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## ***Mass protests spread to Bolivia after a disruption in electoral broadcasts***

Protests and strikes are shaking Bolivia after the vote tally for President Evo Morales jumped significantly during a 23-hour disruption in the broadcast of electoral results. Morales has deployed anti-riot police and declared a “state of emergency.”

After 7:50 p.m. Sunday, the day of Bolivia’s presidential elections, the Supreme Electoral Tribunal (TSE) stopped reporting its preliminary results. With 83.85 percent of polling stations counted, Morales had a 7.87 percent lead over Carlos Mesa, short of the 10 percent needed to avoid a second round. Then, at 6:30 p.m. Monday, the reporting resumed, showing a 9.36 percent lead and 94.7 percent of stations. Yesterday morning, Morales proclaimed himself winner, denouncing the continued protests as “an internal and external coup.”

The latest count, including 99.58 percent of polling stations, showed a 10.48 percent Morales lead, while the TSE said it would repeat the vote at four stations in Beni due to irregularities. The turnout—which is obligatory and enforced—was about 90 percent.

The demonstrations have remained largely led by the right-wing and US-backed opposition in support of the candidate Carlos Mesa, a former vice president and president who oversaw a deadly military crackdown against mass protests led by Morales between 2002 and 2005.

However, the current protests have seen sections of workers and youth participate across Bolivia. Mass anger against Morales and his Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) party from below has been brewing for several years as social and labor conditions worsen.

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Doctors struck for 47 days last year and several times this year, while the San Cristobal mine, the largest in the country, struck for 20 days last month. Moreover, results show Morales lost over 400,000 votes since the last election in 2014 despite hundreds of thousands of new voters.

The Trump administration has exploited the suspicions of fraud, which grew further after the vice president of the TSE resigned Tuesday, to favor Washington's preferred candidate, Mesa. On Wednesday, the US ambassador to the Organization of American States (OAS) declared outright that La Paz "shut down the results so that they could steal the election."

Under this pressure from Washington and citing "high political and social tensions," the OAS electoral mission in Bolivia called for a second round Wednesday. This call was seconded by the European Union. Despite these neo-colonial efforts to directly manage the electoral result before the final count, Morales has continued to appeal to the OAS to legitimize the elections—the same imperialist body that provided a cover for the 2017 electoral fraud in Honduras and has aided the ongoing US coup operation in Venezuela.

The response of MAS and Morales further exposes their class character and underlines that, whatever the outcome of the elections, any future capitalist government in Bolivia will act at the behest of the local financial and land oligarchy and their imperialist bosses.

The objective basis for MAS's popularity has quickly been erased by the crisis of global capitalism, leading it to attack democratic rights and turn increasingly to imperialism.

In 2016, Morales repudiated a referendum in which a 51.3 percent majority voted against reforming the 2009 Constitution that his own government introduced to allow a third consecutive term. The following year, the Constitutional Court ruled that a president can be reelected indefinitely.

A boom in gas, oil and other commodity prices allowed Morales to partially nationalize gas in 2006, while massive profits continued to flow to foreign corporations. State income grew 10-fold and led to a limited expansion of social spending. This was the price paid by capitalism to secure bourgeois rule after mass upheavals against water privatization and for the nationalization of gas between 2000 and 2005, which were channeled behind the election of Morales.

However, the stagnation of the global economy and geopolitical competition are pushing global finance to demand social austerity to pay back Bolivia's debt and to regain total control and re-divide its strategic resources, from gas to silver and lithium.

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Poverty continues to be among the highest in South America and has been bouncing back since 2014, encompassing 35 percent of households. Malnourishment affects one-fifth of the population. Precarious labor, which is informal and largely violates the minimum wage and basic protections, affects 80 to 85 percent of workers.

The 2019 MAS campaign was based on appeals to the ruling class that it can continue to suppress the class struggle to facilitate its right-wing agenda.

At a mass rally in late August, Morales boasted, "a group of private businesspeople has joined us, and what do they tell me? 'I'm not a MAS member nor in the process of becoming one, but I'm profiting more from it than with my own party.' They say that sincerely."

MAS Senate president Adriana Salvatierra told the *Financial Times* that MAS "ha[s] shown we can run a country," while Vice President Álvaro García Linera assured the *Economist*, "The absence of Evo would generate a kind of social dismemberment and convulsions that are characteristic of Bolivia's history."

Such warnings about the eruption of the class struggle by the western media have acquired an increasingly hysterical tone. Before the elections, the *Economist* warned: "After 13 years of his rule, voters are getting restless." And, on Wednesday, the *New York Times* carried the headline: "'There could be a war': Protests over elections roil Bolivia."

In this context, Morales's "state of emergency" is another show of force to the ruling class that he will not hesitate in crushing social opposition. While sidelining the Constitution, which only refers to a "state of exception" that requires congressional approval, he stated ominously: "The Armed Forces have the duty to guarantee the unity of the national territory."

After a meeting with Morales, the Bolivian Workers' Center (COB) trade union, which constitutes an essential backbone of MAS's bourgeois government, also declared a "state of emergency" on Wednesday to secure the "social and economic stability of the country" in open coordination with the police and intelligence services.

In fact, according to a diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks, in his first meeting with the US ambassador after entering power in 2006, Morales "claimed he had demonstrated

his commitment for negotiation over confrontation and that the violence in Bolivia's immediate past had flowed either from the absence of dialogue or a lack of good faith efforts during negotiations." He added that "the syndicates [trade unions] he led had an unparalleled track record in keeping their promises and meeting their side of the various bargains they had entered."

*25 October 2019*