

Coup regime in Bolivia concedes electoral victory to MAS

Andrea Lobo
19 October 2020

The Bolivian regime installed by the US-backed military overthrow of president Evo Morales last November has recognized the victory of Morales's Movement Toward Socialism (MAS) in the presidential elections held Sunday.

While the official results have not been issued, exit polls showed an overwhelming first-round victory for Luis Arce, the MAS presidential candidate who was Morales's economy minister. The MAS candidate was credited with 52.4 percent of the vote against 31.5 percent for the right-wing ex-president Carlos Mesa. The far-right politician Luis Fernando Camacho, who directed fascist paramilitary groups during and since the coup last year, received 14 percent of the vote.

Mesa has already conceded defeat, while the de facto president Jeanine Áñez and the president of the Organization of American States (OAS), Luis Almagro, have congratulated Arce for the victory. The OAS played a crucial role in the overthrow of Morales last year by publishing a report with false allegations of voter fraud.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic and heavy military presence at the polls, local media reported a high turnout as millions took to the polls with masks and waited long hours in socially distanced lines.

This electoral outcome demonstrates the deep popular hatred for the fascistic Áñez regime, which twice postponed the elections, amid a catastrophic response to the pandemic, military repression and rampant corruption. With nearly 8,500 confirmed COVID-19 deaths, Bolivia has the highest per capita fatalities after Perú and Belgium.

The decision to accept the election results, handing power back to MAS, is being taken by US imperialism and its stooges in the Áñez regime and Bolivian military as a necessary tactical maneuver to politically disarm and paralyze the growing workers' struggles, even as they prepare a shift to authoritarian forms of rule.

At the same time, an Arce administration is perceived as a better vehicle to re-start the economy, implement a "herd immunity" policy of generalized contagion, ram through brutal austerity measures in response to the economic downturn and further build up the repressive state apparatus.

Preparations were in place to overturn the election of MAS. Less than a year after the military overthrow of Morales, hundreds of troops, some in riot gear and others wielding rifles, patrolled the streets of La Paz, Santa Cruz and other cities to oversee the elections. In at least one instance, the army was caught clandestinely transporting bags with ballots in Santa Cruz.

Salvador Romero, appointed by the coup regime to oversee the electoral court, is a former electoral chief named by Mesa himself. He became an informant for the US ambassador, Philip Goldberg, as the latter plotted a civil war along with the Santa Cruz elites in 2008, and became resident director for the National Democracy Institute (a US State Department front) in Honduras in 2011-2014 with the mission of "building trust in the elections" overseen by the regime installed in the 2009 US-backed coup.

Romero announced at the last minute that, supposedly due to system issues, preliminary results would not be published the night of the elections, which would have facilitated a fraud.

None of this impeded ex-president Morales, who was arbitrarily banned from running as a candidate, and other MAS leaders from presenting the elections as a "celebration of democracy."

At a press conference held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Evo Morales added: "Today, we have recovered democracy and the fatherland. We will recover stability and progress! We will recover peace!"

Meanwhile, in La Paz, as the police beefed up the cordon to protect the MAS campaign headquarters,

president-elect Arce read a statement to the media indicating: “We will govern for all Bolivians, we’ll build a national unity government, we’ll build unity in our country.”

These statements amount to an olive branch to the coup plotters, who will simply bide their time until MAS is again deemed inadequate to suppress social opposition.

Most fundamentally, MAS’s entire response to the coup has been directed at preventing the independent mobilization of the working class against the capitalist state. This was accompanied by promises to the ruling class of an “economic reactivation” and benefits to the same military responsible for massacring those resisting the overthrow of Morales.

On Saturday, Morales tweeted: “The soldiers and Joint Task Force personnel did not receive bonuses or salaries in the last three months, a situation that we denounce as a flagrant violation of their rights and a dismissal of the work they perform.”

This followed an interview with *Jacobin* where he introduced himself as “the only civilian president who has been in the barracks,” indicating that he was conscripted in 1978, specialized in the Military Police and provided security for the Chiefs of Staff. He then argued that MAS can provide stability to bourgeois rule as opposed to the decades of “one coup after the other” before his election in 2005.

He fraudulently presented as “anti-capitalist” his opposition to the coronavirus shutdowns, a position based on protecting the continued stream of profits at the expense of workers’ lives. “The productive apparatus was paralyzed by the quarantine, but also the government itself shut it down because it submitted to the policies of capitalism,” he said.

MAS and Morales are preparing another betrayal of the Bolivian workers and masses amid the ongoing deadly threats of the pandemic, military dictatorship and fascism. This can only be understood as the outcome of their bourgeois-nationalist politics, which are completely subordinated to Wall Street and imperialism.

Evo Morales first came to power in order to quell the crisis of bourgeois rule in 2000 and 2005, when mass protests erupted against water privatization and over demands for the nationalization of natural gas.

A rise in commodity prices and growing Chinese demand allowed Morales to offer major proceeds to transnational firms as “partners”, while assigning majority ownership and more income for the state. Economic growth and a balancing act between Chinese,

European and US capital greatly enriched sections of the local business elite, the real social base of MAS.

New social programs and investments in public service helped millions rise out of poverty, but most remained near the threshold of the official poverty line. Bolivia remains the poorest country in South America, with the UN finding that 63 percent live below or near poverty, the same percentage living under poverty in 2004.

Once commodity prices fell in 2014, the Morales administration bowed to pressures by transnational corporations and finance capital, granting permits for expanding mining and agricultural exploitation into previously protected lands, implementing social cuts and raising foreign debt to record levels.

Consequently, the drop in poverty effectively stopped in 2015, and extreme poverty began to rebound in 2018. This led to a resurgence of the class struggle and growing popular opposition to the Morales government.

In February 2016, Morales lost a constitutional referendum to seek reelection, a result he disregarded, which in turn fed social anger.

In the weeks before the 2019 elections, there was a national strike of health care workers and a 20-day strike at the largest mine in the country in San Cristobal. This happened against the backdrop of the social explosions against inequality in Chile and Ecuador.

The coup was mounted in response to fears within Bolivia’s ruling circles that Morales was becoming incapable of suppressing the class struggle. It also was in line with the drive by US imperialism to regain its hegemony over the natural resources and markets of Bolivia—including strategic lithium reserves—and all of Latin America against Chinese and European competitors.

The coup and the subsequent repression, however, did not intimidate the mass resistance of Bolivian workers and peasants, whose anger has only grown in the face of repression and the disastrous response to the pandemic.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact