

BOLIVIA

The Resurgence of Indo-America

Frederic F. Clairmont



CITIZENS INTERNATIONAL

BOLIVIA

The Resurgence of Indo-America

by

Frederic F. Clairmont



CITIZENS INTERNATIONAL

Published by

CITIZENS INTERNATIONAL

22 Taylor Road
11600 Penang
Malaysia

2004

Printed by Jutaprint
2, Solok Sungai Pinang 3
Sungai Pinang
11600 Penang
Malaysia

ISBN 983-41395-4-3

BOLIVIA

The Resurgence of Indo-America^{*}

Frederic F. Clairmont

The bolting of Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, ousted president of Bolivia, to Miami on 18 October marks an epochal date in the political metamorphosis of the landlocked Andean nation; the blazing of what could well be a new highway in the mass political liberation of Indo-America and the organized victory of the more than 200,000 workers, trade unionists, peasants and students: a mass uprising against the established order. This is not the promised land, but it is more than the start of an arduously protracted struggle which is flinging its shadow over Latin America's ruling elite and accentuating the class struggles that have begun to bite in intensity.

The battle is now joined, for what is at stake is not merely the survival of the political and ideological avant garde in Latin America but the survival of the creole oligarchy and its patron saint and protector: US imperialism. This is what the Aymara socialist leader Roberto de la Cruz meant when he vowed: "We've won an important battle but what we must understand is that the war has only just begun and there'll

be no respite. Don't count on easy victories. What history in this country and elsewhere teaches is that the enemy will fight back. He has licked his wounds but is already regrouping for a counter-offensive. His preferred instruments of war are targeted killings, sanctions, blockades and sabotage." According to the latest tally of the Ministry of Public Health, more than 110 protesters were killed in October and more than 500 wounded. That is not the end of the extermination, for many of the wounded will not survive.

The October uprising was the historical upshot of the most far-reaching and sustained class struggles that raged for months, inconceivable without an ideologically coherent mass organized political base in which the Andean Indians — Aymara and Quechua — surged to the centrestage of history in the federal capital of La Paz and its twin city, El Alto. A movement that owed nothing to chance.

In this nation of 9 million, 75% are Indian or what I shall designate as Indo-American, 15% are mestizos and 10% of European origin although this last ethnic category is highly differentiated socially, economically and politically. The 150 families are the hard core of the white creole oligarchy incubated in the centuries of the Conquista, and whose wealth is consolidated by inter-marriages. They were and remain the political and economic masters of this land before and after it acquired its formal independence in 1825.

Sanchez de Lozada's origin and socio-political trajectories are symptomatic of the patterns of domination and inequity that bedevil Latin America, with Cuba the singular exception. He ranks as one of the wealthiest men in Latin America, a scion of one of the biggest mining, banking and insurance dynasties in the country. His net worth swelled with the World Bank/IMF neo-liberal privatizations of the eighties and nineties. A profile of his caste gives us a clue of the sheer ramifications of his wider cultural and economic networks. He was educated in the United States and possesses an American passport, as do the rest of his family. He speaks Spanish with an American accent. The military branch of his family was educated at West Point and the Escuela de las Americas (School of the Americas) in the Panama Canal Zone.

Weep not for Sanchez de Lozada, for he will not be a peniless exile. He is the owner of citrus fruit plantations in Southern California and Florida. His capital assets, like most of his breed, have already fled the country. It was not surprising that in all cities and villages demanding his mid-term resignation, one saw the two-word ultimatum scrawled in English: "Get Out." The ruling junta understood the wider political reverberations of this order. How reminiscent of another, no-less-potent slogan that was also scrawled everywhere in the Indian subcontinent in 1942: "Quit India."

Despite the panic-stricken pleadings of the Spanish and US embassies that he should hang on and crush the insurgency, the march of popular resistance dictated his ouster.

The peaceful protesters set up roadblocks and called for a general strike that was followed. Sanchez de Lozada, the ever-loyal domestic to the policies of the US mega-terrorist state, was driven in the dead of night to the airport in an armoured US vehicle and flown in a US military aircraft to Miami. Symbolically, it defined the relationship between the master class and the servant class. It was pathetic to listen to the parting words of this emasculated politico gushing with sentimental nostalgia. "I leave my beloved country knowing that the dangers hanging over it remain intact." They do indeed, for they spell the approaching extinction of his class rule. He had scripted his own political obituary for he and his masters no doubt understood that was the end of his road. He could no longer be recycled. But his class, his masters and the state apparatus, although shaken, are still basically intact.

Sanchez de Lozada absconded before being indicted for crimes against humanity, but the indictment remains. What would have been the repercussions if the security forces of Hugo Chavez had killed a couple of white protesters that were calling night and day for the overthrow of his elected government? It requires no effort of the imagination to see that the Empire's media would have hollered to the heavens of grotesque "violations of human rights." The difference here is that the victims were Indo-Americans one of whose major political planks was to effect changes in the existing system of property and social relations.

The social explosion was due to a multiplicity of factors but the most pressing was the eradication of coca cultivation on the order of the US government deploying US army helicopters and chemical defoliants. The ecological effects related to the widespread deployment of these chemical defoliants were devastating, as were its revenue and employment impacts on the peasant cultivators. The US moves slashed GDP by an estimated 4%, savaging the livelihood of more than 120,000 farmers. So-called “legal crops” provided jobs for only one in five of those who worked in coca cultivation.

The flipside of the destruction was that it generated one of the world’s most powerful and articulate farmers’ unions, which, together with the industrial unions and miners and indigenous peoples, became the spearhead of the resistance to the oligarchy known as La Rosca.

The leader of the coca union was none other than Evo Morales, one of the young (42) radical leaders and founder of the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS). Morales did not and could not dissimulate from where he came and where he was going. The audacious and eloquent manifesto was free from doubletalk.

There is no future for the theology of neo-liberalism. This is the path of genocide. Either we advance to socialism and embrace the public ownership of resources and planning that is the drive wheel of socialism, or we lurch backwards into slavery and genocide. In our blueprint for the new order we have

no truck with neo-liberalism, the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and the mass privatization and expropriation of our national heritage. This means there is no place for the World Bank and the IMF [International Monetary Fund] and the WTO [World Trade Organization]. To believe that our cumulative misery can be halted and reversed by tinkering with market forces manipulated from abroad and fiscal and monetary gimmicks is the acme of madness.

The Economist and other ruling-class propagandists are whining of the grim future that faces the established social order as “the successor government to Lozada will be facing reckless opposition by people who are skilled at whipping up protest but have few realistic solutions to offer”.¹ What an amazing morsel of bombast. Indeed, what were the “realistic solutions” that the Conquistadores, their successors and the US corporate and political junta achieved in Bolivia with their grandiose neo-liberal designs over the last 500 years?

Profound social changes against entrenched interests will not be realized without the pursuit of class struggles. The Financial Times says: “The IMF, World Bank and the US will be pushing Javier Cuevas, the finance minister in the successor government, to keep the free market model intact.” This necessitates that the present government of Carlos Mesa, fully anointed by the US State Department, should ensure that the continued domination of national and transnational capital remains inviolable. The Economist advocates — representative of the stratagems of corporate capital

— that in the current revolutionary maelstrom in Latin America the political choices should be unambiguous. “Put bluntly, Latin America needs more Lula da Silvas and fewer Chavezes or Morales. This is where the United States could help.” (italics mine) We can assure The Economist that such “help” is massively underway.

What had given the organized working class in Bolivia an enormous impetus was the successful opposition to water privatization in the city of Cochabamba by the Bechtel corporation, in which US vice president Dick Cheney is one of the major shareholder. Victory would have been impossible without formidable working-class unity seen in the self defence committees at the urban and village levels that galvanized political consciousness at the local, national and regional levels. However, while the bankers, capitalists and landowners have taken fright, it must not be ignored that they are still entrenched in the commanding heights of the national economy.

The second major front against the oligarchy and the US junta was opened up when the political resistance forces repudiated foreign ownership, control and marketing of Bolivia’s natural liquefied gas resources (the second largest deposits in Latin America) to the US via a pipeline to a Chilean port. This was a vast area that originally belonged to Bolivia, annexed by the Chileans in 1875. The organized masses refused this gas deal, seeing it, as Roberto de la Cruz says, as amounting to a blatant return to the days of unbridled capitalism when profits, dividends

and interest payments were creamed off by international companies with accountability to none. Debt servicing and profit remittances gobble up 65-70% of export earnings.

Chairman Mao's formula has not lost its relevance: "Where there is oppression there is always resistance." Here is a country on the move, with the bulk of its people, according to World Bank data, grovelling on \$2 a day. Every social indicator is branded with the mark of hunger and social deprivation: endemic poverty, among the highest infant mortality rates in the world, chronic unemployment in which the numbers are no longer even counted. According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 43% of Latin America's peoples are living below the poverty line. In Bolivia this figure escalates to 55 per cent.

Where is the economic surplus of the nation going? Who are the expropriators of the nation's wealth? These are not questions that are being debated in academic and esoteric circles but the subject of widespread national debate, a source of burning indignation. Where is the talk of the Monterrey Declaration with its golden promise of economic aid? Over the last two years, more than \$200 billion has flown out of the Latin American region. In short, as we have always known, the resources of the region's peoples are filling the troughs of finance capital in the developed capitalist economies. The mask has slipped.

The social explosion in La Paz and El Alto was part of a much broader canvas that saw, in a relatively short time scale, the ouster of three presidents in Argentina, Ecuador and Peru. Grinding poverty, corruption and the sheer inability of capitalism's ruling class to deliver anything but non-stop repression and impoverishment were part of the picture. Chavez's victory in Venezuela that smashed the two-party system of the dominant oligarchy survived despite domestic and foreign intervention. These changes moved in tandem with the mass upsurge of the landless movements in Brazil and elsewhere.

It is at this juncture that the achievements of Porto Alegre and more recently Mumbai sparkle in clearer perspective. It was here, at the World Social Forum, that Indo-America came in great numbers to exchange experiences and build up a sustained organizational resistance network. The Internet this time proved to be an indispensable tool of revolutionary organization. The anti-capitalist globalization front sparked in Seattle burgeoned over the years, culminating in imperialism's debacle in Cancun. The crippling of the WTO and the hammer blows against the US-concocted FTAA are proof sufficient of the all-too-glaring cracks and fissures of international capitalism.

The Promethean strides of Indo-America were nothing short of breathtaking for those of us who glimpsed this tidal wave of militancy over several decades. "The comatose Indian", that stinking little Spanish buzzword, has been flung into the dustbin of history. Subcomandante Marcos, philosopher and leader of the Zapatista National Liberation

Army, reminded us of how the Indio was described by the Spanish conquistadores as “a people with the colour of mud.” My larger Oxford English Dictionary enlightened me on its pejorative usage: “something regarded as worthless or polluting ... the worst part of anything, the dregs.” This was the designation of a people that had given humanity the incomparable civilizations of the Aztecs, Mayas and Incas and whose blood, sinews and muscle laid the foundations of globalized capitalism. The great political renaissance of the Indo-Americans in the eighties and nineties coincided with the mass awareness of the splendours of their cultural heritage and, above all, of the scope and nature of the greatest sustained holocaust to which any people had ever been subjected.

Let’s recall briefly the nature of this infamous crime which would be neither forgiven nor forgotten, slated to become one of the cradles of international capitalism. True, the extermination and exploitation of the Indo-Americans had begun with the advent of the Conquista in 1492, but it was more than five decades later, in that never-to-be-forgotten date, 1545, that the holocaust was born. It remains an apocalyptic date not only in the blood-drenched history of “primitive accumulation” (or what Adam Smith called “prior accumulation”) but also in the mass genocide through labour servitude of the Andean Indian.

It was the year of the discovery of the inexhaustible silver mines in Potosi, in what is now Bolivia but was then part of the viceroyalty of Peru, in the mountain range of Cerro Rico. “The mud-faced peoples” who worked those mines were

dragooned from the entire Andean region and beyond. This was the slave labour that for centuries constituted the bedrock of primitive accumulation so dramatically depicted in that imperishable formulation of Marx in Chapter 31 on "The Genesis of the Industrial Capitalist" in *Capital*.

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, the conversion of Africa into a warren for the commercial hunting of the blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.

The life expectancy of the enslaved miners was six years. Those unable to work because of accidents were dumped in the villages; the luckless ones were slaughtered. More than six million died over four centuries in this fabulous rush to riches for a few and the premature death of millions when the last drop of blood of their labour power had been squeezed from their half-starved bodies. Independence changed nothing. Slavery did not end with independence, nor did exploitation. It was only at the start of the 20th century that a subsistence wage system emerged similar to that in South Africa's gold mines. No less primordial than the unspeakable suffering imposed on the enslaved miners was the deleterious ecological impact: deforestation, the rape of the earth, massive depopulation of the region and the annihilation of traditional agriculture. These were the tears of blood that were simply scrubbed from the preda-

tors' history books.

The historical record of these crimes cannot, however, be obliterated. The victims have risen from the ashes and a spectre now haunts the region's ruling classes. The Indo-American will neither forgive nor forget. Felipe Quispe, founder and theorist of the Pachakuti Indigenous Movement, also branded, as Morales, an irrepressible racist by the oligarchy and certain scribblers of the US corporate media, retorts: "We cannot accept and indeed we reject the murderous and tyrannical legacies of the Conquista. Bolivia and Latin America will be forged in fires of a different kind. We are not racists, but let those who momentarily rule understand that the people have to be conscious of our right to govern ourselves according to the models of governance that we have chosen. We shall take our seats in parliament because we are the original owners of this land. But that's only a transitory stage in our journey."

What we are experiencing in Bolivia with such clarity is not only a sharply rising political consciousness of the revolutionary working class and peasantry, but also an awareness that a successful social revolution — which Evo Morales calls "the unbending road to socialism" — can only bear fruit when it is joined to an ethnic pride of the race and its cultural links with the unscissored past. It is only in this sense that the question "from whence have we come and whither are we going" assumes a truly new historic dimension.

In his classic work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1910, revised in

1920), the distinguished African American scholar W.E.B. Du Bois drove home the point that the problem of colour is a major factor in the historical process in the 20th century. We might add that the judgment is relevant to the 21st century as well. It is apposite to recall those pungent reflections as they impinge directly on the renaissance of Indo-America in our time and on the class and racial dimensions of imperialism.

The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line — the relation of the darker races to the lighter races of men and women in Asia, in Africa, in the Americas and the islands of the sea ... How many of us today fully realize the current theory of colonial expansion, of the relation of Europe which is white, to the world which is black and brown and yellow? Bluntly put, that theory is this: it is the duty of white Europe to divide up the darker world and administer it for Europe's good. However despicable 1914-1918 was, it was nothing to compare with that fight for freedom which black and brown and yellow men must and will make unless their oppression and humiliation and insult at the hands of the White World cease. The Dark World is going to submit to its present treatment just as long as it must and not one moment longer.

A formidable testimony of man's faith in his ultimate liberation and whose prophetic force is now in the throes of realization. As Evo Morales tells us, the physical liquidation of the Arbenz reforms, or the triumphs of the United

Fruit Company which are the other side of the coin, in Guatemala in 1954 was trailed by the massacre of more than 300,000 Central American and Guatemalan Indians. It was part of the appalling apprenticeship of blood of the Indo-Americans and others.

It was against the backdrop of the Cuban revolution that has stood its ground against seemingly insuperable odds, and the aura that it inspired, that a new dawn in Bolivia's history was ushered in. Che Guevara, a medical doctor, believed that the moment was propitious for a successful revolutionary onslaught against La Rosca. In contrast, there were his so-called 'progressive critics' who pilloried Guevara as an adventurer, ignorant of the material conditions under which he launched his legendary enterprise, adding for good measure that he never constituted a threat.

Unbelievable as it may have appeared, it was an enterprise consisting of only 49 men and one woman. These internationalists battled on for two years (1966-67). At the end of their epic resistance, their numbers had dwindled to less than half. Guevara and his group believed, drawing on the Cuban experience in the Sierra Maestre, that the campesinos (peasants) and the workers would be pulled into the movement like iron filings to a magnet. This was not to be. Cuba and Andean America were at that time at different levels of historical consciousness and organization.

It is timely to recall the blistering critique of Lenin against those social democrats that excoriated the Irish insurgents, notably James Connolly, who led the spring uprising in

Dublin in 1916. It was an onslaught by a small band of nationalists whose objective was the toppling of the British Empire in its oldest colony. It was the first armed uprising against the mightiest of empires then bleeding in the Battle of the Somme. Both Nehru and Gandhi were aghast by its audacity. Lenin's thesis was the essence of lucidity. He castigated "those superior strategists with their vaunted omniscience, that babble of putschism and adventurism, but who are oblivious that the world is traversing the greatest imperialist massacre [1914-1918] in history in which tens of millions are being butchered."

The victims of this butchery, he went on, are workers and peasants. Hence, it is the prime task of social democrats, he emphasized, to crush and weaken the system by any and every conceivable strategy. That is precisely what the oppressed colonial peoples of Ireland and their vanguard were doing; theirs was not a putsch, he argued, but a revolutionary act. Those who indulge in such preachments of omniscience, he concluded, must learn that there can never be an ideal moment for the launching of a revolutionary struggle. "Revolutions are not made with chronometers". To be sure, in one year's time, this thesis would be tested in the assault on the autocracy's citadels of power.

What Guevara and his internationalists in their messianic conception believed was that the passions of revolutionary voluntarism could smash a fascist phalanx. The premise is admirable but they knew very little of their adversary's organization and firepower. The country had been massively militarized, thanks to the CIA and the Pentagon, with

highly trained professional killers in the five years preceding 1966. These included the deployment of US Green Berets, training in the School of the Americas in the Panama Canal Zone, Fort Hood in Texas and others. Many had served in Vietnam in the early 1960s. Several Bolivian officers would pursue their postgraduate genocidal experience in Vietnam, in Central America and specifically Nicaragua, where their lethal propensities were once again applauded in the corridors of the Pentagon and the corporate media.

What struck the world was the sheer physical courage of Guevara's tiny band that stayed the course for almost two years before finally being outgunned by an incomparably greater class enemy at home and abroad. He was captured on 8 October 1967 and executed the next day on the orders of the CIA. They were present at his execution to ensure the elimination of all traces of his body and its final resting place.

In one of his diary entries, Guevara lugubriously gave us an invaluable insight into the unfolding of an historical process: "The inhabitants of this region are as impenetrable as rocks. You speak to them [he spoke Quechua] but in the deepness of their eyes you can see that they do not believe you."² These are words that recall the wisdom of the Russian Hegelian, Alexander Herzen, who wrote in the middle of the 19th century: "You can waken men only by dreaming their dreams more clearly than they can dream them themselves." Here was the fatal rub. Guevara, this towering figure who made, as William Blum shrewdly observed, social revolution his life's work, did not grapple with the

souls of the campesinos. Such a verdict, while plausible on the surface, cannot ignore, however, the reverberations of his extermination that ignited Latin America, not least Indo-America. A murder most foul that became the well-spring of his resurrection.

Evo Morales, outstanding Indo-American socialist leader, recalls that he was only 7 years old when he heard of his murder. Like the young Hugo Chavez and countless others, he raised questions as to the nature of this man and his companions who crossed the seas and the mountains and the wild forests to liberate his country and its peoples. "The death of El Che," he wrote, "meant that I began to ask questions. What was he fighting for? Why was he murdered and disposed of in such haste and in such a hideous way? I came to see, as I uncovered layer after layer of that great life, the poverty and centuries-old oppression and humiliation of my peoples not as part of a divine dispensation, as our people were brainwashed into believing. Over the centuries the Church had shoved it into their brains that they were born to be exploited. Breaking with the tyrannical dogmas of the Church and revolting against exploitation were for me part and parcel of the same battle. In the quest for enlightenment my first teachers were my own race. That was well before I read *The Communist Manifesto*, Galeano's *Open Veins of Latin America*, before I read and re-read the speeches of Fidel and learnt and studied the theory and practice of Cuba's road to socialism. Then I became a teacher, a public speaker and a trade union organizer. I was now part of the labour movement. It wasn't surprising that the masters of this land and their gringo paymasters

branded me a racist and a troublemaker. I expected them to. I translated my reading and study into concrete practice. That was the heritage of El Che.”

It reminds me of the metaphor of my teacher, the great economic historian Paul Mantoux, who wisely observed that “only a negligible quantity of ferment is needed to effectuate a radical change in a considerable volume of matter.”³ Guevara was that ferment. The Indo-American ceased to be “as impenetrable as rocks.”

This is one of the most poignant autobiographical statements that I have ever read emanating from the entrails of the capitalist underdeveloped universe, encapsulating as it does the unquenchable striving of Indo-America for the freedom which, momentarily, is still elusive. Apart from being an exquisite homage to Guevara, it bears testimony to the spirit of combat and the unbending determination to obliterate the obstacles of a decadent economic and social order that will not and must not survive.

The killings in what is now immortalized as “the October uprising” (although the slaughter began before that month) centred in La Paz and El Alto. They were galvanized by the masters of capital. They failed to achieve their objective, which was to crush the workers’ resistance. The resistance was a combat against national exploitation and globalization.

It is appropriate that the Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos, in his reference to Cancun, was also drawing the

lessons from the triumphs of the Bolivian insurgency.

It is a war. A war against humanity. The globalization of those who are above us is nothing more than a global machine that feeds on blood and defecates in dollars. In the complex equation that turns death into money, there is a group of humans who command a very low price in the global slaughterhouse. We are the indigenous, the young, the elderly, the women, the children, all those who are different. That is to say, the immense majority of humanity. This is a world war of the powerful who want to turn the planet into a private club that reserves the right to refuse admission. The exclusive luxury zone where they meet is a microcosm of their project for the planet: a complex of hotels, restaurants, and recreation zones protected by armies and police forces.

All of us are given the option of being inside this zone, but only as servants. But we have no reason to obey and accept this choice between living as servants or dying. We can build a new path, one where living means life with dignity and freedom. To build this alternative is possible and imperative. It is imperative because on it depends the future of humanity.

Indubitably, the upsurge of Indo-America, of which the Bolivian insurgency is but one segment in a much larger historical process, is a giant step in the remaking of Indo-America and, indeed, our planet.

* I would like to thank Lim Jee Yuan and Lean Ka-Min for their assistance in the preparation of this paper.

1 The Economist, November 1-7, 2003.

2 William Blum, *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions since World War 2*, Monroe, Maine, 1992.

3 Paul Mantoux, *The Industrial Revolution in the Eighteenth Century: An Outline of the Beginnings of the Modern Factory System in England*, London, 1939.

Other papers by Frederic F. Clairmont published by Citizens International

In this gripping pamphlet the author questions the arrogant affirmations of US omnipotence peddled by its corporate manacled press, radio and television media. The essential thrust of this major contribution to the political economy of global power is to describe and analyse the extent to which the wholly corrupt, demoralised and criminalised structure of American capitalism is being battered and swiftly undermined by one of the most tenacious world economic depressions of all times. He investigates the role of the current depression and the crumbling of empire that is inseparable from the swelling debt that permeates every niche of American capitalism and which in both the short and medium term is unsustainable. A process of indebtedness that he contends that could reach a breaking point stemming from its current war of conquest in Iraq.

This hard-hitting brochure based on extensive research is a complement to the author's earlier work, *USA: The Crumbling of Empire* that examined the implications of the debt that permeates every niche of American capitalism. It is the author's central thesis that the horrendous war crimes committed against Iraq will prove to be one of the crucial phases in the debacle of imperialism. The author pungently points out that never perhaps in the history of any conquest has the reversal of fortune been so swift as in Iraq. The tremors of fear and chaos are shaking the US caste oligarchy, which has never

been more isolated than at present. One of the author's major contributions is also to have unravelled the nexus between the role of the United Nations and its agent Sergio de Mello and US imperialism in the occupation of Iraq. The plans of conquest have, however, gone awry, as he concludes, due to the sustained struggle of the Iraqi resistance movement which has become an anti-imperialist catalyst of Promethean force throughout the region and beyond.