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Raúl Zibechi

Bolivia: The Extreme Right Takes Advantage of a Popular Uprising  
November 12, 2019

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*In the following translated article by Raúl Zibechi, the long-time Uruguayan militant and analyst of social movements in Latin America, the author adopts the position that the resignation of Evo Morales was the outcome of his government marginalizing and repressing the very social movements that had formed the base of Morales' Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) once he came to power. While these movements continue to oppose the ongoing right-wing coup carried out by the civilian bourgeoisie and armed forces, they also withdrew their support for a renewed fourth presidential term for Morales. Zibechi takes this opportunity to challenge readers to "see beyond the leaders (caudillos)" and reject colonial and patriarchal forms of politics in our struggles.*

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## **Bolivia: The Extreme Right Takes Advantage of a Popular Uprising**

Raúl Zibechi

November 12, 2019

What caused the fall of the government of Evo Morales in Bolivia is an uprising by the people of Bolivia and their organizations. Their movements demanded his resignation before the army and police did. The Organization of American States sustained the government until the bitter end.

The context for what is taking place in Bolivia didn't start with electoral fraud, rather it began with systematic attacks by the government of Evo Morales and Álvaro García Linera against the same popular movements that brought them to power, to the point that when they needed the movements to defend them, the movements were deactivated and demoralized.

The social mobilization and the refusal of movements to defend what in another moment they considered to be "their" government was what precipitated Morales' resignation. That is made clear by the declarations by the Workers' Central of Bolivia (COB), the teachers and authorities of the Public Uni-

versity of El Alto (UPEA), and dozens of other organizations, including Mujeres Creando, which has been perhaps the clearest of all. The Latin American left appears unable to accept that a considerable segment of popular movements demanded the resignation of the government, because they can't see beyond the leaders (*los caudillos*).

The declaration of the Union Federation of Mine Workers of Bolivia (FSTMB), an organization that is close to the government, provides a clear example of what is felt from many within organizations: "President Evo, you have already done a lot for Bolivia, you improved education, health, and brought dignity to many poor people. President, do not allow your country (*el pueblo*) to burn, and don't allow more deaths, president. The people will respect you for the position you have to take, your resignation is inevitable, *compañero* president. We must leave the national government in the hands of the people."

This sad outcome has precedents that go back, in a short version, to the march in defense of the Isiboro-Sécure Indigenous Territory and National Park (TIPNIS) in 2011. After that massive action, the government began to divide the organizations that convened the march.

Morales and García Linera maintained excellent relations with the business class as they created a coup against the National Council of Ayllus and Markas of Qullasuyu (CONAMAQ) and the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Bolivia (CIDOB), two historic Indigenous organizations. They sent in the police, kicked out legitimate leaders, and then sent in new leaders that close to the government under police protection.

In June of 2012, the CIDOB denounced "government meddling with the aim of manipulating, dividing and affecting the organic and representative organizations of the Indigenous peoples of Bolivia." One group of dissidents, with support from the government, refused to recognize the authorities and convened an "expanded commission" to elect new authorities.

In December of 2013, a group of dissidents linked to the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) within the CONAMAQ took over their offices, and beat and removed those who were there, with help from the police. They remained there so as to impede access by the legitimate authorities who wished to recuperate their headquarters. The communiqué of the CONAMAQ said that the coup against them was so that the organization would “approve all of the policies against the Indigenous movement and the Bolivian people without anyone saying anything.”

On February 21, the government itself convened a referendum so that the people could vote on the possibility of a fourth re-election for Morales. Regardless of the fact that the majority voted NO, the government plowed ahead with plans for re-election.

Both of these actions, disregarding popular will and the removal of the legitimate leaders of social movement organizations, were coups against the people.

But it gets worse yet. On the morning of Wednesday, November 17, 2017, days before the referendum on re-election, a demonstration by parents of students arrived to El Alto’s City Hall. A group of 100 demonstrators entered the building by force, causing a fire which killed six people. Members of the MAS had infiltrated that mobilization, hiding behind a group of parents.

This is the style of a government that cries “coup,” but that time and again repressed organized popular sectors that stood up against the government’s extractivist policies.

For the majority of people in Bolivia, the elections of October 20 were fraudulent. The first counts indicated there would be a run-off election. But the counts stopped without explanation and the results presented the next day showed that Evo had won the first round, obtaining just a 10% lead over his next rival, though without receiving over 50% of the vote.

In different regions of the country there were clashes with police. Demonstrators burned three regional offices of the electoral tribunal, in Potosí, Sucre and Cobija. Citizen organizations called for an indefinite general strike. On October 23d, Morales denounced that a “coup d’état” by the Bolivian right was underway.

On Monday, October 28th, protests intensified, blockades were erected and demonstrators clashed with police, there was also fighting between government supporters and members of the opposition. As in other moments, Morales and García Linera mobilized co-opted social organizations to confront other organizations as well as those who opposed their government.

On November 2nd there was an important development. Luis Fernando Camacho, president of the Civic Committee of Santa Cruz, which had an alliance with the government of Morales, called on the police and army to “stand on the side of the people” to force the resignation of the president, invoking God and the bible. On Friday November 8th, the first three police units mutinied, in Cochabamba, Sucre and Santa Cruz; in La Paz uniformed officers mingled and mixed with demonstrators. Two days later, with the country mobilized, Evo verbally resigned (though not in writing).

In this extremely polarized scenario, we must point to the notable role of the feminist movement in Bolivia, especially of the Mujeres Creando collective, which spearheaded the articulation of women’s organizations in the largest cities in Bolivia.

On November 6, in the midst of violent polarization, María Galindo (of Mujeres Creando) wrote in the *Página 7* newspaper: “Fernando Camacho and Evo Morales complement each other.” She continued: “Both call themselves the sole representatives of the ‘people.’ Both hate freedoms for women and queers. Both are homophobic and racist, and both are using this conflict to try and gain the upper hand.”

Galindo not only demand the resignation of the government and the electoral tribunal (which was complicit in the fraud),

but she demanded that new elections be convened under new rules, with which society is involved, so that “nobody, ever again, needs a political party to be heard and to be represented.”

The immense majority of people who live in Bolivia refused to enter into the game of war that Morales and García Linera set up when they resigned and sent party members to participate in destruction and looting (especially in La Paz and El Alto), probably so as to force military intervention and justify their claim of a “coup” which never existed. The majority of Bolivians have also stayed out of the game played by the extreme right, which acts in violent and racist ways towards popular sectors.

If there is anything left of ethics and dignity in the Latin American left, we should be reflecting on power, and the abuses committed in its exercise. As feminists and Indigenous people have taught us, power is always oppressive, colonial and patriarchal. That is why they reject leaders (*caudillos*), and why communities rotate their leaders so that they don’t accumulate power.

We cannot forget that in this moment there is a serious danger that the racist, colonial and patriarchal right manages to take advantage of this situation to impose rule and provoke a bloodbath. The revanchist social and political desires of the dominant classes is as present as it has been over the last 500 years, and must be stopped without any hesitation.

We will not enter into the game of war that both sides wish to impose.