

Crisis and division grip Bolivia's new right-wing government

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Less than one month after taking office, Bolivia's new right-wing government is embroiled in a severe internal crisis that threatens to bring it down. The confrontation between President Rodrigo Paz Pereira and his vice president, Edman Lara—a former police captain and evangelical preacher—has exposed deep fissures in the country's ruling elite and raised fears of a social explosion.

Paz and Lara won the election thanks to the disintegration of the Movement toward Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo-MAS), which ruled Bolivia for the previous two decades. The party, once a flagship of Latin America's bourgeois-nationalist “Pink Tide,” won a humiliating 3.2 percent of the vote in the first round of the presidential elections and held on to just a single legislative seat.

The MAS, while employing pseudo-socialist and anti-imperialist rhetoric, maintained intact the capitalist state and its repressive police-military apparatus. It met payments on the country's debts to the international banks, even as domestic economic growth collapsed and inflation rose to over 23 percent. Faced with plummeting popular support, the party was riven into bitterly opposed personalist factions supporting former President Evo Morales and his successor Luis Arce.

During the election campaign, Lara famously declared: “I'm the guarantee—if [President] Rodrigo Paz doesn't deliver, I'll confront him.” True to his word, he has turned against the president, denouncing him as a “liar” and “cynic” for bowing to the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

Lara now accuses Paz of betraying voters by adopting the same austerity policies he attributed to his even more right-wing electoral rival, former Bolivian President Jorge Tuto Quiroga—spending cuts, tax breaks for the wealthy, and hollow relief for the poor. The new

president has also sought a US \$9 billion loan to stabilize an economy reeling from high inflation, a widening deficit, and a chronic shortage of US dollars.

Paz ran on the demagogic slogan of “capitalism for all” and appealed to former MAS voters with promises to maintain limited social assistance programs that were made possible by the commodities boom that ended a decade ago and have since been largely eviscerated by inflation.

The partnership between Paz, the scion of Bolivia's most prominent political dynasties, and the right-wing populist policeman Lara was formed on the basis of “renting” a political party to which neither belonged. Lara, in addition to proving adept at the use of social media, helped secure a base for the ticket through his appeals to evangelical Christians, who make up between 16 and 19 percent of the population.

He is attempting to turn his toxic mixture of religious dogma and right-wing populism—a formula employed by the now jailed fascistic former Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro—against Bolivia's new president. “If Rodrigo Paz follows the path of evil,” he warned, “I'll be the first to denounce him.”

The new president now insists austerity measures are necessary to restore market confidence. Critics, however, see them as fitting a familiar pattern of IMF-inspired structural adjustment that punishes ordinary Bolivians while meeting the demands of international creditors along with foreign and domestic capitalist interests.

The rift between Paz and Lara has paralyzed decision-making. Without consulting the president, Lara convened Congress to appoint judges and denounced cabinet ministers for corruption. Offended by Paz's unilateral creation of a Vice-Ministry of Legislative Coordination, a body that would usurp

functions previously delegated to vice-presidents, he warned that no major policy would move forward without his approval. In effect, Bolivia now has two competing centers of authority.

In response, Paz has introduced a bill to remove Lara from office. Ministers back the president publicly, but divisions within the administration remain deep.

Paz's admission that Bolivia inherited over one billion dollars in unpaid debts underscores the country's vulnerability. Creditors now dictate terms, demanding fiscal discipline and resource extraction to secure repayment. According to the Spanish daily *El País*, the government plans to open the Amazon and Chaco regions to new oil and gas projects, loosening environmental protections and riding roughshod over Indigenous land rights.

These moves reflect a broader orientation: the subordination of Bolivia's sovereignty and the well-being of its people to capitalist imperatives and the need to generate profit to stay solvent.

The political legacy of the MAS has been to politically disarm the working class and oppressed masses in the face of the new right-wing government. Social movements that provided a base of support for the party's creation were converted into the government's corrupt instruments and obedient clients.

Similarly, the Bolivian Workers' Center (COB), the country's main trade union federation, subordinated the interests of the workers it purported to represent to the government in return for perks and positions. Corruption scandals have engulfed the COB after the arrest last month of its longtime leader Juan Carlos Huarachi for illicit enrichment through kickbacks by government contractors.

Meanwhile, former president Evo Morales—in hiding due to an arrest order—sees opportunity in the chaos, proposing dialogue with Paz as a way to restore stability and protect his own interests.

The two men, despite their political differences, share a common goal: averting popular unrest that could spin out of control.

Behind the personal feud between Bolivia's new president and vice president lies something larger: the exhaustion of Bolivia's bourgeois regime. The ruling class, caught between the demands of global finance capital and the resistance of the working class and oppressed masses, is incapable of governing in the old

way.

The victory of the Paz-Lara ticket was celebrated in Washington. The overriding goal of US imperialism in the region is to reverse, by means of political pressure and naked force, China's growing economic influence.

This appears particularly challenging in Bolivia however. The US does not make even the top ten list of the country's export markets and accounts for only 6.8 percent of its imports. US foreign direct investment is negligible, while state-connected firms from both China and Russia, as well as Brazil, have made billions of dollars in investments, the lion's share in developing the exploitation of the country's strategically critical lithium reserves, the largest on the planet.

Even more daunting for Washington and its allies in Bolivia's ruling oligarchy is the resistance of Bolivia's working class and oppressed masses. They turned against the MAS not out of a rejection of socialism, but because of its failure to overcome the country's historic backwardness and subordination to imperialism, and its alliance with the most right-wing representatives of the Bolivian bourgeoisie in the name of "national unity."

History has proven—from the miners' uprisings of the 1950s to the gas and water wars of the early 2000s—the capacity of Bolivia's workers and oppressed to revolt against the existing capitalist order. The same forces are stirring once again in response to the reactionary policies of the Paz-Lara regime.

If this movement is to prevail and not fall victim once again to a police-state dictatorship, the working class must mobilize its strength independently from the MAS, the trade unions and all the political forces of the bourgeoisie on the basis of a revolutionary socialist and internationalist program.



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