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Civil war elections in Bolivia

Next Sunday, the first general elections will be held in Bolivia since elected president Evo Morales was overthrown in a US-backed military coup, placing in power Jeanine Áñez's self-proclaimed government.

The coup regime, which took power promising to call new elections within 90 days, has postponed the date of the vote three times. Today, less than half of Bolivians, just 43 percent, believe that their vote on Sunday will be respected, according to a survey by *Tu Voto Cuenta*.

The broad popular rejection of the Áñez government has been expressed over the past year in continuous demonstrations by masses of workers and peasants throughout the country.

In November, tens of thousands took to the streets of the capital La Paz and other Bolivian cities to resist the coup. They were violently repressed by military forces joined by fascist gangs like the Cochala Youth Resistance (RJC) and the Crucenista Youth Union (UJC), linked to the ultra-right presidential candidate, Luis Fernando Camacho. In two brutal episodes, the military massacred at least 23 people and left another 230 wounded, subsequently receiving legal protection from the government.



Jeanine Áñez speaks at the anniversary of the Bolivian Air Force, October 12, 2020. (Credit: Agencia Boliviana de Informacion)

The protests resumed this year in opposition to the regime's incompetent and violent response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its successive election postponements. In August, a

wave of strikes and roadblocks rocked the country for 10 days, with the masses demanding the immediate fall of the Áñez government.

On both occasions, Morales' Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) played the essential role in disarming the revolt in the streets, maneuvering with the promoters of the coup behind the backs of the workers and peasants. Morales harshly opposed the popular demand for the overthrow of the regime, arguing that holding new elections was the only way to reestablish democracy in Bolivia.

The electoral agreement engineered by the MAS, however, is proving a farce, providing no guarantee that democratic forms of rule will be reestablished by the ruling class.

On September 18, self-proclaimed President Jeanine Áñez withdrew her bankrupt presidential candidacy, which received little more than 10 percent of support among potential voters, throwing her support to right-wing presidential candidate Carlos Mesa of Comunidad Ciudadana (CC), who was defeated in last year's elections by Morales.

When Áñez dropped her candidacy, Mesa was in second place in the polls, with 26.2 percent, more than 10 points behind Luís Arce of the MAS, with 40.3 percent, which indicated a victory in the first round for the MAS candidate.

But the political calculations of Áñez and her allies, even as they try to support a stronger contender to MAS, are not guided by an electoral strategy. When she withdrew from the presidential race, Áñez called for unity among the right-wing parties, crying out: "If we do not unite, Morales returns, the dictatorship returns." This statement, whose essential content has been systematically repeated by the coup leaders, implies that even a MAS victory at the polls will be considered illegitimate and is likely to be overthrown by the military.

This is exactly the path being paved by Áñez behind the backdrop of the elections. She and Government Minister Arturo Murillo are using their grip over the state machine to drive a campaign to outlaw the MAS and mobilize fascistic forces among the military to serve as the pillars of a terror regime against the working and popular masses.

Last Friday, the de facto government celebrated the 53rd anniversary of Ernesto Che Guevara's summary execution at the hands of the Bolivian military and its CIA "advisers," paying a sordid tribute to his assassins. Áñez declared that the lesson of Guevara's death "is that communist dictatorship has no place here." And she warned that any foreigner, "whether Cuban, Venezuelan or Argentine," who comes to Bolivia to "cause problems, will meet his death."

The fascistic agitation continued in the following days. On Saturday, in an official event broadcast on national TV, Áñez violated Bolivia's election laws by calling upon the population to vote for those who would assure that "Morales and the MAS won't govern us again." She also said of the MAS: "They are violent, they despise democracy, they want to subject the whole people and design a way of life."

On the same day, Government Minister Murillo participated in a police event in Santa Cruz, where he glorified the role played by police officers in the November coup, and appealed to them: "We, I say we because I feel as one of you, have a double task; one with democracy to go and vote to make sure that the dictatorship does not return, that the pedophile does not return, and the other, we have the obligation to take care of the people's vote."

On Monday, in an event celebrating the anniversary of the Bolivian Air Force, Áñez followed the same script. She declared: "Last year, in November, the Armed Forces, together with the Bolivian people, said no to the dictatorship, and that was the end of a long and terrible period of populist authoritarianism."

Murillo made clear the "double task" that he reserves for the military in the elections as he demanded an extension of the "good government act," which prohibits the gathering of people in public places, for two days after the elections. A joint operation of the armed forces

and the police will be mobilized throughout the country, ready to violently repress any popular demonstration against a new election coup.

These efforts are being coordinated almost openly with US imperialism. On September 28, Murillo embarked on an official trip to the United States, allegedly “to fulfill a work agenda with the Organization of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) and the Department of State of that North-American country.”

Even as the MAS representatives denounced a series of violations that put the legitimacy of the entire electoral process in question, their response to these events exposes the cowardice of this party of the Bolivian bourgeoisie, as well as its hostility to any independent mobilization of the working class.

The MAS campaign activities have suffered repeated violent attacks, like the use of tear gas to disrupt a recent youth meeting in El Alto. On the other hand, other attacks have been attributed, without proof, to MAS militants by the press and right-wing parties, which, together with the government, seek to label it a terrorist organization.

Only 10 days before the elections, the MAS presidential candidate, Luis Arce, was accused of illicit enrichment while he was Minister of Economy in Morales’ government. The MAS responded by declaring the accusation part of a “dirty war” against them. Arce faces four criminal charges, including one of “terrorism,” all concocted by Añez’s coup regime.

This week, the MAS warned that a “second coup” was underway in the country, pointing to a series of irregularities and lack of transparency in the procedures adopted for Sunday’s elections.

Nevertheless, in an interview this Monday with *La Razón*, MAS spokesperson Sebastián Michel stated that the problems of the population will end next Sunday, as soon as the elections are held!

Michel made an appeal for confidence in the rigged electoral process urging that: “the people who are suffering, have a little patience; that the people who are starving, hold on a little longer; the nightmare will soon be over. ... A time is coming when the state companies will start to work again. ... when the distribution of income will work again.”

This is a lie. Not only because of the fraudulent nature of the elections conducted by the coup regime, but because the problems faced by the Bolivian masses are rooted in a deep crisis of international capitalism, which the bourgeois national perspective of the MAS cannot resolve. They have nothing to offer to the working masses, except the demand that they “hold on a little longer.”

The economic conditions upon which the Morales administration based itself, the rise in commodity prices and the influx of European and Chinese capital, were already rapidly receding in the last years of his government, which were marked by attacks against the working class. It is the party’s defense of capitalism that makes it shamefully capitulate to the fascists.

The dictatorial efforts of the ruling class and the conditions of growing misery among the masses can only be fought through the independent political mobilization of the Bolivian working class on the basis of a socialist program. Such a struggle will open great possibilities and find overwhelming support among workers in Latin America, the United States and internationally.