Fascist protests in Bolivia demand overturning of presidential election

Tomas Castanheira
3 November 2020

With less than a week to go before the inauguration of the MAS party's Luis Arce as president of Bolivia, extreme right-wing and fascistic groups are promoting demonstrations throughout the country demanding the overturning of the recent election and a military takeover.

Last night, a street council called by the fascist Cruceñista Youth Unon (UJC), gathered thousands of people in the center of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, Bolivia's largest city and the main center of the country's right-wing opposition. The council adopted the following points: annulment of the elections and auditing the electoral process, blocking the inauguration of the new president, blocking state institutions and demanding that the military "fulfill its constitutional role," i.e., that they take control of the state institutions.

The coup assembly held in Santa Cruz was greeted by the self-proclaimed president, Jeanine Áñez, who tweeted this morning: "The Santa Cruz Council is a lesson for the *Masistas*: Arce has won but will not be able to govern through abuse." This is a dangerous threat coming from someone who prepared the military for a possible coup during the elections, and it expresses the degree of political instability that remains in Bolivia.

Accusations of electoral fraud, made only by the so-called Civic Committees and their "shock groups," like the UJC, were insufficient for mobilizing forces immediately after the vote, which took place on October 18. Luis Arce's clear victory was recognized almost immediately by the coup regime of Áñez and later even by the ultra-right presidential candidate from Santa Cruz, Luis Fernando Camacho.

Demonstrations for the annulment of the elections called by the UJC did not have any initial turnout, but suddenly gained strength last Wednesday, after a decision taken in the Legislative Assembly. Having a large majority of MAS deputies, the assembly voted to modify its own rules, overturning the requirement for a two-thirds majority, replacing it with a simple majority, for the approval of a series of measures, among them the promotion of police and military officers.

First denounced by the Unidad Demócrata (UD) caucus, the decision soon became the focal point of the right-wing opposition as a whole. UD Representative Claudia Mallón said that the MAS was seeking to unleash "a vendetta against the police and the military."

The second-place candidate in the presidential elections, Carlos Mesa of Comunidad Ciudadana (CC), announced that if the MAS does not back down on the "two-thirds decision," he will not attend Arce's inauguration ceremony, virtually delegitimizing the new administration. The lawyer for the CC, Carlos Alarcón, stated that the modifications "are a blatant attack on democracy and the rule of law."

Camacho once again took the offensive and recorded a statement saying: "The withdrawal of two thirds [rule]… is a clear indication that Luis Arce will govern according to the same authoritarian style of *Masismo* ." And he warned that "new struggles are coming to defend the democracy that MAS is once again hurting and trampling."

The current president of the Santa Cruz Civic Committee, Rómulo Calvo, Camacho's successor in this post, characterized the measure as another "coup" of the MAS and announced a hunger strike in front of the Legislative Assembly.

Boosted by this political support, protests headed by fascists in Santa Cruz and other big cities like La Paz and Cochabamba began to demand not only the annulment of the vote that overthrew the "two-thirds" requirement, but the annulment of the presidential elections. Led by the UJC and their counterpart in Cochabamba, the Cochala Youth Resistance (RJC) protesters shouted slogans like: "If there is no annulment, there will be no inauguration!" and "No, no, I don't feel like living in a dictatorship like one in Venezuela."

© World Socialist Web Site

In Santa Cruz, a vigil at the gates of the Eighth Army Division headquarters demanding the military seize power, which had been going on for days, grew large last Wednesday, according to the newspaper *Página Siete*. Blockades were also erected at dozens of points in Santa Cruz and some places in Cochabamba.

The protests intensified and were more violent on Friday. In Cochabamba, demonstrators, supposedly members of the RJC, tried to bring down the gate and occupy the Specialized Operations Tactical Unit of the police, where a police riot was started during the 2019 coup against Evo Morales.

That same night, a group of seven journalists from different broadcast networks reported being verbally attacked and detained for about 10 minutes by these protesters. Journalists from *Opinión* also said they had been surrounded and threatened by members of the RJC. The next day, eight members of the RJC were arrested for a third incident, involving the destruction of vehicles of alleged supporters of the MAS. The detainees carried explosives, a homemade bazooka and other weapons.

While their paramilitary branches were acting in the streets, the Civic Committees launched an appeal for an international audit of the electoral process, which was supported almost immediately by the Catholic Church, also a supporter of the 2019 coup. This demand, completely unfounded, serves only as a means of legitimizing the fascistic demonstrations demanding a new coup.

Significantly, an important member of Áñez's government backed the call for a review of the election results. Minister of Public Works Iván Arias declared Saturday: "What Santa Cruz and, I think, the whole country is asking for is an audit. I think it is best that the Electoral Body orders a prompt and quick audit with international observers."

In yet another political provocation, Áñez invited to Luis Arce's inauguration ceremony the US-backed puppet, self-proclaimed "interim president" of Venezuela, Juan Guaidó. Ousted MAS president Evo Morales was not invited.

The growing climate of political violence that marks the post-election period in Bolivia manifested itself in the assassination of Orlando Gutiérrez, executive secretary of the Federation of Bolivian Mineworkers Union and a militant of the MAS. Gutiérrez, who had suffered previous attacks, was beaten as he returned home in the days following the elections, in what appears to have been a premeditated killing by the extreme right. He was hospitalized with head trauma in a clinic in La Paz on October 22 and died days later.

The minister of government, Arturo Murillo, one of the most brutal figures of the coup regime, spreading slanders to cover up the real motives of the assassination, said that Gutiérrez "was partying for two days and then was attacked." Murillo continued: "There is talk that he was with other miners leaders, many say … that they were fighting over positions in the ministry they were offered, and then the aggression occurred."

This fascistic violence is able to grow thanks to the politics of the MAS. Since the November 2019 coup, the MAS leaders have worked to quell workers' and peasants' resistance in the streets, and for an agreement with the military and the most reactionary layers of the Bolivian bourgeoisie.

In a recent interview with their pseudo-left middle-class supporters of *Jacobin*, a prominent leader of the MAS, Andrónico Rodriguez, made it clear that, having won the election, his party will maintain the same cowardly attitude and continue its betrayals of the working class. He stated that the Arce government "is representing all sectors," including the "extreme right wing." He said: "Let's hope that a kind of unity will be achieved among all of us, that state policies will be established and constituted so that, finally, Bolivia will win, irrespective of each one's political colors."

The electoral victory of the MAS, as recent events make clear, has not eliminated the dictatorial threat posed by the fascists. Arce is coming to power promising to form a government of "national unity" and to work for the "pacification of the country," that is, to suppress the struggles of the Bolivian working class, while accommodating his administration to the political forces that will seek, from now on, to overthrow his presidency.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site