a difference of 10 points above the second-place candidate (Article 166).



That night, the results were being celebrated as a major victory by the opposition. Despite this, at 9:25 pm local time, Morales claimed victory in the first round expressing his "trust in the rural vote." The results quickly fell prey to suspicion. In cities and smaller towns, citizens mobilized to safeguard the ballots and electoral records. Then, 22 hours after the rapid count was suspended, suspicion turned to fury as the TSE resumed the rapid count, giving, at 95.63 per cent of the votes counted, the MAS a victory with 46.85 per cent. The margin was barely ten per cent over Citizen Community, Carlos Mesa's party, which received 36.74 per cent of the vote. Thus, a second round was unnecessary.

To make matters worse, over the following days, members of the TSE were unable to meaningfully justify the suspension of the rapid count (they initially spoke of avoiding releasing two results, and later of a server attack). In Potosí and Sucre, people burned offices of the Departmental Electoral Tribunals, while in Oruro they burned the offices of the MAS. On the day of October 21st and into the night, protests occurred throughout the country and, in some cases, demonstrators battled with police.

Beginning on October 22, members of the electoral body began to resign. The next day, as OAS observers recommended proceeding to a run off, Morales denounced an attempted coup d'état and called for the "defense of democracy." His call was answered almost immediately, with large demonstrations in support of the MAS in La Paz and then in Cochabamba. Shortly after, Morales called for a "siege on the cities."

By that time, civic strikes against the "fraud" were already strong in several cities of the country. In a short period of time, civic mobilization reached a national scale, from east to west and from

north to south, which had not occurred previously in the country's history. Its epicenters were, no doubt, the administrative capital cities in departments throughout the country. At this point, the class and color lines that marked both mobilizations were clear: on the one hand, the middle classes formed much of the "defense of democracy," while those mobilized in "the defense of rural vote" were peasants and workers. In other words, the lightest skin was pitted against the darkest.

The civic protests in Santa Cruz and Potosí, however, had a broader, more popular character than their equivalents in La Paz and Cochabamba. Between October 23 and 25, the first clashes between those protesting fraud and supporters of the MAS occurred in Santa Cruz, Cochabamba and Yapacaní.

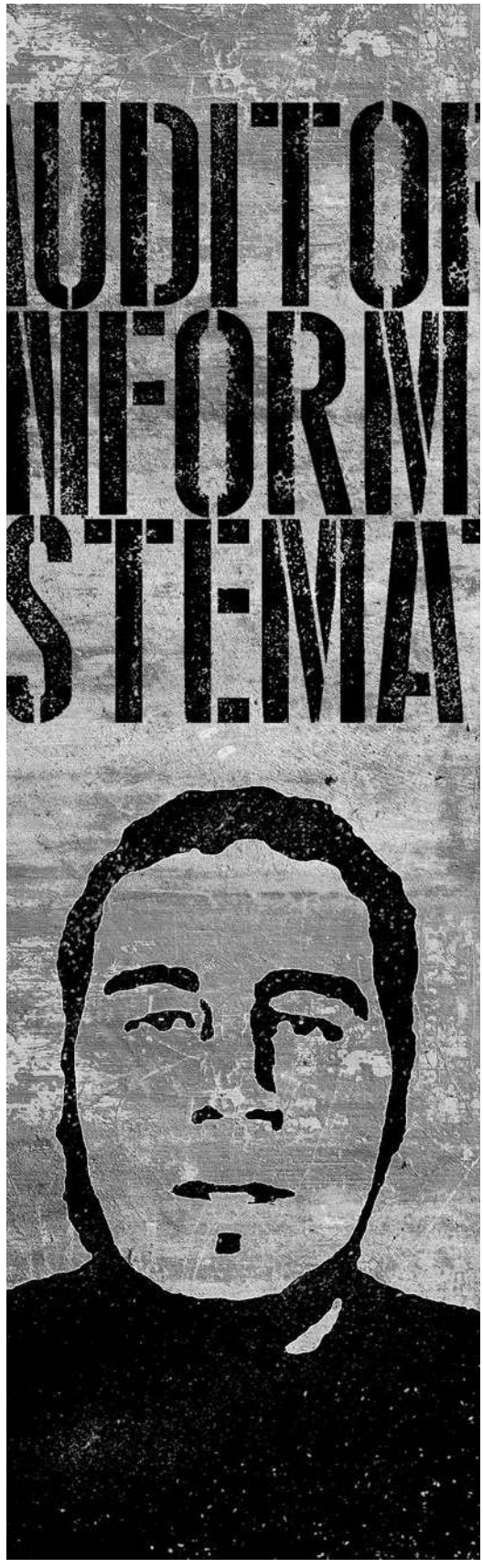
On October 25, the TSE concluded the official count and announced that the MAS was victorious with 47.07 per cent to CC's 36.51 per cent, confirming that a second round was not necessary. TSE authorities gave no further explanations and did not speak to the press over the following week, after which one of them affirmed that the results were "sacred." The week beginning October 28 was marked with civil strife in several cities and smaller towns; the numbers of people injured in clashes rose to dozens. As the peasant siege began, the opposition and the ruling party challenged each other through huge rallies in the cities.

On October 30, in Portachuelo and Montero (both in the department of Santa Cruz), two protesters among the ranks of the opposition were killed by gunshot wounds. According to the ensuing police investigations, town bureaucrats and the area's elected deputy, both MAS officials, were allegedly involved in the deaths. Allegations of fraud on the part of citizens, which had exploded without any order, many of them false, became systematic. A non-partisan computer engineer and his team explained the possible mechanisms in an interview that was widely viewed, while the company providing the electoral software sowed more doubts.

Then, at the request of the MAS government, the OAS began an audit, despite reservations on the part of members of the opposition, because of previous actions of OAS Secretary General, Luis Almagro, who on repeated occasions had publicly supported Morales. Leaders of peasant organizations suspended the siege on the cities and Morales, no longer defiant, asked protestors for an "intermission." In contrast, participants in large gatherings in Santa Cruz, Cochabamba, Potosí, Sucre and La Paz radicalized their positions, calling for the resignation of Morales or the annulment of the elections. By this point, protests against the government had developed a more popular tinge, as compared to their inception. Self-organized neighbors outside of the middle-class neighborhoods, and some sectors with people of more humble means, particularly in Potosí and to a lesser extent in Santa Cruz, began to join.

Attacks continued on the offices of peasant organizations in the cities, as well as on the offices of the MAS. Racism marked much of the mobilizations. The last major concentration of social movements in support of the government in La Paz took place on November 5, with the participation of the Central Bolivian Workers Union (COB), miners from Huanuni and Colquiri (State-owned mines), peasants, the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Quollasuyu (CONAMAQ) and oil workers. Ch'ulos (traditional Andean hats) and mining helmets visually dominated the scene.

There were more clashes between popular and middle-class sectors. On November 6, near the town of Vinto (close to Cochabamba), there were brutal clashes between peasants and neighbours, culminating in the death of a young man from the opposition. En-



raged, people reacted by burning City Hall and humiliating the MAS mayor, who they accused of being a provocateur. Meanwhile in La Paz, students clashed with salaried miners using dynamite.

Finally, on November 7, there was a final rally in El Alto convened by neighborhood councils, the COB and small merchants, apparently in favor of the government. The mobilization demanded peace, rejected recent racist events, and requested an investigation into the causes of the three protest-related deaths at that time. Morales did not participate, opting to send "greetings" from his Twitter account instead. COB leader Juan Carlos Huarachi highlighted what was already becoming evident, saying: "we want to see the massive participation of El Alto, the sleeping lion… let him wake up at once, damn it!"

Demonstrations were also held in support of the government in Cochabamba and in San Julián, in the department of Santa Cruz. In La Paz, meanwhile, the civic leaders of Santa Cruz and Potosí, who a few days earlier had begun to coordinate actions, participated in a rally organized by the coca growers of the Yungas, which was also attended by students, mine workers and the wives of police officers. That night, the manager of the Panamanian company Ethical Hacking, which conducted the computer audit of the electoral process, affirmed in another widely viewed interview that the election was "impregnated with elements for its nullification" due to multiple irregularities.

At this point, the balance of forces had already turned in favor of the various social sectors commanded by the civic alliance. On Friday November 8, a police riot began in Cochabamba and spread like wildfire to other cities overnight. Over this time, Morales's only public communication was via Twitter. The next morning, with a police riot in La Paz, the mutiny became general and national. In several cities, police officers marched together with people who had been blockading and demonstrating for more than two weeks. The commander of the Armed Forces announced that he would not repress the people. The cards were drawn. Morales, speaking from the El Alto Air Force base, called for social mobilization. Only the coca growers from Chapare (department of Cochabamba) heeded his call, marching from their region towards an unknown destination.

On November 9, a caravan of around 150 buses carrying approximately eight thousand representatives from their respective civic committees, left from Sucre and Potosí as part of their coordination with the national civic movement. These representatives included students, cooperative miners (from Cerro Rico and Porco), salaried mining workers (from Porco, San Lorenzo, San Cristóbal and several other mines) and others, who received a farewell filled with popular solidarity before heading to La Paz.

That day, the first group was intercepted and attacked by peasants, apparently instigated by a MAS mayor in the village of Vila Vila, resulting in several wounded. The next day, a second contingent was attacked with firearms on the

highway near the town of Challapata, resulting in various injuries and one death. Over these two days, upon hearing the news of the bus attacks, large infuriated crowds mobilized in Potosi, pressuring their regional authorities, all MAS representatives, to resign, and burning the residences of one of them and a of a minister. In Oruro, demonstrators burned the MAS governor's house, accusing him of being responsible for the attack on the caravans. The house of Morales' sister was also burned.

In this context came the final blow for Morales. At dawn on Sunday November 10, the OAS commission that was conducting the audit of the electoral process released its preliminary report (which was meant to be delivered a couple of days later but was hastened by the convulsive social environment). It concluded that there were multiple irregularities in the electoral process and recommended new elections. That same morning, Morales, accompanied by a handful of leaders of social organizations, made a brief statement in which he called for new elections.

All of this triggered a wave of resignations of ministers, governors, mayors and assembly members, beginning with authorities from Potosi authorities, between November ninth and the eleventh. The MAS, both as state apparatus as well as political party, collapsed in a matter of days. On Sunday November 10, the Armed Forces and the COB asked, almost simultaneously, for the resignation of Morales. In the middle of Plaza Murillo, which was guarded only by the mobilized students, without police or military and without the miners of the state companies that had been there days prior, the leaders of the civic movement (Luis Fernando Camacho and Marco Pumari) entered the presidential palace, placed Bolivia's tricolor flag on the floor, kneeled and laid down the resignation letter they had written for Morales to sign together with a Bible.

By then, Morales was heading to Chimoré (Chapare) from where, along with his Vice President Álvaro García Linera and Minister Gabriela Montaño, he would resign from the presidency. They did not acknowledge that there was electoral fraud, nor did they make any reference to the dead and wounded. In fact, Morales compulsively focused on the attacks on the homes of members of his inner circle. According to them, "the coup had been consummated."

Festivities began in several cities. But as night fell, social mayhem prevailed. Vandals and the shock-groups linked to the MAS, separately and perhaps in some cases together, burned the public buses of the opposition municipal government, the houses of some opposition figures, and ransacked businesses all in La Paz. The celebration by the middle classes was replaced by their collective hysteria.

COUP OR FRAUD?

Was there a coup d'état?

That is what the MAS government assured since the conflict began. However, for the most part, the claims substantiating this were generic. Even in the most critical moments, when detailed information could have influenced the sympathies of the protesters on either side, Morales did not take the opportunity to explain how the alleged coup was being rolled-out. Why not use the occasions he had to convince the population of the coup instead of using them to poke fun at the mobilized?

The Minister of the Presidency, Juan Ramón Quintana, who attended the School of the Americas, dedicated his time to talking about a fearsome plan to turn Bolivia into a new Vietnam. It was the Minister of the Interior, Carlos Romero, who dedicated a few minutes to talking about the coup. He said that it "has three fundamental devices. The first is the violation of the constitutional guarantees of citizens, including freedom of expression and freedom of the press. Second, the activation of a racist sentiment to generate confrontation at the level of the civilian population of Bolivia and third, the violent confrontation against state institutions, particularly the Police."

Romero's statement, which remained quite general, was made on November 4, when the "coup" was already two weeks old. When he went into detail, he mentioned that the opposition had acquired "weapons and ammunition in the United States" for this purpose. A blog in English seems to have been the source of his assertions. Apart from this, the government's various statements about the so-called coup at that time served mainly as fodder for comical memes. In fact, the MAS government had adopted the practice of labelling mobilizations against it a "coup d'état," most of the time without any basis, on various occasions during the past decade. Also missing was an accusatory or a defamatory campaign against the supposed "coup plotter," Luis Fernando Camacho, as would normally arise during these circumstances. It was evident that at that time, Camacho wasn't even on the government's radar.

How would it have been possible for coup plotters to create the climate that generated collective anger immediately following the elections? How would they have caused the TSE to suspend the counting of the votes? How would they have managed to do it almost at the same moment that Morales suspiciously declared himself winner? In order to achieve this, it would have been necessary for the opposition at least to have controlled one or both of the companies involved in the elections process, either the software provider or the computer auditor, and that the companies take the risk in this adventure. But even if that were the case, how could the opposition have managed to avoid the TSE and the government from detecting its maneuvers in the months of preparation of the elections? Only inconceivable errors and myopia could explain such a situation. Although it is not possible to rule this scenario out completely, it seems to be no more than a remote possibility.

Was there fraud? There are many indications that suggest this. In July 2015, the composition of the TSE was completely renewed when the MAS-controlled Legislative Assembly appointed six new members, and President Morales appointed one. After the 2018 resignations of the so-called "institutionalist" TSE members under political pressure, the ruling party appointed members who, according to

the press, had been linked in the past to the MAS (Antonio Costas remained as the only "institutionalist" TSE member). The same TSE member who declared that the results were "sacred" following October's elections was photographed painting walls in favor of MAS during previous elections.

Costas himself said that the period after the new members were named was marked by a series of dismissals and changes in officials. In the meantime, on November 28, 2017, the Constitutional Court provided an interpretation of the Constitution, with legal maneuvers common among charlatan lawyers, that Morales and García Linera have the "human right" to run for another term, thus ignoring the result of the referendum held on February 21, 2016. In that referendum, which took place against the backdrop of an unfolding soap opera, the population voted against a constitutional modification that would otherwise have enabled their candidacy for a possible third reelection.

On December 4, 2018, this process culminated with the granting of final approval by the government-controlled TSE of the eligibility of both candidates for the 2019 elections. In addition to this, it is important to highlight the following irregularities: that there was a supposed unusual increase in the electoral roll; that notaries from Pando were found flagrantly enrolling citizens in Riberalta, which is part of another electoral district; that a single company was authorized to transmit the results from exit polls; that there were resignations of members and officials of the electoral departmental tribunals the days immediately after the election; and finally, that the silence of the TSE was deafening during weeks when it was imperative to hear the technical voice of the institution in order to clarify doubts about the electoral process.

Considering that polls in the year leading up to the election indicated that the MAS was leading but did not exceed 50 per cent of the votes or a 10 per cent difference over their second-place rivals, many in the country believed that the government had planned to manipulate the election if necessary. Both preliminary OAS reports came to confirm what mobilized citizens had presumed since the night of the election.

The MAS, as a party structure, was unable to generate leaders who could have taken the baton from the Morales-García Linera duo, or perhaps this was not attempted. When Santos Ramírez was sentenced to jail due to corruption scandals in the state oil company, the path for Morales's natural successor was closed. Similarly, when former Foreign Affairs Minister David Choquehuanca was cast aside as a delegate to the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (ALBA) in 2017, Morales remained as the sole presidential candidate.

The MAS, then, found itself in a dead end created by the very Constitution it had approved in 2009, which prohibited the re-election of the president and vice-president for more than one continuous term (Article 168). Morales and García Linera considered themselves irreplaceable and forced the way for a possible fourth consecutive term. García Linera himself had said that without Morales "the sun will hide, and the moon will escape." When the election arrived, they knew that they could not win in the first round and that if they didn't and the election went to a run off, they would lose to Carlos de Mesa and his running mate. On October 20, they bet on suicide.

WHEN HEGEMONY VANISHES

Bolivian sociologist René Zavaleta said that crises show society in all of its nakedness. The MAS government was always the government of the popular sectors of the country. It was, in truth, a macro articulation of various organizations of peasants, wage workers, cooperative workers, merchants, the self-employed and transport drivers. In the beginning, a part of the middle class

was also part of this, though their support decreased progressively over time.

The business community, on the other hand, went from being radical opponents of the MAS during the first years, to converting to the government of "economic stability" following an agreement to coordinate economic policies signed on February 4, 2011. Even though the vast majority of farmers' and workers' organizations lined up behind the MAS when the crisis began on October 20, the events that unfolded and the information related to electoral fraud changed the balance of forces.

The initial stupor which popular sectors experienced in the face of the possibility of fraud committed by the party that represented them lasted a couple of days. When Morales summoned the "defense of the rural vote," rejecting the accusation of fraud, farmers from the main regions of the country heeded his call, including the coca growers of the tropics and some ayllus from northern Potosí, the state mining workers of Huanuni and Colquiri, the gold mining cooperatives, and the neighborhood councils.

Intermingled with the sincere support for the proceso de cambio was clientelist mediation, installed several years before. Over this period, the quasi-state party apparatus, through its many mayors and other authorities, also worked to mobilize people, and bureaucrats were systematically used to inflate MAS rallies. Perhaps all this took its toll on the MAS when revelations of fraud were thrown into the mix. One by one, these sectors stopped responding to Morales' call, until practically no one did. When the police in La Paz mutinied, the miners of Huanuni and Colquiri, who had been guarding Plaza Murillo for days, had disappeared from sight.

The peasantry was always the mainstay of support for the MAS government, its most intimate social sector. The renewal of Agrarian Reform kicked off a massive process of transferring land to peasant hands, an act with unprecedented historical significance since the peasantry forced the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) to undertake agrarian reform in 1953. But land ownership does not guarantee permanent possession, and nothing in the market prevents land from becoming concentrated, quite the contrary.

This is even more so if large-scale landholdings are not made subject to redistribution. By 2012, the agricultural census showed that agricultural units with an area of more than 500 hectares represented 66 per cent (22,818,064 hectares) of the total area used for agriculture, livestock or forestry production. If we lower the mark to 100 hectares, which is still a large area for a peasant family, the share would be 79 per cent (27,471,259 hectares).

Over the last 14 years, peasants in Bolivia have undoubtedly benefited from the distribution of land that, considering the decades of smallholdings, extreme poverty and migration, help explain their deep gratitude to the government. But this distribution failed to alter the historical process of converting the country's agricultural and livestock production into mechanized and industrial-scale enterprises, which produce soy, corn, sunflower, sorghum, beef and poultry.

Manual workers represent another important sector in Bolivia which had for the most part supported the MAS government during the past years, though their relationship to the party was oscillating and conflictive. They protested the pension law in 2008 and

2013, the gasolinazo (cuts to the subsidies to oil prices) in 2010, the extent of salary increases, and other specific sectoral conflicts in other years. At some point (2013) workers tried to form their own party and acquire political autonomy with respect to the MAS.

Despite this sometimes-tense relationship, when the electoral crisis began, the mine workers of the state companies responded to Morales' call and defended him with dynamite in hand, until they eventually stopped doing so.

The gold mining cooperatives, which had benefited from important deposits in the north of the department of La Paz and the Amazon region, some of which were within protected areas, also heeded the call. They too retired to their regions as the conflict advanced. Apart from these visible actors, the participation of workers was diluted, as it was mediated by other types of neighborhood or civic organizations. Although the relative size of the working-class population according to the 2012 Census had increased at the expense of the peasantry, this had not been reflected in political forms.

In the opposite camp, as the crisis progressed, segments of the popular sectors aligned themselves with the opposition and the civic movement, in some cases directly and in others due to the confluence of the forces in flux. It is not surprising that the coca growers of the Yungas region had joined the opposition, considering their conflicts with the government over the expansion of coca cultivation areas in the non-traditional region (Chapare), over which their leaders were imprisoned.

It is also not surprising that the mining cooperatives from Potosí had also joined the opposition, as the sector had lost many lives in different struggles with the government. As of yet, no one has been held responsible for their deaths, but some of their leaders were locked up. The human rights complaints of the Chojlla mine workers were not attended to by the government, despite only being a few hours away from La Paz. It is not surprising, thus, that the sectors plagued by the repressive arm or the indifference of the MAS government volunteered to join in with the political currents that besieged it.

The middle classes, meanwhile, were the backbone of the civic and opposition mobilization during a good part of the crisis, until more popular neighborhoods and regions entered the arena. The young university students and the

jailones (rich kids) from Bolivia's largest cities were politically baptized during these times. Many of us underestimated them, but no one did so more than the government. Morales mocked their organizational capacity by saying that they would not endure and that they were only there for "a little money and some grades." They came up with the war cry that set the tone for the entire mobilization: "¿Quién se rinde? ¡Nadie se rinde! ¿Quién se cansa? ¡Nadie se cansa! ¿Evo de nuevo? ¡Huevo, carajo!" (Roughly: "Who surrenders? No one surrenders! Who gets tired? No one gets tired! Evo again? Hell no!").

Many of the students from public and private universities who swelled the ranks of the protestors are also the children of workers and peasants. The MAS enlarged the absolute size of the middle class during its tenure. The population employed in non-manual work, according to the 2012 Census, has almost doubled since 2001 (although its relative size increased very slightly, to almost 20 per cent in 2012).

If these serve as complementary indicators, the urbanization of the country has continued at an accelerated pace: almost 70 per cent of the population now lives in urban centers (compared to 62 per cent in 2001, or 26 per cent in 1950). In addition, a substantial improvement of living conditions (the combined outcome of wage-increase policies and cash-transfers, together with the increase in imports of cheap manufactured goods from Asia), has produced an expansion of the middle classes. According to the Ministry of Economy, 58 per cent of the population had middle-level income in 2017 (compared to 35 per cent in 2005). Somehow, the MAS itself spawned the social class that initiated the mobilization that caused its fall: the MAS fell prey to the very forces that it unleashed or accelerated.

There was no economic crisis, not even a recession, that could be said to have prompted the dissatisfaction of the mobilized middle classes. The loss of their support was slow but steady over recent years, not just because of the clumsy management of the state bureaucracy, but mainly due to the government's profound inability to recognize its mistakes, which included: the brutal repression of disabled people in 2012 and 2016; the repression of the indigenous organizations that marched from the TIPNIS territory to La Paz in 2011; ignoring the 2016 referendum and forcing the validation of their candidates in violation of norms

they themselves approved; and not recognizing, during the electoral campaign, the existence of the great forest fires in the Chiquitania region, which had been burning for some time. The anger of the middle classes had moral roots. And in democracies, there is no possible hegemony without middle class consensus.

Graphic courtesy of the Centre for Labour and Agricultural Development Studies, La Paz, Bolivia.

Behind the middle classes and their good intentions, the fascist sectors that had been silent for several years reemerged. In Santa Cruz, during the first week after the elections, they went out wanting to beat up collas (highland people), and many did. A resurgence of religious sentiment in politics came to articulate several of these sectors through prayers in assemblies, prayers among mobilized neighbours or kneeling policemen, and the symbolism of the Bible laid on the flag in the Presidential Palace.

Civic movements are the multifaceted expression of the middle classes and others that are articulated with them. In Santa Cruz, Camacho, who was formerly the leader of the juventudes cruceñistas (Santa Cruz youth) is also the representative of a fraction of the business community, starting with his own family, which owns an insurance conglomerate called Grupo Nacional Vida.

The Bolivian crisis was never characterized by a block of magnates allied with the middle classes against the government and the popular classes. It is much more accurate to say that a fraction of businesspeople mobilized while others stayed on the sidelines, some of which later changed sides when the prospects for victory shone more clearly on the civic side. On October 30, the economic support of the business associations -at least what was known to the public- (the Agricultural Chamber of the East, CAO, and the Chamber of Industry, Commerce, Services and Tourism of Santa Cruz, CAINCO, in addition to the Percy Fernández foundation), began to finance the ollas comunes (community meals) for those mobilized: 220,000 portions were served in Santa Cruz up until November 10.

On November 8, Camacho's father complained in a letter to the Confederation of Private Businesspersons of Bolivia (CEPB), the Federation of Private Businesspersons of Santa Cruz (FEPSC) and CAINCO expressing his "disappointment because the institutions you run today do not defend the legitimate interests of the companies of the Grupo Nacional Vida," which apparently was under the authorities' microscope.

It is not possible to imagine that the livestock farmers, who provided the MAS with high-ranking leaders in particular in the department of Beni (including governor Alex Ferrier) and who had just benefited from a supreme decree authorizing clearing and controlled burning of forests and savannas, were celebrating the mobilizations against the government. After all, the leader of the ranchers' confederation, Óscar Ciro Pereyra, had, together with Morales, celebrated the beginning of the export of beef to China in the middle of the voracious fires in the Chiquitania.

The banks, which enjoyed record profits during the proceso de cambio (from $44 million in 2005 to $317 million in 2017 before taxes, according to the Ministry of Economy), seemed also to have been observing the conflict from the stands, as were other business sectors. Why would transnational mining companies support a mobilization against the government that allowed

them to earn, according to my own calculations, $1.1 billion in the past years? Businesspeople, said Minister Romero, "are supporting the candidacy of president Evo Morales, whether they say it openly or not, they are doing it" since "they are not nearsighted, they know where to aim and they know that Evo guarantees them continued expansion."

Another government would obviously generate a more favorable environment for businesspeople overall; however, this is not enough reason for them to embark on political adventures when business is going well. CAINCO didn't join the calls for Morales's resignation until November 10.

The unexpected allies of the industrialists leading the mobilization were the civic leaders of Potosí and Chuquisaca: Marco Antonio Pumari, the young man who was once an "ice-cream salesman, fish scaler, cooperative peon" and the son of a mine worker, as well as the Trotskyist school-teacher, Rodrigo Echalar.

These two civic committees articulated students, cooperative miners, salaried mine workers and others in the protests. Potosí, the epicenter of huge and long strikes against the government for autonomy, greater government investment and the industrialization of the resources of the region with benefits for local people, in particular in the case of lithium, is without doubt the city that has been most ignored by the government in past years. In fact, Potosí was already fully mobilized a week before the general elections. This convergence is undoubtedly circumstantial, albeit catalyzed by its opposition to the government.

The police force was never Morales's favorite. Morales replaced police in the presidential guard with Armed Forces when he assumed the presidency, and police officers do not enjoy the benefits granted to the military. They do not have access to, for example, retirement with 100 per cent of their salary, as do soldiers. Morales treated the police with the resentment that was germinated when he was union leader: a few years ago, he made a policeman bend and tie his shoes in public.

Already in 2012, the police had mutinied demanding better wages and labor conditions. During the post electoral social confrontations, the police were in charge of delivering chicken dinners to the mine workers mobilized in La Paz. Their very-organized wives had mobilized early in the conflict and were surely among the instigators of

their husbands' mutiny. The massive opposition rally in La Paz, on October 31st, asked for the support of the police and the Armed Forces. During a November 4 rally in Santa Cruz, Camacho promised that the new government would meet police demands. The MAS government realized the risk too late. On November first, they made an extraordinary payment of Bs3,000 ($433) to all the troops. The cops called it a "loyalty bonus" but it didn't produce the expected effect, and may have done the opposite. "We were already tired of humiliations," one of the mutineers would say later. The day before the riot, policemen in Cochabamba had already made their decision, and met with the city's "youths," a fascist group, to ask for their support.

In addition to these mobilized sectors, there were other important spectators and others who came to play that role overtime. If we exclude the mobilization of October 28, the bulk of the city of El Alto observed the events as they unfolded without mass participation. Nowhere was the post-elections stupor more obvious.

How to defend a government that most likely had committed fraud? What was lacking was the moral conviction of those who aspire to victory, which is the foundation of heroic acts in history. El Alto, the brown-skinned and working-class city, was paralyzed by the dismay caused by the findings and witnessed its government fall.

The COB leader was not wrong to ask that the lion wake up. It eventually did, when Morales was already on his way to Mexico and unashamed police cut the wiphala (the Andean flag) from their uniforms, while others burned the flag in various parts of the country. On November 11th, after Morales fell, not before, the fury of El Alto exploded like a hurricane destroying six police stations along its path, in a matter of hours. "The wiphala must be respected, damn it!," people shouted.

After this, police officers in El Alto and in other cities apologized to the people, some even doing so in Aymara. "They have called us hordes, they have humiliated us, they have burned the wiphala", the people of El Alto said. They asked for respect: to not be referred to with aggravating terms like "vandals," and for a stop to racist acts. In Tamborada, Cochabamba, the police station also underwent the wrath of the people. The collective hysteria that preyed on the middle classes during the nights of November 10 and 11, particularly in La Paz, was the perfect excuse to treat poor people mobilized in an organized peaceful (or furious) way against racism; the MAS militants with their shock-groups and the vandals with a similar club.

Beginning November 11, Bolivia was militarized, and the repression proceeded amid a notable media silence. It was not long before the first wounded occurred. In Santa Cruz, people were given a party; in El Alto, in the popular neighborhoods of other cities, and in some minor towns (Yapacaní in particular) people bore the brutality of repression. The recovery of "democracy" took place with the army on the streets being cheered by the middle classes.

CHAMPA GUERRA AND DEMOCRACY IN FATIGUES

In the midst of the wave of resignations that included President Morales and his vice president, the presidents of the Chamber of Senators and Deputies also resigned. The disbanding of the MAS left the path open for the self-proclamation of the vice president of the Senate, Jeanine Añez, as president of the country in front of an almost empty parliament and with a gigantic Bible in her hand on November 12. MAS parliamentarians did not even manage to prevent this, nor did they try to control the transition. The Constitutional Court hurried to bless the succession the same day. The self-proclamation of Añez and the escalation of the repression provoked a series of protests that

refused to recognize the new government, and in some cases called for the return of Morales. Urban protests were limited, however, to Cochabamba, El Alto and a couple of mid-size towns, while the rest of the cities were returning to normal.

On November 13, new ministers and a new military high command were appointed. Arturo Murillo, whose hotel had been burned in Chapare a few days before, became the Minister of the Interior and promised to embark on a manhunt for some of the most important figures in the MAS. With the new military command, it is quite possible that those "whose careers were truncated" in the almost 14 years of the previous government returned. In fact, the new commander of the Armed Forces, Carlos Orellana, had been the former President Jorge Quiroga's aide-de-camp.

Thirsty for revenge, they did not waste the first opportunity. The leaders of the coca growers' federation, probably in coordination with Morales (who never ceased to be their main leader and who continued to coordinate actions from Mexico), decided to march on Cochabamba to offer up lambs for sacrifice. As in the rest of the country, the city was full of military and police forces, in addition to a part of the middle class that brimmed with racist and classist hatred. What was the political objective of marching to the enemy's court when the rules of politics ask that the adversary be resisted from one's home territory in moments of weakness?

This rule was well known by the cocalero leaders who had successfully practiced the roadblock strategy since the 1990s. In the middle of the November 15 march, some middle-class looking subjects carrying long guns appeared among the cocalero marchers, as if somehow they could face hundreds of soldiers and policemen. Later it was said that some of the cocalero leaders had vanished from the march before the repression. Here, the army and the police's naked violence, in broad daylight, converged with the perverse desire of the last fractions of leaders of the MAS to use the dead for political maneuvering. The massacre claimed the lives of nine people.

Meanwhile, residents of one of the most peripheral areas of El Alto initiated a blockade in front of the Senkata fuel plant on November 14, while a large part of the city was observing. Like the rest of the protests, it was not so much in favor of the MAS as it was against the self-proclaimed government's repression. On November 19, in a scene that seemed copied from 2003, the new government decided to intervene and allow a caravan of tanker trucks protected by a military and police operation to cross the blockade. The brutal repression killed eight people. The "democracy" in military uniform took no shame in producing a bloodbath. It did not even respect the relatives of the deceased who marched together in an immense march of outrage from El Alto to La Paz on November 21: images showed wooden coffins lying alone in the middle of the street behind a tear gas cloud.

Graphic courtesy of the Centre for Labour and Agricultural Development Studies, La Paz, Bolivia.

In the countryside, the peasants resumed their traditional tactic of road blockades, the day of Jeanine Añez' self-proclamation as president. As of November 21, 102 blockaded points were registered, chiefly along the main highways. And although the movement reached significant proportions, it had no prospects of being supported in the cities where demoralization, fatigue and calls for peace dominated.

With El Alto divided and only small protests against the new government remaining in other cities, these blockades represented the closing of the curtains on a month of dramatic events. Agreements between the government and the most important social organizations in the country, including the COB, the Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB), "intercultural" peasants, the Bartolina Sisa organization, CONAMAQ, the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB), and residents of the districts of El Alto, to call for new elections, the withdrawal of the army, and the cessation of persecution deactivated most of the remaining demonstrations.

The call for elections, without the participation of Morales and García Linera, and the restitution of the electoral roll by means of a law passed unanimously in parliament, with the acquiescence of the MAS, was surely the final act.

It is true that Morales, for whatever reason, did not deploy the repressive forces. Rather, he bet on civil confrontation to defend irregular electoral results. Before and after his fall, the MAS mobilized its quasi-state apparatus and when it had no other means left, resorted to bribe. The crude use of money to mobilize a few people of modest means who were paid by the MAS without any qualms in the middle of the first marches since November 11, as documented in dozens of videos, and the payment to a few vandals, who have no more loyalty than to the one who makes the payment, have nothing to do with the deeds that mobilize multitudes.

The sacrifice paid by the coca growers in their morbid offering was the ultimate expression of the moral degeneration of a party that lost its horizon. In any other circumstances, the massacres of Sacaba and El Alto would have provoked a popular insurrection, but not this time. Sadly, all of this was far from the heroic days of 2003. In this debacle, the MAS displayed its most unpleasant face.

Perhaps the most lasting consequence of the recent political crisis is not the fall of the political project of the national majorities, the fall of their government, but rather the decomposition of the social organizations themselves. Not only did the MAS state and party apparatuses collapse in this process, it is possible that the clientelist union structure will do so as well. Like wood rotting from the inside, it too is disintegrating with the impact of the crisis. This has become apparent, particularly in El Alto, which looks today more like a hydra with many heads trying to quickly reorganize, disregarding, in some cases, the MAS and opposition leaders. Reorganization requires new leadership, as only once the weeds are pulled out will crops grow. The stupor of election day produced disorganization; and the violence of "democracy," in turn, despair.

Pride hinders judgement. The man who kneed a journalist in front of many cameras during a soccer game is the same man who believed he could commit electoral fraud without anyone noticing. The MAS leaders drank too much from the goblet of power and got drunk from it. They did not recognize their mistakes, they ignored a referendum and reacted late to the great fire in the Chiquitanía; they harshly repressed those who challenged them, including the leaders of social organizations who once supported them; it is they, in short, who created the conditions of their own defeat.

And they are the ones who gave a political opportunity to the right and to the truly conservative sectors who now venture out. After a decade of wage increases, improvement of the living standard of national majorities, extraordinary profits for industrialists,

merchants and banks, as they themselves said, in a time of "economic growth and stability," the MAS had the best prospects to continue governing the country for several more years, if they had not stubbornly forced the candidacy of the irreplaceable men.

After several years, the political opposition did not yet have the necessary strength, nor the program required to be a real opposition. In their obstinacy, believing themselves irreplaceable, the leaders of the MAS did not mind pitting workers and peasants against the middle classes, as if in a boxing-ring. It is they who bet on the civil confrontation to resolve the dispute. It is they who replicated and expanded the champa guerra (war among people of humble means), as Bolivian sociologist Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui would say, just as it was incited by the MNR during its decline in the 1960s. It is they who opened the doors to the reconstitution of the conservative forces: just as in 1964, the conservative reaction arrived in November. Morales and García Linera are the ones who are truly responsible for this gigantic social and political disaster. History will judge them.

A political cycle has closed and its requiem must be played. Political processes rarely fit into prefabricated ideological schemes and must be considered in their complexity. We cannot look to the future without facing the mistakes of the past. When the global economic crisis, which has been in fermentation during these past years and in relation to which the economic policies of the MAS government have made the country more vulnerable, finally occurs, other songs will be played. We will have to travel new paths. For now, it is time to reorganize, to clean house. For those abroad, international solidarity must be not with he who wanted to be the supreme leader, the caudillo, but with social movements during their painful process of reorganization and in defense of the social gains they've acquired over past years.

November 24th, 2019

All the elements mentioned in this article can be corroborated by reviewing the Bolivian national media, among others. Newspapers: Página 7, El Deber, Cambio, La Razón, El Potosí. Television: ATB, PAT, Red UNO, UNITEL, TVB, RTP. Radio: Erbol, Panamericana, Fides, San Gabriel, Kawsachun Coca. Social media: Colectivo Curva, VosTv and others.

This article was originally published in Spanish in Bolivia by the Centre for Labour and Agricultural Development Studies (CEDLA) and a shortened version appeared in the periodical Pukara. The author would like to thank Kirsten Francescone, Matt Hawkins and Dawn Marie Paley, who made this translation possible.

CONTROL CIUDADANO

DIRECTOR:
JAVIER GÓMEZ AGUILAR
PRODUCCIÓN EDITORIAL:
UNIDAD DE COMUNICACIÓN Y GESTIÓN DE INFORMACIÓN - CEDLA

Suecia Sverige

cedla
CENTRO DE ESTUDIOS PARA EL DESARROLLO LABORAL Y AGRARIO

Achumani, Calle 11, N° 100
entre Av. García Lanza y Av. Alexander
Telfs.: (591-2) 279-4740 / 2799848
E-mail: info@cedla.org
Casilla: 8630
La Paz, Bolivia