



Susanne Käss is Resident Representative of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Bolivia and head of the regional programme Political Participation of Indigenous Peoples in Latin America (PPI).

SEVEN YEARS OF EVO MORALES IN BOLIVIA

ASSESSING A SELF-APPOINTED BEACON OF HOPE FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Susanne Käss

In December 2005, Evo Morales Ayma won the presidential elections in Bolivia with 54 per cent of the votes. The leader of the cocalero (coca farmers') union¹ had emphasised his indigenous origins from the Aymara ethnic group during the election campaign, and achieved the best election result in the young democracy's history. The elections set the seal on the decline of the traditional party system, and propelled the governing party, MAS (Movement for Socialism), into a currently undisputed position of hegemony. Its charismatic leader, Morales, has been fêted not only in Bolivia but also in the international press as a beacon of hope for advancing the interests of poor people and above all of the indigenous population. He and his party campaigned under the promise of overcoming poverty in the country. It proposed to accomplish this by means of an economic model with the state as the most important actor, regaining national sovereignty in the face of international interference, replacing the republican political system by a plurinational model involving appreciation of indigenous peoples and coming down hard on corruption and nepotism.

After seven years of this government, however, the hopes of many have been replaced by a more sober attitude. In October, the country celebrated the 30th anniversary of the end of the military dictatorships and the return of democracy. At the same time, it is undergoing a series of social conflicts unmatched in number since 1982. Now, many

1 | The cocalero unions in Bolivia have campaigned, and continue to do so, for growing and selling of the coca plant to be made completely legal.

doubts are being expressed concerning the democratic credentials of the MAS. Corruption and nepotism are flourishing in spite of the former political elites having been entirely swept away. The public administration is inefficient and lacks transparency. A dispute broke out concerning the government's plan to build a road through the Isiboro Sécure National Park and Indigenous Territory (TIPNIS). Many indigenous inhabitants of the region rejected this scheme; since that point the indigenous movement has been split and a significant part has broken away from the government. The contradictions between the party's manifesto and ideology, between kindled hopes and reality, are at the root of the increase in social conflicts that are bedevilling the country. Nevertheless, it is not improbable that Evo Morales will be elected President of the Andean state for the third time in 2014.

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DECLINE OF THE TRADITIONAL PARTY SYSTEM

After various military dictatorships in the first half of the 20th Century, Bolivia embarked on a democratic phase in 1952 with the revolution carried out by the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement party (MNR), lasting until 1964. Subsequent military dictatorships followed, some of which were very brutal, until 1982 heralded the transition to an initially very unstable democracy. A political system crystallised under which on a regular basis none of the parties represented in parliament was able to command an absolute majority. As a result of this, pacts had to be formed between various parties after each poll in order to guarantee a working government. This system was referred to as a contractual democracy and allowed the country to enter a phase of stability starting from the mid-1980s as a result of coalitions commanding a clear majority in parliament. Many reforms were achieved during this period.

However, the democratic election of the former dictator Hugo Banzer in 1997 stopped the reforms in their tracks and sparked an increasing number of conflicts which were an expression of the populace's frustration with the political elites. The coalition governments that had guaranteed democratic stability in the first place increasingly fell into disrepute and were considered responsible for corruption,

nepotism and cronyism. The citizens regarded themselves as unrepresented by the small political elite which periodically swapped power within its own ranks. As far back as the elections in 2002, there were already signs that some formerly large parties were being marginalised, along with the emergence of new political forces. Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, an MNR member who had already been President of Bolivia from 1993 to 1997, won the election with a slight lead over Evo Morales Ayma, the MAS candidate. This latter party had only been formed a few years before and had not played a role on the national stage up to that point. The political crisis came to a head in Sánchez de Lozada's second term during which hardly any attention was paid to content but rather the sharing-out of offices between coalition partners. It ended in chaos in October 2003 following public unrest with demands for specific policies. During this time, the MAS succeeded in developing rapidly from a regional force into a nationally successful party.



In 2005, Evo Morales was elected President in the first round of voting with 54 per cent of the votes, and a record participation in the ballot. | Source: Marcello Casal Jr. / ABr (CC BY).

THE RISE OF THE MAS AND THE SUCCESS OF ITS LEADING FIGURE, EVO MORALES AYMA

Evo Morales Ayma was born into extreme poverty in 1959 as the son of a farming family in the small village of Isallawi in Orinoca Canton within the Oruro Department.² In search of better living conditions, the Morales family emigrated to Argentina for a few years. They returned in 1982 and settled in the sub-tropical Cochabamba Department in the Chapare Region. After a short period of growing rice, the family began to plant coca because of the higher profitability of that crop. As early as 1983, the young Morales became sports secretary for the small San Francisco cocalero union, rising to become its general secretary two years later. This was the start of a meteoric union career. In 1988, Morales was elected General Secretary of the Governing Body of Cocalero Unions in the tropical region of Cochabamba.

Under pressure by the USA, Víctor Paz Estenssoro's MNR government promulgated the still valid law number 1008 on the regulation of coca and controlled substances. This distinguishes between coca production for legal consumption and that for manufacturing narcotics. The area planted was gradually reduced on the basis of the law, while the state promoted production of alternative products. The USA demanded the total destruction of all coca fields, but neither Paz Estenssoro nor his successor Jaime Paz Zamora considered this option since it would have robbed about 300,000 people of the basis for their livelihoods. However, a partial destruction of the coca fields was undertaken without compensation being paid to the farmers affected. This triggered forceful protests by the cocaleros against the government's policy and intervention by the USA. They contended that they could not be held responsible for the illegal activities of third parties. Meanwhile, everyone was aware that only a small portion of the coca produced was being used for legal consumption, above all from the Yungas growing

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2 | Roberto Ortiz de Zárate, "Evo Morales Ayma", Centro de Estudios y Documentación Internacionales de Barcelona, 20 Dec 2005, http://www.cidob.org/es/documentacion/biografias_lideres_politicos/america_del_sur/bolivia/evo_morales_ayma (accessed 15 Oct 2012).

region, while the remainder was being diverted into the production of cocaine, above all from the Chapare growing region.

In 1994, the cocaleros from Chapare organised the “March for Coca, Life and Dignity”, which culminated in La Paz and in the course of which protests were raised above all against the militarisation of Chapare and the criminalisation of cocaleros. When Evo Morales and his adherents saw little prospect of achieving their demands through union means and the social movement, they decided to use the instruments of democracy and to found a political organisation to take part in elections – thereby achieving democratic legitimacy for their actions. This intention coincided with the passing of the Law on Citizen’s Participation in 1994, on the basis of which Bolivian communities were provided with the means for self-government. For the first time, the rural population above all was able to gain experience in public administration at local level, and play a stronger role in politics. This initiated a process of political consciousness-building amongst the rural population. In March 1995, the “Land, Territory and Political Instrument” conference was held in Santa Cruz, during which the decision was taken by the Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia CSUTCB, the Bartolina Sisa National Federation of Peasant Women of Bolivia, the Syndicalist Confederation of Colonizers of Bolivia CSCB (under which the cocalero unions were organised), and the Confederation of Indigenous Peoples of Eastern Bolivia CIDOB, to found the Asamblea por la Soberanía de los

The greater commitment displayed by the indigenous population to political positions can be explained by the international campaign to mark 500 years of resistance to colonial domination.

Pueblos (Assembly for the Sovereignty of the Peoples) as a political organisation. The greater commitment displayed by the indigenous population to political positions can be explained by, amongst other factors, the international campaign to mark 500 years of resistance to colonial domination, in 1992. To this extent, various sectors of the rural population organised themselves within the new political movement. However, an application to be registered as a party and to be granted a corresponding legal personality on the electoral court was refused. Consequently, the decision was taken to join with the existing United Left party (IU), and to take part in local elections in 1995. Despite the fact that the new political organisation only attracted

about three per cent of the vote throughout the country, it did win all the mayoral posts in Chapare. On the basis of this success, the cocaleros demanded a pre-eminent position in the newly founded so-called Political Instrument, the managing committee of the organisation. This led to a dispute between the rural workers' leader Alejo Véliz, who had been appointed chairman in Santa Cruz, and Morales, the union leader in Chapare.

Evo Morales was able to consolidate his leadership amongst the cocaleros in 1996, and was elected President of the Coordinating Committee of the six cocalero unions in tropical Cochabamba. In 1997, the IU took part in the general elections and only attracted 3.7 per cent of the national vote, however it did win 16.5 per cent and four direct mandates for deputies in Cochabamba. Morales was elected as deputy for the Chapare and Carrasco constituency, the coca growing regions, and scored the best result nationwide in any directly elected constituency with 70 per cent of the vote.

In 1998, the leadership dispute in the IU expanded to include the chairmanship of the Unified Syndical Confederation of Rural Workers of Bolivia, for which position both Evo Morales and the Aymara leader Felipe Quispe were competing. Shortly before, Quispe had completed a term of imprisonment for participating in the terrorist activities of the radical indigenous Tupaj Katari guerrilla army, together with the subsequent Vice President under the Evo Morales governments, Álvaro García Linera.

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The CSUTCB promptly split and the Political Instrument also collapsed.³ Morales wanted to take part in the local elections in 1999, as a result of which he entered into negotiations with a registered party, the MAS-U, a breakaway faction of the Falange Socialista. This gave rise to the MAS-IPSP, the "Movement for Socialism – Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples".⁴ The name of the new party was intended to be a statement against interference by the USA into Chapare's concerns. Initially,

3 | Moira Zuazo, "Cómo nació el MAS?: La ruralización de la política en Bolivia", Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, 2009, 37-40, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/bolivien/06276.pdf> (accessed 8 Nov 2012).

4 | Ortiz de Zárate, n. 2.

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the party was strongly identified with the coca issue, making it unelectable for large sections of the population. It was only when the crisis of the traditional parties extended into a crisis of democracy that the MAS was able to exploit the resulting vacuum and broaden its power.

The first radical expression of popular dissatisfaction with the liberal economic policy was the so-called Water War that broke out in Cochabamba in April 2000. This involved massive street protests against a hike in water prices by the privatised water utility. On 6 August 2001, Vice President Jorge Quiroga succeeded President Banzer, who retired from office due to acute cancer. Quiroga quickly took a hard line against coca production in Chapare. Violent rioting broke out at the beginning of 2002 when the cocaleros heard about the already signed government decree No. 26415 which went as far as banning the drying and selling of coca leaves produced in Chapare. These resulted in several people losing their lives. Following this, the government began talking about narcoterrorism, and the Ethics Commission of the Chamber of Deputies withdrew Evo Morales' mandate, holding him responsible for the riots.⁵ However, this step proved to be counter-productive. Instead of harming Morales, these measures were responsible for a sudden rise in his popularity. The party appointed him as their presidential candidate.

During the presidential elections in June 2002, Evo Morales achieved 20.9 per cent of the vote, placing him only 1.6 per cent behind the winner, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. In the parliamentary elections, the MAS attracted 11.9 per cent of the votes, making it the second largest party. Evo Morales was once again elected as a deputy, recording 81.3 per cent in his constituency; yet again this proved to be the best result nationwide. No candidate achieved an absolute majority, therefore the Congress was called on to select the President from the two best-placed candidates. In the days leading up to the run-off ballot, the U.S. ambassador Manuel Rocha warned against electing Morales, linking this to the possibility of U.S. development aid amounting to 90 million U.S. dollars annually being cancelled. Morales

5 | Xavier Albó, *Movimientos y poder indígena en Bolivia*, La Paz, Ecuador y Perú, 2009, 65-69.

did not win the run-off ballot in the Congress, but he did use the opportunity to denounce the USA's interference in domestic affairs.⁶

Social conflicts soon became exacerbated under the second administration of Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. In February 2003, when the government announced tax increases, violent protests erupted at the seat of government in La Paz, in the course of which 30 people were killed. During this conflict, Morales rose to prominence as the spokesperson not just of the MAS but of the entire extra-parliamentary opposition and he organised protests on the streets of the republic. These were also directed against the government's announcement that it would export gas via Chile to the USA.

The flames of unrest were fanned above all by hostile feelings towards Chile, against which Bolivia lost its access to the ocean in the War of the Pacific from 1879 to 1883,⁷ as well as the fear that the common people would not benefit in any way from additional revenues accruing due to the gas exports. Protests spread from the seat of government in La Paz throughout the country. Following a total blockade of La Paz, intervention by the military and the flight of the President on 17 October 2003, the quasi-civil conflict left more than 60 people dead as well as inflicting deep wounds on the collective consciousness of Bolivians. It signalled the end of so-called contractual democracy and the traditional party system. The explosion of violence meant the middle class now also felt itself rejected by the traditional system. The MAS, on the other hand, was able to gain middle-class support by adopting moderate positions. For example, the party supported the constitutional succession of Sánchez de Lozada by the Vice President Carlos Mesa and, under him, the holding of a referendum regarding what to do with the gas and crude oil resources, held in 2004.⁸ Even in the local elections of

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6 | Ortiz de Zárate, n. 2.

7 | Matthias Mäckelmann and Michael Lingenthal, "Peru and Chile – Does the Road to Good Neighbourly Relations Lead via The Hague?", *KAS International Reports*, Mar 2012, <http://kas.de/wf/de/33.30495> (accessed 31 Oct 2012).

8 | Fernando Mayorga, "El gobierno de Evo Morales: cambio político y transición estatal en Bolivia", *En Tendencias políticas actuales en los países andinos*, Kyoto, 2008, 31.

December 2004, the MAS emerged as the political force commanding the largest share of the vote, with 18.4 per cent. In 2005, Evo Morales was elected President in the first round of voting with 54 per cent of the votes, and a record participation in the ballot.

This rapid rise of the MAS was made possible by the interplay of various factors. Following the economic crisis under the left-wing UDP government from 1982 to 1985, liberal reforms had been pushed through leading to macroeconomic stability whilst failing to resolve the problems of poverty and social inequality. The rural population, above all that of indigenous origin, failed for a long time to find any place for itself in the political system. These segments of the populace were only able to participate actively in politics following the Law on Citizen's Participation in 1994, from which point onwards they developed a new political consciousness. The MAS became their mouthpiece. In this, it relied on the stable structure of the entire union apparatus as well as on decades of organisational experience. The party made use of these assets to organise itself politically and it was able to draw upon a loyal constituency which often lines up as a block behind one candidate due to union traditions. As a result, the functions of the unions were only expanded. To achieve political objectives, a strategy of combining democratic decision-making on the one hand through working in parliament, for example, was teamed on the other hand with extra-parliamentary resources such as street blockades, strikes and public protests.

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State suppression at the beginning of the MAS's rise to power cemented cohesion within the movement. The traditional political system was already on the verge of collapse, and the MAS skilfully managed to occupy the vacated ground. At the beginning, the party only represented the positions of the cocaleros, whereas from the turn of the 21st Century onwards it also attempted to represent moderate positions as well, in order to be elected by broad swathes of the population.

PROGRAMME AND IDEOLOGY OF THE MAS

According to its constitution, the MAS is primarily concerned with defending the coca plant as a substantial part of Andean culture, and one which occupies an important role in medicinal and religious rites. Furthermore, the party condemned eradication of the plant, a policy promoted by the USA, thus building up an anti-imperialist discourse.⁹

However, it soon became clear to the party leadership under Evo Morales that it would be necessary to widen the dialogue in order to stand a realistic chance of achieving power through the ballot box. Thus, even before the 2002 elections, the MAS had already formulated general positions criticising the traditional party system. Evo Morales was built up into the leader of all sectors of the rural population, and increasingly represented indigenous positions as well. In this connection, he benefited from the fact that most coccaleros come from the Aymara and Quechua peoples, although for the most part they had abandoned their traditional territories in order to migrate to Chapare. In the economic context, the party principally expressed criticism of a neo-liberal economic model, saying that it had not led to any significant reduction in poverty. The MAS demanded a constitutional convention with the objective of developing a Magna Carta intended to bring social aspects to the fore. In the political arena, it declared war on corruption and nepotism.

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These positions were differentiated further and, before the elections in 2005, Morales presented a ten-point plan: Holding a constitutional convention, nationalisation and industrialisation of natural gas and crude oil, the Autonomy Law on economic and political decentralisation, the plan for productive development and the abolition of the neo-liberal colonial economic model, the plan for public safety, the Anti-Corruption Law, the Law on the Consolidation of State Finances, the Law on the Distribution of Land and Agricultural Development, a fairer social security system and a new education law for enhancing the culture. In the election campaign, focus was directed towards the

9 | Rafael Archondo, "La ruta de Evo Morales", *Nueva Sociedad*, 209/2007, 82-99, 92.

indigenous question for marketing reasons. Amongst other things, this had the effect of Evo Morales wrongly being perceived outside the country as primarily an indigenous rights campaigner and not as a unionist.

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This programme alone clearly shows the various streams that converge to define the MAS as a whole: Nationalism, Socialism and Indianism.¹⁰ The representatives of the first stream demanded nationalisation of natural resources and a policy against foreign intervention in domestic affairs. Socialist positions were expressed in the call for an equal distribution of income through reforms in the economic and social system as well as for a land reform along Socialist lines. In the process of debate, the class war was replaced by a struggle between different ethnicities. Indianism demanded decolonisation of the system and the emergence of an Aymara and Quechua nation. This clearly shows that the positions of the indigenous peoples in the east of Bolivia were not taken into account. These streams are, in some respects, highly diverse and are not always coherent amongst themselves; without the strong leadership of Evo Morales who embodies them as parts of a single ideology, it is probable that they would fail to coalesce. However, the diffuse ideology also often appears to be an advantage for the party, since it appeals to very diverse voters and permits greater flexibility in strategic planning.

After taking over responsibility for the government in 2006, the party put the National Development Plan into effect, with the objectives of ending poverty and exclusion through state capitalism and distribution policy. The objective, it is claimed, is to establish a sovereign, autonomous state with a pluralistic economy within which state-owned, private and community economic forms by indigenous peoples should interact. The focus is intended to be on the good life (*vivir bien*), a concept with its origin in the Aymara culture (*suma qamaña*) which emphasises harmonious interaction and living in tune with nature and other life forms. With the state as the protagonist of economic development and through the foundation of state-owned companies in

10 | María Teresa Zegada Claire, "Socialismo Comunitarista y Proceso de Cambios como operadores ideológicos en el discurso del MAS", *¿El MAS es de Izquierda?*, 2011, 37-45.

strategic sectors, it is intended not only for self-sufficiency to be achieved in the energy sector by measures such as increasing oil and gas production, but also for general affluence to be obtained.

The government's programme has also formulated additional targets and measures in the social sphere. Corruption is to be combated by measures such as the possibility of investigating private assets and the passage of an anti-corruption law. The stated object in public administration is to build on the basic principle of transparency. Instances of social control must be set up and given the authority to examine the actions of the government at all times. By setting up a multinational state, it is hoped that the contradictions can be overcome between the political system derived from a homogeneous society, and the actual situation.¹¹

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These concepts are strongly reflected in the constitution passed in February 2009. The MAS had a simple majority on the constitutional convention that was elected in 2006. The second most powerful force was PODEMOS, a party chaired by the former President Jorge Quiroga. In spite of massive resources being provided in terms of finance and time, as a result of insurmountable differences the committees were not able to reach any agreement. In December 2007, a draft constitution drawn up unilaterally by the MAS was passed in an irregular procedure, with the exclusion of the opposition. Several violent conflicts broke out in 2008 between the government and the opposition as part of this process, after which both camps attempted to enter into constructive dialogue. A parliamentary commission comprising representatives of all parties negotiated on some of the disputed passages in the text of the constitution, which was then altered accordingly and adopted in a referendum in January 2009. Indian positions are enshrined particularly firmly in this. Bolivia is characterised as a plurinational state with 36 indigenous languages of its own. The concept of a diverse, fragmented society occupies the heart of the matter. The uniqueness of traditional indigenous

11 | MAS-IPSP, "Programa de Gobierno MAS-IPSP. Bolivia digna soberana y productiva para vivir bien", <http://constituyentesoberana.org/info/files/Programa%20Gobierno%20MAS-%20IPSP%202005.pdf> (accessed 15 Oct 2012).

cultures is emphasised. The suppression of indigenous peoples going back over centuries is held responsible for the existing problems, which are to be resolved through decolonisation.¹²

DISAPPOINTING REALITY

On 1 May 2006, the natural gas and crude oil sector was nationalised by government decree 28701. This measure was supported by broad sections of the population. However, the MAS' radical rhetoric has only been put into effect to a partial extent. For example, new ground rules have been defined for foreign companies, without entirely breaking with them. As a result of rising world-market prices for crude oil and natural gas, state revenues from this sector are increasing significantly year-on-year, thus accounting for approx. 60 per cent of the state's income. In spite of this very favourable economic climate, the government has to date still failed to invest in the infrastructure of this sector, neither has it pursued a policy of economic

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diversification. To a large extent, the economy is dependent on external factors such as the global economy and world market prices for the raw materials Bolivia exports. The objective of self-sufficiency in energy has not yet been achieved. Bolivia imports petrol and

invests the state's money in suppressing petrol prices for consumers. 755 million U.S. dollars were allocated to this objective in the 2012 budget, accounting for about 0.51 per cent of GDP. The attempt to abolish this kind of subsidy by a government decree on 26 December 2010 failed in the face of popular riots and protests. This measure would have resulted in petrol prices almost doubling. The low prices mean there is little incentive for companies to invest in the crude oil sector.

The state has set upper price limits and imposed export bans for certain foods in order to guarantee self-sufficiency in foodstuffs, but this has already led to repeated shortages. This policy affects the agricultural east of the country in particular, since it would be able to profit enormously from exports given the high world market prices

12 | Fernando Molina, "La ideología de la Constitución 2009", *Fundación Milenio*, 2009, 39-41.

for foodstuffs. Despite macroeconomic stability and a direct transfer of state money to the needy population, large segments of the population complain that they have not noticed any significant improvement in the economic situation in terms of their personal finances. For example, food inflation was running at a high level in 2009, 2010 and 2011.

State-centralism has been pushed through in the formal economy. However, this contradicts the tendency for the informal sector to expand. The state neither monitors this sector nor are state regulations such as those relating to health and safety observed, and no taxes are paid. Studies show that between 59 and 80 per cent of the working population are active in the informal sector.¹³

The state's monopoly on the use of force scarcely exists at all in the areas of smuggling and drug dealing. In October 2012, there were sharp clashes between the military and Mafia-like smuggling bands in Challapata State which were attempting to remove cars impounded by the military from barracks. In the coca growing regions, there are large areas without any state presence at all. Evo Morales continues to exercise his office as General Secretary of the six tropical cocalero unions, therefore the government is scarcely doing anything at all to combat coca production. According to estimates by the United Nations, the area under cultivation has now attained approximately 30,000 hectares, despite the fact that Law 1008 only allows 12,000 hectares for legal cultivation. In February 2011, the chief of the Bolivian special unit charged with combating the drugs trade, General René Sanabria, was arrested in Panama with the involvement of the Chilean secret service, for smuggling 144 Kilogrammes of cocaine into the USA. Following a full confession, he was sentenced to 14 years' incarceration in the United States. In July 2012, an article appeared in the Brazilian weekly newspaper, *Veja*, accusing former Presidential Chief of Staff Minister Juan de la Quintana and the candidate for the post of governor in the Beni Department, Jessica Jordan, of being linked with Brazilian drugs cartels. The rise

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13 | Fundación Milenio, *Informe de Milenio sobre la Economía*, No. 33/2012, 88-89.

of drugs trafficking and the associated presence of international drugs cartels in Bolivia have significantly impaired the state of public security over the past few years.

The promise of achieving greater transparency in public administration has not been kept. On the contrary, it is becoming more and more difficult to access official data and statistics. Also, corruption and nepotism continue to flourish. At the beginning of 2009, the biggest corruption scandal to hit the government so far resulted in the arrest of Santos Ramírez, then Chairman of the natural gas and crude oil company YPFB, and also a close confidant of Morales. The logic of the MAS structure has left its mark on personnel policy in the public administration. All unions and social movements that support the government want to appoint ministers and place their members in the public administration. As a result, there has been a continuous rotation of personnel in all posts in the ministries, thereby obstructing a professionalisation of the apparatus. This lack of technical knowledge is apparent to all citizens in their day-to-day contact with bureaucracy.

The constitutional convention was held, although it did not succeed in drawing up a draft constitution which could have contributed to appeasing the situation in the country. Instead, the constitutional process became the motive for numerous violent conflicts. Many parts of the text of the constitution are contradictory, a state of affairs that is explained above all because of the speed with which it was negotiated in the parliamentary mediation commission. A constitution should represent a minimum social consensus on which social and political life can build. But this is not so in the Bolivian case. As a result, respect for the constitution is in short supply. Several unconstitutional laws have already been passed under the three-quarters majorities of the MAS in both chambers of the parliament since 2009, and also the government openly flouts the constitution in some cases. These facts make no contribution to fostering a culture of respect for the constitution and the law.

The urban middle class above all had been hoping that the MAS government would deliver a deepening of democracy following the crisis of traditional parties. The promise of integrating all sectors of society, above all the

rural population, into the political system has been kept. However, this expansion of political participation has gone hand-in-hand with the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies in the way the governing party acts. For example, the anti-corruption law passed in 2010 has been used above all as a tool for pursuing former politicians of the traditional parties and opposition politicians. The judiciary has been completely politicised. Criminal prosecutions have already been launched against almost all opposition politicians. This strategy has meant that several opposition mayors and two opposition governors have been suspended. There is no longer an effective separation of powers. The governing party controls both chambers of parliament with two-thirds majorities, and has also controlled the judiciary since the politicised judicial elections in October 2011. Numerous representatives of the political opposition have left the country in order to escape political prosecution, and the remaining opposition has been significantly weakened. Several laws have already been passed limiting the freedom of the press and information, while critical journalists are regularly stigmatised in public by the President. There have also been violent attacks on critical journalists.



Large parts of the Bolivian population depend on coca production. The Morales government hardly clamps down on that. | Source: Ryan Greenberg / flickr (CC BY-NC).

It is clear that the MAS has used democracy for pragmatic reasons in order to achieve power and to implement its own goals, which are at their core directed against a democratic system.¹⁴ At this point, it is revealing to analyse above all the speech given by Vice-President Álvaro García Linera. García is regarded as the leading thinker of the Socialist wing within the government. In the 1990s, he was the joint-founder of a group of intellectuals calling itself “the Commune” and publishing left-wing ideological texts. The group rejected democratic elections as a feature of the liberal representative system, until the MAS became a real power option on the democratic pathway in 2002. Propaganda was made for the revolution. The leading thinkers had to adapt their ideology to reflect the new situation. As a result, democracy seems to be the means rather than the end.¹⁵

The liberal democracy and the state under the rule of law are regarded as part of the colonial system. Condemning the representative democracy has been used by the MAS as grounds for rejecting the will of the majority. A small

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elite takes the decisions and claims to speak for the people. Any resistance is nipped in the bud. According to H.C.F. Mansilla, the MAS is the typical populist party which claims it is always right because it embodies the will of the people. As a result, he continues, it lacks any capability for self-criticism and has little tolerance for dissenting opinions.¹⁶ Excesses in the use of power are justified by claiming that these are the means to implement the will of the people. Degrees of communal, regional, departmental and indigenous autonomy may have been introduced by the new constitution, although the decentralisation process is directed by central instances of state such as the Ministry of Autonomy. As a result, clear limits have been set on decentralisation, and there has been scarcely any effective vertical separation of powers.

14 | Fernando Molina, “Teoría de la democracia bajo fuego”, *La democracia bajo fuego*, 2010, 7-71.

15 | Fernando Molina, *Conversión sin fe. El MAS y la democracia*, La Paz, 2007, VI-VII.

16 | Hugo Celso Felipe Mansilla Ferret, “El discurso de la descolonización, el indigenismo socialista y el nacionalismo tradicional en Bolivia, Reflexiones sobre la temática indígena en la Bolivia de hoy”, 2012, 9-41, 14-16.

The defence of national sovereignty functions very well against the USA, the actions of which are always interpreted as interference. For example, President Morales expelled the U.S. ambassador from the country in 2008, while the officials of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency have also been obliged to leave Bolivia. The actions of political friends, however, are seen in a much more positive light. For example, there are numerous Cuban, Venezuelan and Iranian advisers in the government, above all in the area of the secret service. These cases are not referred to as interference.

When the government came to power in 2006, a Vice-Ministry¹⁷ for Decolonisation was set up in the Ministry of Culture. The Vice-Minister drew attention to himself by various measures, such as the folkloric instruction obliging the entire workforce to come to work once a week wearing traditional indigenous costume. Decolonisation is probably one of the most diffuse areas of the government's ideology. It appears impossible to clearly separate Spanish influences from autochthonous elements within Bolivian culture that has grown up over centuries. For example, the traditional costume worn by Aymara women is copied from European 19th Century fashions. The government's rhetoric gives rise to many myths and presents the indigenous cultures as pure and sublime. In reality, however, large sections of the indigenous population lead precisely the lifestyle that is characterised by a mixture of cultures and by western, above all technological, products.

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The Indian persuasion in the MAS is reflected above all in what the government says, rather than what it actually does. This becomes apparent in various ways, such as the TIPNIS case, in which economic, real-world interests of road building are more important to the government than consultation with indigenous peoples and *vivir bien*. Building of the road through the national park and the indigenous territory was an election promise by the MAS to the cocaleros. This makes it clear that the President is

17 | In Bolivia, government departments are still divided into various sub-entities for certain topics, referred to as vice-ministries. Each of these is headed by a vice-minister, comparable with secretaries of state in Germany.

much more beholden to the clientele of the cocaleros than to indigenous people living in traditional communities. Only a few ministers come from the indigenous movement. The urban middle class as well as representatives of various unions and social movements are much better represented in the cabinet.

The number of social conflicts has risen continuously since the government of Evo Morales came to power.

The MAS' declared aim of decolonisation included destruction of neo-liberal institutions. Although this has been successful, no new stable institutions have been created to replace the ones that were swept away. In spite of significant public support, the government has not succeeded in guaranteeing social peace. According to a study by the Fundación UNIR, the number of social conflicts has risen continuously since the government of Evo Morales came to power. 1,300 social conflicts were recorded in 2011 alone.¹⁸ Defence of indigenous rights has gone hand-in-hand with an attack on the values of the urban middle class. Rafael Loayza advances the argument that the plurinational society is a fiction and that the promised model of a plurinational statehood has awakened expectations amongst the indigenous population above all which cannot be fulfilled in reality. As a result, there has been a rise in the number of conflicts, he observes.¹⁹

In its understanding of democracy, the MAS adheres to the logic of the unions and the so-called social movements, most of which represent very specific economic interests. Pluralism is not perceived as a positive value by the majority of citizens organised in unions, but rather as a synonym for division. The consensus principle is also applied in political decision-making processes within traditional indigenous communities. Unity is regarded as highly important. This makes it possible to explain the block voting in elections, for example. The MAS is attempting to uphold its links to the union movement. This is the only way to explain why President Morales continues to hold his office as union leader. Numerous representatives of the unions and social movements hold offices in the cabinet and the public

18 | "Informe de seguimiento y análisis de la conflictividad en Bolivia", Fundación UNIR, 2012.

19 | Rafael Loayza Bueno, "El Estado Plurinacional ¿El camino hacia la convivencia imposible?", *Reflexiones sobre la temática indígena en la Bolivia de hoy*, 2012, 45-68.

administration. In addition, regular meetings are held with the grass roots. The movements now use street blockades as a means of exerting pressure on the MAS government as soon as the government is not willing to take certain decisions in other respects. As a result, state policy oriented towards the common good is scarcely possible. Exerting pressure on the streets, in some cases involving violence, has proven to be the most effective means of expression for political interests. This is a practice that has been followed in Bolivia for a long time, but was perfected by the MAS and is now being used against it. In the event of a continuous rise in the potential for conflict, it could undermine the stability of this government.

CONCLUSION

At present, there are no prospects for a democratic change in Bolivian politics. The opposition has been minimised through the effects of criminal prosecution, and its freedom of action has been restricted. It is clear that the MAS government is incapable of meeting the hopes and high expectations that it generated. The erosion of the state's monopoly on the use of force, deficient public administration and increasing social conflicts represent a danger for Bolivian democracy. The peaceful pathways of parliamentary democracy are only being used to an inadequate extent as a means of taking decisions. They have been replaced by the logic of frequently violent street protests. If politicians do not succeed in combating this logic and promoting a peaceful political culture, there may be an explosion of violence in the country.

The MAS government is incapable of meeting the high expectations that it generated. The erosion of the state's monopoly on the use of force and increasing social conflicts represent a danger for Bolivian democracy.

Against this backdrop, the social movements that assisted the rise of the MAS could bring the government down through continuous, violent protests. This would not be the first time that the fate of a President has been decided on the streets. If Evo Morales either cannot or will not meet the demands of the social movements, however, there is likely to be a particularly violent response because he has always defined himself as a part of these movements and

betrayal by one of their own will not be tolerated.²⁰ The MAS will not be able to hold onto power without the support of its original base. If, however, the government undergoes a violent fall, the question arises as to who could fill this political power vacuum in order to prevent the country from descending into chaos. It is essential for democratic alternatives to the MAS to be strengthened in order for a democratic and regulated change of government to take place through elections and to prevent the visions of violence from becoming reality.

20 | Following the TIPNIS issue, indigenous organisations have repeatedly emphasised that they had not expected a betrayal by Evo Morales, and thus that it is unforgivable. They would have expected nothing else from previous governments.