

Interview with a union officer from Bolivia

Interview with Linder Surco, Education and Culture Secretary of the Regional Workers Central of El Alto (Cor)

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.

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What is the current situation that the Bolivian people are going through, according to your organisation?

First of all, there is dismay in regard to the new government that came into effect. The bourgeoisie in action, has played a new card, and that card is the Constitutional succession. The people in El Alto, the organisations, are demanding and will stick to the nationalisation of our Hydrocarbons. Because the previous government, the one of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, have written a law that currently is simply in favour of the multinational companies when it comes to our resources derived from petrol. In these moments, the contracts that now have been made legal in Bolivia, just a month ago, are harmful, as they give legal status to the contracts that for years and since years have been kept under lock, that no one knew them. The main organ of justice in Bolivia, has determined that those contracts are illegal and now, to give them green light through the Law of Hydrocarbons, approved by the government of Carlos Mesa, is to guarantee the looting of our resources for some 20 or 30 years more in Bolivia.

Because of all that, we demand and ask, through the movement initiated in this very city and that now have spread to all of Bolivia, the nationalisation. But now we are faced to a problem that is the Constitutional succession, being the new president the president of the Supreme Court, what is prolonging the time span of these troubles. No matter what, our demand is nationalisation.

Nationalisation aside, what other demand is carried on today by the Bolivian people on struggle?

First of all, it is always there the demand for nationalisation of the Hydrocarbons and then, we want to reach a Constituent Assembly. But unfortunately, the current government and the bourgeoisie, are trying to do a Constituent Assembly without the participation of some sectors, like, let's say the agrarian or peasant one. The elite sustain to get into this historical moment only with people of their environs, that is to say, the ones to say amen to the traditional parties and those who depend on the crumbs fallen from the US embassy and the multinational companies.

What role do you believe the popular movements have to play in this process of social and political reconstruction in Bolivia?

We, in this moment, have formed the Originary Popular Assembly. In Bolivian history, this is the first tool of popular government, as three days ago, us, because we practically lacked of any sort of legitimately established government in Bolivia, lead to the formation of a tool capable of reflecting the aspirations of the people. That is to say, to administer social justice and in the city of El Alto we achieved this through the Originary Popular Assembly. In other words, it is a form of self-government the one going on in this country. In the days when Carlos Mesa resigned, the people in El Alto formed their self-government through the FEJUVE (Federation of Neighbours' Organisations) and the Regional Workers' Central of El Alto. But what for? With the aim of providing the food and the resources needed by the population, that were lacking security when it came to robberies, for instance, that were lacking medicine, to administrate emergency resources, needed in these chaotic moments. Without the intention of instigating what could be a social upheaval.

Do you think that in effect there has been a situation of dual power between the State run by the bourgeoisie and the social movement represented by the Popular Assembly?

There has been the government of the people, that has distributed the resources in a way that all of the social organisations, unions, get them, with the purpose that in the absence of anyone to provide them, there is no vandalism, chaos or any other degrading situation that plays against our struggle, that is the nationalisation of the Hydrocarbons.

What role have played different popular actors in this new movement against the multinational's government?

Among the new generation in the union, social, civic environs, there are deep roots of this process to nationalise and re-take over our natural resources like the ones of the capitalist industries. Let's say, Bolivia and those at this stage, are aware of the need to take back everything that has been robbed from us, by the previous and all the former governments. We have developed, academically, philosophically, culturally, and above all, in our Andean culture, the essence of getting back what is ours. For all this, we have build up, I repeat, the clear motto of getting back what belongs to us. There is a motto of nationalisation, and that is rooted in the schools, both in primary and secondary levels, in the universities and in every actor of our society.

Do you think that the struggles in Bolivia are on the way of deeper changes?

The actors now on stage, such as Mr. Rodríguez, interim president, constitutionally only for a few months, and the new government to emerge from some supposedly democratic elections, aren't going to be able to solve the neuralgic problems, the lack of education, health, of better days, the injustice. To start with, Mr. Rodríguez, now president, was a bureaucrat in the government of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada and those to become candidates or pretending any political play, are those to count on with the economic resources and the protection of the US embassy. For all those reasons, class struggle in Bolivia will continue, but with a fundamental fact: that in the city of El Alto, we have entered a generational, historical process, in the one we have put the neoliberal model in a situation in which they have begged us, we have been asked to stop the movement. All of that directed from the East, dominated by multinational companies; that is to say, in few words, in Bolivia there is a first instrument called Originary Popular Assembly. When the problems get harder and the exploitation in which we live in Bolivia continues, we will rise the flag of the people's, workers', peasants', students' government, and we will get there, for it is close enough, as we will keep the struggle. I want to indicate that it is neoliberalism the one that has forced us to struggle for better days... the US, the Europeans and the big powers are to blame. And the struggle goes on, brother.

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This interview was done by telephone (14/06/05), with active and young members of the popular organisations that with their mobilisation toppled the multinationals' government of Carlos Mesa, with the ones we have contacts and whose revolutionary convictions should inspire fighters all over the world... we want to thank the support of the Latin American Solidarity Centre (Ireland) that made possible for this interview to take place.

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