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For the first time in more than a century, Bolivians are expected to elect a president for the third-consecutive time; indications are that Evo Morales will be re-elected for a term that would keep him in office until 2019 (NotiSur, Feb. 3, 2006, Dec. 18, 2009, Dec. 7, 2012, and Jan. 31, 2014). Morales takes credit for important achievements during his eight years as the country’s leader, and his achievements have been recognized by international organizations and even some of his domestic enemies. Meanwhile, his opposition—mainly right-wing and ultraright groups—has failed to build either strong leaders or a united program. On the contrary, it has mounted destabilizing campaigns that don’t get anywhere in a society that, if measured by votes, is determined to continue backing Morales’ Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS).

"That is what drives the virulent domestic and external campaign against Morales as he isn’t promoting a way to simply wield control of the country’s government," said Julio Louis, Uruguayan historian and scholar on the topic of Bolivia. "Rather he is pushing for an unprecedented way to build socialism."

From the time Morales assumed the presidency in January 2006, he had been seen as an enemy by groups on the right that have tried to damage his image in every way possible. Almost immediately, and in a nearly cyclical rhythm, his opponents tried to generate dissent within MAS, the party Morales created when he was a union leader making an initial foray into politics by confronting the neoliberal policies (NotiSur, Sept. 23, 1994, and April 28, 1995) of two-time President Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (1993-1997, 2002-2003). Complementing this tactic, opponents promoted divisions in MAS’s social base: indigenous organizations and union movements.

Successive failures—even before the launching of this electoral campaign—encouraged the right to make a risky move by backing a major strike by police and noncommissioned officers and sergeants of the armed forces that threatened institutional stability. They supported the Asociación Nacional de Suboficiales y Sargentos de las Fuerzas Armadas (ASCINALSS)—the union of sergeants and noncommissioned officers—when it mobilized under the pretext of obtaining better salaries, rank promotions, and access to higher education.

Between April 20 and the end of June, there have been various protests involving work stoppages, street demonstrations by the soldiers and their families, and a prolonged hunger strike by the wives of lower-ranking officers. During this short, two-month period, much of the right-wing press and other civil sectors repeatedly warned that the elections were in danger.

The seditious movement—which had aspects reminiscent of similar events in Ecuador and Argentina—was fed by a wave of rumors belied by reality. These events, however, showed how far the extreme opposition was willing to go. On April 22, radio and television stations dedicated considerable time to a charge made by ASCINALSS president Johnny Gil, based solely on rumor. News agency Deutsche Presse-Agentur (DPA) reported that day that Gil told noncommissioned officers during a meeting that, in retaliation for the protest, the Ministerio de Defensa had expelled...
four leaders of the union and 60 students from the Escuela Militar de Ingeniería and other military institutions of higher education.

A similar police revolt in Ecuador in September 2010 attempted to overthrow democratically elected President Rafael Correa (NotiSur, Oct. 15, 2010), and, in October 2012, a series of identical events destabilized Argentina’s democratic government.

Although Bolivia’s right-wing opposition continues to experience failed adventures, it has attempted to put its house in order since May. However, just as in the previous two elections, it has been unable to unify its forces, and, on Oct. 12, it will challenge the current administration by offering voters four presidential tickets. With just a month until the elections, the Página Siete newspaper published a poll indicating the opposition has less than 5% support from probable voters.

The presidential tickets are headed by the following candidates:

• Cement magnate Samuel Doria Medina, one of Bolivia’s richest people, working with the Movimiento Demócrata Social (MDS), an ultra-right party based in the secessionist department of Santa Cruz;

• Fernando Vargas, a Bolivian Indian, who heads a Partido Verde (PV) ticket to "revive respect for the Constitution, laws, and international treaties";

• Former La Paz mayor Juan del Granado, a longtime political associate of Morales, who has moved to the right in recent years and has now formed a partnership with right-wing Deputy Adriana Gil; and

• Ex-President Jorge Quiroga (2001-2002), who defines his program as "the opposite of whatever Evo says (NotiSur, Aug. 17, 2001, and Oct. 12, 2001)." In 2010, he was found guilty of defaming a bank the previous year.

The country’s two oldest parties—the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) and Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN)—did not register candidates and are now at risk of losing their electoral status. Attempting to avoid marginalizing themselves, all the candidates except Quiroga promised to maintain the solidarity programs helping school children, young mothers, and senior citizens known as Juancito Pinto, Juana Arurduy, and Renta Dignidad, respectively.

Catholic bishops resume criticism

After a period of relative calm in what have long been turbulent relations between the Catholic Church and the MAS administration, the church’s bishops have again taken to criticizing Morales, who, in turn, has not spared his criticism of the church. The prelates joined the opposition’s campaign and, without offering any details, said in a joint statement, "In this electoral campaign, the president is again using state assets."

On Aug. 22, the Italian news agency ANSA disseminated responses to that charge from two Cabinet ministers. Communication Minister Amanda Dávila called the church a "political rival" and said, "As always, it again is involved in a dirty war against the people and has become the spokesperson..."
of the most conservative structures. The bishops work, as they always have, against policies that benefit the people."

Minister of the Economy Luis Arce said, "In its crude defense of the interests of the powerful and those of the empire [the US], the Catholic Church has become one more political party."

The Vatican replaced Julio Cardinal Terrazas, a vocal Morales critic since the president’s first election, with Sergio Gualberti, who had been coadjutor archbishop, as archbishop of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, on May 25. But the peace between both powers that followed Terrazas’ departure lasted less than three months.

**Morales boasts of economic achievements and solidarity programs**

Against this dismal landscape of the right Morales has much to challenge. When he launched his electoral campaign on July 28, he took stock of his time in office and pointed out that, when he began his first term in 2005, public investment stood at US$600 million, but, by 2014, it had grown to more than US$6 billion. During that speech, the president referred to all his "accomplishments." He spoke about "re-founding the country," which made possible the creation of the Plurinacional State—one national state that recognizes 36 cultural nations (NotiSur, July 16, 2010). He took credit for renationalizing hydrocarbons, which along with minerals now make up 80% of GDP. He spoke of one of the most successful aspects of his social policy—solidarity bonds that include Juancito Pinto, an assistance program for school children; Juana Azurduy, which helps young mothers; and Renta Dignidad, to aid senior citizens who had not contributed to retirement programs.

Morales cited an Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) study disseminated by Agence France-Presse (AFP) news agency that ranks Bolivia as the second-fastest-growing country of the region with growth of 5.5%.

"During these years," Morales said, "we have healed century-old wounds such as discrimination against indigenous peoples and women, unequal income distribution, the economic model of being trapped as a producer of raw materials, and, in recent decades, the destruction of our national heritage through privatizations (NotiSur, Jan 30, 1992)."

In contrast to the opposition’s paltry offerings, the president has much to show. Confident of victory and with the opposition’s lack of a clear governmental program, the president’s campaign events exhibit a deeply ideological and didactic discourse of his party’s goals.

"We have proposed a transition from the neoliberal state to the plurinacional state," Morales said. "This implies a transformation of power relations between social classes and political blocs in the economic, political, and cultural arenas."

Morales maintains there are two blocs. One, the popular sector, is made up of workers, campesinos, small and medium-sized owners, revolutionary intellectuals, and indigenous ethnicities (98% of the population, including mestizos). The other bloc, the defender of the capitalist system, is made up of landowners, allies of transnational companies, and former government officials.

"One," Morales said, "is anti-imperialist and supports all mechanisms of integration and proposes socialism since there will be no peace with capitalism; the other supports close relations with the United States and excludes most Bolivians from access to consumer goods and the benefits of civilization."
When calling on Bolivians to support him at the polls, Morales said that he aims "to complete the inclusive projects we are developing that provide food, health, housing, education, jobs, and security for everyone.

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