

# **Developmentalism and Social Movements in Bolivia - “Internationally, there is no clarity on what is happening in Bolivia.”**

Thursday 29 October 2015, by [ZIBECHI Raúl](#) (Date first published: 9 December 2014).

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The main difficulty is personalization. The ruling party, the Movement for Socialism (MAS, Movimiento al Socialismo), has not consolidated itself, and there is a large concentration of decisions in the Palace, which is a long term weakness,” states Martin Sivak. Journalist and personal friend of [Bolivian President] Evo Morales, he is the author of best seller “Jefazo” (big boss), which has sold more than 30,000 copies.<sup>1</sup>

For Sivak, it was almost impossible for Evo not to win, so the 61% of the vote reaped by the Evo Morales-Álvaro García Linera ticket was not surprising. “Living conditions considerably improved, there were social investments and investments in infrastructure, economic development was prioritized above Mother Earth, and changes have not been as radical as initially thought,” he qualifies.

Contrary to appearances, Sivak notes, there were more continuities than thought to be possible in those eight years. For example, “under the Evo government, 50 people died in protests,” not always attributable to direct repression. Furthermore, “the economic right lost a lot of money because it pays more taxes, but they weren’t expropriated.” These are nuances between the new, which actually is not so new, and the old, which has more life than you could imagine.

## **Strong economic growth**

The figures speak for themselves. Since 2005, the economy has grown at an average of 5% annually, thanks to rising international prices of export products and growth in export volumes. Mining growth is impressive: it went from 176,000 metric tons from 1999-2006, to 450,000 from 2006-2012.<sup>2</sup> Between 2008 and 2013, the value of mineral exports doubled from \$750 million to \$1.6 billion.<sup>3</sup> The remarkable growth of both exports and the economy allowed the government to implement extended social policies (the Juancito Pinto program for schools, Renta Dignidad for senior citizens, and the Juana Azurduy program for women). Together with increases in minimum wage and employment levels, they reduced poverty for 38% to 18% of the population.<sup>4</sup>

teleferico<sup>2</sup>This large growth in exports allowed for a sharp increase in international reserves, going from \$1.7 billion in 2005 to 14.43 in 2013, 47% of the GDP. The state is implementing the kind of long term development projects that before didn’t exist [in Bolivia]. In the field of hydroelectric

power, increases of 6,000 MW in the next ten years have been proposed with the launch of Cachuela, Esperanza, and Rosita—an investment of \$4 billion between them.<sup>5</sup>

There are several projects in the field of hydrocarbon industrialization: a new ammonia and urea natural gas plant in Cochabamba, a liquid-gas separation plant in Tarija and one in Rio Grande, in addition to investment in refineries and new gas extraction wells. This year the average production volume of natural gas, Bolivia's main export, will reach 64.54 million cubic meters per day, nearly double what was produced in 2005.<sup>6</sup>

policias-conamaq-lpzThe industrialization of lithium production for batteries is expected to begin in 2016. In 2013, the Tupac Katari satellite was launched into orbit with the help of the Chinese, which gives [Bolivian] telecommunications autonomy. An obvious expansion is recorded even in the industries geared to the domestic market. For the first time the country has a paper company, with the help of China, which began production in 2014 and will supply 30% of the domestic market in two years.<sup>7</sup>

The ruling MAS also won a majority in Santa Cruz, with more than half of the votes. It won in 8 of the 9 departments. And it established a strategic alliance with the Santa Cruz agricultural oligarchy: MAS proposed to increase production from 3 to 10 million hectares, and the amount of food from 15 to 45 million tons by 2025.<sup>8</sup>

### **Social movements and autonomy**

If economic growth is sustained and there are ambitious strategic plans in place, the two weaknesses of the current process of change are in the environment and the autonomy of social movements. When the MAS tenure began, the Unity Pact between major peasant and indigenous organizations—who were the foundation of MAS support—was reached. It included the United Syndical Confederation of Campesino Workers of Bolivia (Confederación Sindical Única de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia, CSUTCB), the National Council of Ayllus and Marcas of Qullasuyu (Consejo Nacional de Ayllus y Marcas del Qullasuyu, CONAMAQ), Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia (Confederación de Pueblos Indígenas del Oriente de Bolivia, CIDOB), and the Bartolina Sisa National Federation of Indigenous Campesinas in Bolivia (Federación Nacional de Mujeres Campesinas Indígenas Originarias de Bolivia “Bartolina Sisa”), among others.

At the end of 2011, CIDOB and CONAMAQ—who had supported the march against highway construction through TIPNIS indigenous territory and national park (Territorio Indígena y Parque Nacional Isiboro Sécuré<sup>9</sup>) decided to leave the Unity Pact. They did this considering that “executive power has been biased against the participation of indigenous organizations, valuing organizations related to MAS above all others, the intent of which directly affects our territories, cultures and natural resources.”<sup>10</sup>

conamaq3Since that moment, the Evo Morales government has aimed to neutralize the two principal social organizations critical of its change process. Cancio Rojas, CONAMAQ leader, says his organization suffered a “coup” as a result of government intervention. Rojas was at the 4<sup>th</sup> Seminar for the Integration of Latin America From Below, held in Cochabamba, November 4-5.<sup>11</sup> In effect, the two organizations went through similar situations. In June 2012, CIDOB denounced “government interference, with the sole purpose of manipulating, dividing, and influencing the functional and representative bodies of the indigenous peoples of Bolivia.”<sup>12</sup> A group of dissidents with government support disclaimed the authorities and called an “extended commission” to elect new ones.

In December 2013, a group of CONAMAQ dissidents “affiliated with MAS” took over the local headquarters, beating and expelling the people there. [This happened with] the support of the police, who remained stationed at the headquarters, preventing the legitimate authorities from recovering it.<sup>13</sup> The statement from the organization asserts that the coup against CONAMAQ was to “approve all policies against originative indigenous movement and the Bolivian people, without anyone being able to say anything.”

Based on this reality of state offensives against social movements, which is evident in Bolivia as well as Ecuador and Venezuela, a debate was opened at the Seminar on the type of relationships to maintain with institutions and with international cooperation. Cancio Rojas and Carlos Mamani, both from CONAMAQ, agreed not only to condemn the “coups” against popular organizations, but also criticized the blockade of resources and projects as well as the removal of technical payments by the state. They denounced how the government is acting to neutralize the communities that continue to reject the TIPNIS highway, combining gifts and pressures.

Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui, an anthropologist committed to the movements, profoundly reflected, “The different resistances do not feel part of the same [resistance]. Because what comes after the elections will be the razing of everything that resists. So activism must build bridges between different experiences, because they are defeating us everywhere.” And then she didn’t skimp on self-criticism: “There is a strong dependence on cooperation funds, which makes us vulnerable and takes away autonomy. Self-management, production and sale of crafts, food, [these things] should not have been abandoned, so that there will always be a self-managed wing in the organizations. That would allow us to overcome miserabilism, to stand against the state.” She emphasized that her horizon is not state-based.

As the seminar closed, she gave a talk on “micropolitics and autonomy,” in which she highlighted how progressive governments embody a new colonialism that dominates the political spectrum and all expressions of collectivity. “The only space left for us is the micro, and from there we establish affinity communities that allow us to connect and link networks into a fabric capable of overcoming colonial practices.” Silvia Rivera is inspired by the Tambo Collective in La Paz, a cultural and political meeting place recovered by a group of young people. There, they organize fairs and exhibitions and run a garden to promote urban agriculture with the objective of promoting food self-sufficiency. All self-managed without external support.

### **Solidarity and “selective” convictions**

Sociologist Sarela Paz, also present in the meeting, was part of the team of advisors to the Unity Pact during the Constituent Assembly, and is now linked to the Bolivian Platform Against Climate Change. She argues that the MAS and the government are “an aggregation of local and regional interests which compromises with traditionally dominant sectors (read: agribusiness, mining or oil corporations),” which emerging social sectors with ethnic character join.<sup>14</sup> According to Paz, this social grouping has “ambitions for development that are closest to the dynamics of regional and global capital, rather than alternative visions of development.” The legitimacy of the Evo Morales government facilitates the reproduction of “secular forms of economic coercion” with “democratic” and “popular” trimmings. She argues there were two stages in Evo’s government: the first was founded in the Unity Pact, a progressive agenda and a serious battle with the oligarchy of the eastern part of the country. The second government is different. “It’s a reflection of the breakdown of the popular coalition and the rise of a new power structure whose epicenter is partnership and coordination between eastern agribusiness sectors, oil sectors, and emerging sectors using ethnic rooting as a device for political mobilization.”<sup>15</sup> This new alliance is that one that was massively

blessed in the October 12 elections.

vigilia Feminist María Galindo agrees with this diagnosis, noting “the archaic dominant classes of Bolivian society have penetrated MAS and have achieved significant internal political arrangements so that the government doesn’t touch any of their interests.” In line with Silvia Rivera, she believes that “the main horizon is to work outside the state, in society’s foundations,” something that sums things up to the tune of a Zapatista phrase: “you have to work from outside and below.”<sup>16</sup>

Upon leaving Bolivia, you’re left with the bitter feeling that the left leaning governments of the continent insist on looking up, seamlessly supporting the Evo Morales government and not facing the movements. This is how Aurelio Ambrosio of the Andean Coordinator of Indigenous Organizations (Coordinadora Andina de Organizaciones Indígenas, Caoi) said it with sadness: “Whoever resists is made blamable, and individualized in the leaders. But internationally, there is no clarity on what is happening in Bolivia.”

This conservative turn isn’t perceived in the region. Among other reasons, because the disposition to criticize that which is “ours” is weak. Spanish philosopher Santiago Alba Rico, specialist in the Middle East, says there is so much resistance to admire and so much outrage to condemn, which continues to draw attention to what the Syrian activist Leila Shami calls “selective solidarity” and, in parallel, “selective condemnations.”<sup>17</sup>

It refers to the double standards of the great powers, but also the double discourse of those on the left. A critical view that Oscar Olivera, “water warrior” in 2000, shares. He was an organizer of the Integration from Below Seminar organize, and now agrees with Silvia Rivera on the need to work with ordinary people. He’s dedicated to environmental education for children in schools in peri-urban Cochabamba, from which he focuses on the recovery of collective subjects.

## **Raúl Zibechi**

### FOOTNOTES:

[1] Decí MU, entrevista de Sergio Ciancaglini a Martín Sivak, 14 de noviembre de 2014 en <http://www.lavaca.org/deci-mu/deci-mu-martin-sivak-evo-morales-clarin/>

[2] Petropress No. 33, Cochabamba, agosto de 2014, p. 33.

[3] IBCE, Boletín Electrónico N° 245, 19 de agosto de 2013.

[4] Juan Manuel Karg, “Las diez claves del triunfo de Evo”, Le Monde Diplomatique N° 74, La Paz, octubre de 2014.

[5] Ministerio de Comunicación, “Construyendo la nueva Bolivia”, junio de 2014.

[6] Energy Press, 20 de enero de 2014 en [http://energypress.com.bo/index.php?cat=406&pla=3&id\\_articulo=5585#.VGkhePmG9KA](http://energypress.com.bo/index.php?cat=406&pla=3&id_articulo=5585#.VGkhePmG9KA)

[7] La Razón, 30 de setiembre de 2013.

[8] Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno, N° 149, octubre de 2014, p. 4.

[9] Ver <http://www.cipamericas.org/es/archives/5629>

[10] Somos Sur, en

[http://somossur.net/documentos/Resol\\_CIDOB\\_CONAMAQ\\_pactoUnidad30130118.pdf](http://somossur.net/documentos/Resol_CIDOB_CONAMAQ_pactoUnidad30130118.pdf)

[11] Los dos primeros seminarios se realizaron en Venezuela en 2010 y 2011, a instancias de José Angel Quinteiro Weir y Carlos Walter Porto Gonçalves. El tercero se realizó en 2013 en Chile.

[12] CIDOB, San Cruz, 7 de junio de 2012.

[13] Servindi, 11 de diciembre de 2013.

[14] Sarela Paz, "Elecciones presidenciales y los rumbos del proceso de cambio", Nueva Crónica y Buen Gobierno N° 149, octubre de 2014, p. 7.

[15] Idem.

[16] Contrahegemonía en

<http://contrahegemoniaweb.com.ar/las-clases-dominantes-arcaicas-de-la-sociedad-boliviana-han-pene-trado-al-movimiento-al-socialismo-entrevista-a-maria-galindo/>

[17] En <https://www.diagonalperiodico.net/global/24553-kobane-y-la-izquierda-dilema.html>

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## **P.S.**

\* Americas Program. 9 December / 2014:

<http://www.cipamericas.org/archives/13900>