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New state, new government, the next steps

More than just a change of government

January 22 was not just the day Evo Morales was reinstated as president of Bolivia but a new departure in the way the state is conceived. The liberal “colonial” republic was buried with pomp and a new plurinational state ushered in, seeking the inclusion of all -- indigenous people and *mestizos* alike.

Symbolism was strong during the festivities. The vice-president, Alvaro García Linera, and then the president took off their previous emblems of office and donned new ones. The old emblems dating back to the beginning of the Republic were placed in display boxes and carried off by members of the Colorado regiment (the presidential guard that still dresses in nineteenth century uniforms) to be placed in the vault of the Central Bank. The new emblems include the presidential band with both the national flag and the multicoloured *wiphala*, and flowers from high and lowlands; the vice-presidential medal includes engravings of Simón Bolívar and Tupac Katari side by side.

In the newly decorated Chamber of Deputies (within the Plurinational Legislative Assembly) independence heroes Bolívar and Sucre have been moved over to one side to make room for indigenous leaders Tupac Katari and Bartolina Sisa. The first authorities of the Plurinational State took their oaths on the new constitution and not the Bible.

It fell to García Linera, vice-president for a second term, to outline the thinking behind this change:

- He referred to the republican liberal state as an ‘apparent state’ or an illusion, since it only represented a small part of the population, excluding the indigenous majority and not complying with its responsibilities for administering the common good to the benefit of all. By contrast, the new plurinational state was an ‘integral or whole state’, in which there is greater harmony between the people and its representatives.
- The stated objective is one of socialism, or ‘communitarian socialism’, based on the concept of ‘living well’ (*vivir bien*).

- The state will be built on three main pillars: an inclusive plurinational state, with equal rights for all; democratic autonomies, based on decentralisation and state building at the local level; and economic sovereignty, with a plural economy in which the state plays a strong role.

The day before, in the ruins of the pre-Inca city of Tiwanaku, Morales had spoken more to an international audience. He said that the days of colonialism were over. He blamed capitalism for destroying Mother Earth (*Pachamama*), promoting selfishness and marginalisation. He argued that it was more urgent today to protect the rights of the *Pachamama* than to protect human rights. He called on indigenous peoples in particular to begin a crusade to defend humanity and the planet, through ‘living well’ and in harmony.

Conscious of his role as an international figure, Evo Morales intended this speech to reach beyond Bolivia’s borders. He has called for an international meeting on climate change in Cochabamba in April, an indication of the way in which Bolivia is seeking influence in the wider world.

The Plurinational Legislative Assembly

In some ways the new Assembly, a result of the new constitution, is little changed from the Congress it replaces. The number of deputies for example remains the same, although the number of senators has increased from three to four per department. In other ways, though, the changes are substantial. The vast majority of members of the Assembly are the representatives of social movements, many little known outside their constituencies. Representatives from social movements will therefore play an important part in implementing the new constitution and in the debates that this presupposes. The MAS has sufficient weight in both houses to carry this out. The important thing is that there is proper debate in which civil society plays a central role.

In the Senate, the governing MAS party has 26 seats, whilst the opposition (Plan Progreso para Bolivia, PPB) has ten. The MAS won all four seats for La Paz, Oruro and Potosí, three out of four in both Cochabamba and Chuquisaca and

two out of four in the four lowland departments. The scale of the MAS majority came as something of a surprise in the lowlands, reflecting as it did the 64% won nationally by Morales. Of the senators, 16 are women, and for the first time the Senate will be presided over by a woman, Ana María Romero. An independent allied to the MAS, Romero was previously a much respected journalist and ombudsman (*Defensora del Pueblo*).

The new Chamber of Deputies continues to be composed of 130 representatives, but seven of their number now represent special indigenous seats. In all, the MAS gained 89 seats, the PPB 36, Unidad Nacional (UN) three and Alianza Social (AS) two. The new president of the lower house is Héctor Arce from the MAS. In both houses, the MAS has more than a two-thirds majority.

The new Assembly includes leaders from social movements: *campesino* leaders such as Fidel Surco, Isaac Avalos and Luis Alfaro; indigenous leaders Wilson Changaray, Bienvenido Sacu and Pedro Nuni; women *campesina* leaders like Segundina Flores; and leaders from mining cooperatives such as Andrés Villca. Several representatives played an important role in the Constituent Assembly and it is perhaps fitting that they will now play a part in putting the new constitution into effect. Some have experience in government: Eugenio Rojas, the former mayor of Achacachi; David Sánchez, the former prefect of Chuquisaca; Gabriela Montaña and Rebecca Delgado, former presidential representatives in Santa Cruz and Cochabamba respectively; and Fabián Yaksic, hitherto a minister. Jorge Medina is the first Afro-bolivian ever to gain a seat in parliament.

The opposition is also fielding many unknowns. Amongst the better known are Germán Antelo, formerly president of the Comité Pro-Santa Cruz; Roger Pinto, the former prefect of Pando; and Antonio Franco, a former deputy.

Apart from Pinto and Franco, the few Assembly members who were in the previous parliament include René Martínez, a former MAS deputy and head of the Constitutional Committee who is now a senator for Sucre and first vice-president of the upper house, and Javier Zabaleta, re-elected as deputy for the MAS-MSM alliance.

New Cabinet

The new cabinet announced on January 23 involves far-reaching changes in the executive. Of 20 cabinet members, only six have retained their seats. They include David Choquehuanca,

as minister of foreign relations, Luis Arce (finance), Walter Delgadillo (public works), Carlos Romero (autonomies and decentralisation), Roberto Aguilar (education) and Nardi Suxo (transparency). Both Choquehuanca and Arce are seen as key players, and their re-appointment seems to be an endorsement of the policies of their ministries. Both Aguilar and Romero played key roles in the Constituent Assembly and they will be important figures in implementing the new Constitution.

Of the outgoing members, probably the most conspicuous are Juan Ramón Quintana (previously minister of the presidency), Alfredo Rada (interior), and Walker San Miguel (defence). All have played an important role in relation to the armed forces.

The new cabinet is made up of 50% women. As in the Assembly, effort has been made to give responsibility to women. Elizabeth Salguero, a feminist deputy for La Paz during the last parliament and now MAS candidate for mayor of La Paz in April, says she is delighted. She never expected to see this sort of commitment to women.

Of other new ministers, Oscar Coca, previously minister for hydrocarbons and a Morales confidante since his days as spokesman for the coca federations, replaces Quintana in the key job of minister of the presidency. Sacha Llorenti, previously vice-minister for social movements with many years working before that in human rights, is the new minister of the interior. Social movement leaders such as ex-miners' leader and ex-deputy José Pimentel (mining) and *campesina* leader and former deputy Nemesia Achacollo (rural development and land) are among the new cabinet members.

It would seem that Evo Morales has gone for balance in terms of gender, regional representation, and social class.

Challenges over the next period

Morales' speech to the Assembly on January 22 centred on the achievements of his first government, but key areas in which his new government plans to act include:

- Putting the new constitution into practice, approving a whole raft of laws to this end.
- Implementing democratic autonomies, with decentralisation to departments, regions, indigenous nations and municipalities. The attributes of local government still have to be laid out in detail, and elections for many key posts will take place in April.

- Promoting industrialisation, particularly in the oil and gas sector and in mining. Plans for this have yet to be presented in detail.
- Reforming the judiciary. Elections to the Supreme Court and Constitutional Tribunal are also pending.
- Improving land and other communications, thereby including people with little contact outside their community in the new Bolivia.
- Raising electricity output and exporting it.
- Improving food security, guaranteeing that people have access to cheap food, before local produce is exported.

Five years isn't long

Since the aborted civic-prefectural coup and attempts at secession in the lowlands in 2008, Morales has consolidated his position as leader. The elections showed how support for him has grown in cities like Santa Cruz and Tarija. Whereas Morales won the 2005 election with

54% of the vote (itself considered a landslide victory), he pushed up his electoral support to over 64% in December, with almost 95% of 5 million-plus registered voters turning out to vote.

During his first government, Morales faced down attempts by the right-wing opposition to disrupt and limit the MAS government's reform policies. Probably the most substantial achievement of this first term was to raise the amounts of taxes paid by foreign companies in the oil and gas and mining sectors, and to use these revenues to finance social protection for those on the lowest incomes in this, South America's poorest country. More important than re-defining the rules for foreign investors, the priority for the next period will be to build on the government's capacity to respond to people's basic needs. Though most social movements are content to work closely with government to build the new state, social pressures will have to be met and people's very real social needs attended to. Five years is not a long time for this to happen in.

Baroness Hooper was the official UK envoy to the inauguration ceremony. Here she shares her impressions with the BIF Bulletin:

"Continuing change was the message at the inauguration of Evo Morales' second term as President of Bolivia – this time a 5 year mandate under the new Constitution. The occasion was marked by a special ceremony in Tiwanaku on Thursday 21st January and a formal ceremony in the newly named 'Asamblea Plurinacional' in La Paz the following day.

Bolivia is no longer the Republic of... but a plurinational state with some 30 plus recognised 'nations' each promised autonomous government. The smallest 'nation' has perhaps some 100 indigenous members.

The first ceremony in the magnificent setting of Tiwanaku included a thanksgiving for the achievements of the President's first mandate and for the success of the second at the Pirámide de Akapana followed by a message in Aymara and Spanish to all indigenous peoples throughout the world, on the steps of the Templo de Kalasasaya. Tributes and gifts from invited indigenous groups from Canada, Australia and other Latin American countries concluded that part of the ceremony. Some 50,000 people were said to be there and the red ponchos and bowler hats were much in evidence – a very happy and good humoured crowd.

The elections gave President Morales and his Vice President, Alvaro Garcia Linera a sweeping victory with absolute control of the new 'Asamblea Legislativa Plurinacional' composed of 36 senators and 130 deputies. This means many unknown faces and first time parliamentarians. Looking down from the Visitors' Gallery in the company, amongst others, of President Bachelet of Chile, President Chavez of Venezuela, President Correa of Ecuador and President Lugo of Paraguay, as well as the Prince of Asturias representing Spain, there were again many 'banderas wiphala' (the indigenous banner of 7 colours), bowler hats, miners' helmets and colourful ponchos to be seen. Mixed in with these were those 'with ties' who, the President joked, applauded less often than those without!

This solemn 'Sesión de Honor' which took place on 22nd January meant new sashes of office for both President and Vice President, and the speeches. The clear message was that the new mandate would enable the President to consolidate and continue the process of change, on the basis of "un socialismo comunitario para cambiar el verdadero enemigo que es el capitalismo!" (translated: "a communitarian socialism to change the real enemy which is capitalism!")

As the official representative of the United Kingdom, I was able to give the President a message from the Queen as follows:

'I send my congratulations on your re-election as Constitutional President of the Plurinational State of Bolivia. My Government and I look forward to continuing the close co-operation and excellent relations between our two countries. I send you and the people of Bolivia my best wishes for the future. Elizabeth R.'

Copenhagen: A failure foretold

*Bolivian negotiators played a key role in the Copenhagen conference in pushing for commitments that the industrialised countries were unwilling to accept. Evo Morales and others were blamed by the UK government for the failure of Copenhagen. This could not be further from the truth, argues **Marcos Nordgren**, a member of the Bolivian Civil Society Climate Change Platform who accompanied leaders from Bolivian social movements as part of the official delegation.*

Well before the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen, the international press was warning that developed countries were unlikely to accept the ambitious targets reflecting the scientific evidence available. This became more explicit in US President Barack Obama's speech in November when he said that time had run out for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and that the hoped-for agreement at Copenhagen was not possible. Faced with political obstacles in the US Congress and his own party, Obama instead suggested a declaration of intent, as opposed to a legally-binding agreement, to get round this difficulty. But such a suggestion fell outside the consensus achieved at Bali in 2007, where it was agreed that Copenhagen would produce binding commitments for emissions reductions from developed countries, alongside strategies and the finance required for developing countries to adapt.

...the trust built up over more than 17 years of UNFCCC negotiations dissipated as each day of the two-week conference passed.

From the very beginning of the conference, the already scant possibilities of reaching a binding agreement faded fast when the international press leaked a draft "political accord" drawn up by the Danish presidency with a handful of other developed countries. This and other arbitrary

actions by the Danish presidency, alongside deliberate efforts by the United States and other developed countries to derail the established negotiation procedures, tainted the Climate Conference to such a degree that the trust built up over more than 17 years of UNFCCC negotiations dissipated as each day of the two-week conference passed.

Maybe it will be the arenas for discussion now being promoted by progressive governments in conjunction with social movements that will provide guidelines about how to proceed.

In response to these negotiating ploys, the negotiating blocs of developing countries did not stay silent. The African bloc, the small island states, the ALBA countries (of Latin America), the least developed countries and others protested loudly about such manipulation. But the space for pushing for substantive change was very limited. Delegations from countries critically affected by climate change – Sri Lanka, Tuvalu, Sudan – as well as Bolivia, found themselves having either to accept the "political accord" and then try surreptitiously to negotiate better terms, or to back a comprehensive, legally-binding agreement that responds to the urgent needs of peoples affected by climate change.

Evo Morales stressed the historic responsibility of world leaders in these terms:

"... What is at issue here is whether we are going to live or to die, ... and the differences here are clearly about temperatures. I fully admit that I am no expert, but according to our technical people the differences are these. There are countries that want to allow global temperatures to rise two degrees centigrade. Raising global temperatures by two degrees centigrade means the disappearance of

islands in the world, means the disappearance of glaciers in the Andes, means the elimination of snow cover all over the world. These dreadful facts are something our peoples are not going to accept and will judge us upon ...”

So what went wrong? Why consider Copenhagen a failure when it took place in such a highly unfavourable context?

As someone present at Copenhagen, it seems to me that the conference was not designed, at least in the final phases, in such a way as to enable countries to reach agreements on methodologies, finance and the concrete actions needed in response to climate change. Rather, it was a space which was intended to allow shifts in the direction of the negotiations, and where the urgent decisions for reaching solutions based on a just and coherent analysis of root causes could be put on ice.

While in the wake of Copenhagen developed countries continue to blame developing ones for their own lack of political clarity and to pretend that climate change is not such a serious problem, it is worth asking whether this lack of commitment and this short-sightedness can be

corrected in the short-to-medium term in such a way as to permit real negotiations to resume. An even more difficult question is whether an agreement can be reached in time when the major western powers now suggest that climate change should be discussed by a select group of countries, not by the United Nations as a whole.

Maybe it will be the arenas for discussion now being promoted by progressive governments in conjunction with social movements of global relevance that will provide guidelines about how to proceed in this complex scenario. *The World Conference on Climate Change and the Rights of Mother Earth* convened for April 19-22 by the Bolivian government may prove relevant in this respect. The challenge will be to achieve a collective approach that complements a critical analysis of the problem with both the creativity and skill required to produce viable policies that bring together civil society in both the North and South in this joint endeavour. Not only do we need to resolve the tremendous problem of climate change, but to come up with new paradigms for living that can inspire hope given the uncertainties arising from consumption patterns that are unsustainable and development models that are now redundant.