

Four weeks of general strike in Bolivia: US imperialism and its regional allies move to crush an uprising

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Bolivia is in the grip of a mass social eruption, four weeks into an indefinite general strike declared by the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB). Miners, teachers, peasants, factory workers and indigenous communities staged the most massive demonstration of the conflict on May 18 in La Paz. It was met by 2,500 police and 1,000 military personnel deployed in pre-dawn operations.

At least four protesters were killed and 127 detained on that day alone, and arrest warrants were issued for COB Executive-Secretary Mario Argollo and 24 other union leaders on charges of terrorism. The repression did not break the movement. As of May 21, the Bolivian Road Administration registered 46 active blockades concentrated at strategic access points to La Paz and El Alto.

On May 20, President Rodrigo Paz appeared before the press for the first time in nearly a week and categorically ruled out his resignation: “I will be here for five years to reorganize the country.” He announced a cabinet reshuffle and a new “Economic Social Council” as a supposed platform for dialogue. As of May 22, neither the composition nor the installation date of the Council had been made public, and the COB has conditioned any dialogue on the prior withdrawal of all arrest warrants.

Bolivia is not confronting an isolated national crisis. The program being enforced against its working class—the elimination of fuel subsidies, privatization of natural resources, deregulation of agricultural land, escalating state violence—is the same program being imposed across Latin America under the direction of US imperialism and international finance capital.

The uprising by the Bolivian workers and poor is the sharpest expression of a mass response beginning to take shape against the political offensive led by Donald Trump and his fascist allies across the region.

The Trump administration, which sees its entire hemispheric strategy at stake in the Bolivian workers’ threat to overthrow Paz and his right-wing policies, responded with desperation and ruthlessness.

On May 20, 2026, as state forces were killing protesters in La Paz and El Alto, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio posted on X: “Let there be no mistake: the United States stands squarely in support of Bolivia’s legitimate constitutional government.” He added that Washington “will not allow criminals and drug traffickers to overthrow democratically elected leaders in our

hemisphere.”

The political groundwork for that characterization had been laid one day earlier, on May 19, at the Council of the Americas’ annual assembly in Washington, where Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau declared: “This is a coup that is underway. Make no mistake about it; it is a coup financed by that perverse alliance between politics and organized crime across the region.”

Landau claimed that he directly ordered “the leaders of Brazil and Colombia to support President Rodrigo Paz.” “The great divide is established between those countries that have institutions capable of confronting organized crime and those that are complicit in it,” he stated.

The cynicism of Rubio and Landau’s invocation of the defense of “democracy” and “constitutional rule” in Latin America is staggering.

It is proclaimed by the same administration that invaded Venezuela and kidnapped its sitting president, that is deliberately starving Cuba’s 11 million people in the interest of overthrowing its government, that has directly intervened in recent elections in Argentina and Honduras, and that has sought to overturn the prosecution of Jair Bolsonaro and Brazil’s military leaders for their 2022-23 fascist coup attempt.

It is not merely Paz’s political survival, let alone “democratic” rule, that Washington is defending when it backs his government against Bolivia’s workers.

Paz’s Decree 5503, which prompted the mass upsurge, was the implementation of conditions dictated by the IMF and the Inter-American Development Bank, whose announced 20-fold expansion of its Bolivian private sector portfolio makes the beneficiary explicit.

The intellectual architecture for this program has a specific source: the Harvard Growth Lab, part of the Harvard Kennedy School, which began developing a “Comprehensive Economic Reform Roadmap for Bolivia” in January 2025—when Paz was still a candidate. Bolivian economists described the report as providing “the technical basis for the government’s stabilization program.”

A May 13 investigation by eju.tv put the regional picture starkly: “Bolivia, Argentina and Honduras share the same consultancy firm and the same economic program.”

The fascist government of Javier Milei, implementing that program in Argentina, is not only a model for Paz, but is an active

participant in enforcing it in Bolivia.

On May 15, Paz publicly thanked Milei for sending an Argentine Air Force C-130 Hercules cargo plane carrying 12 tons of frozen chicken to blockaded cities, presented as “humanitarian assistance.” Former Argentine ambassador to Bolivia Ariel Basteiro, however, warned in a May 17 radio interview that Argentina was sending armaments to the Paz government. Paz denies it, but there is historical precedent for such shipments.

In July 2021, Argentine federal prosecutor Claudio Navas Rial formally charged former President Mauricio Macri, former Security Minister Patricia Bullrich, and former Defense Minister Oscar Aguad with aggravated contraband of weapons to Bolivia’s Jeanine Áñez coup regime in November 2019—specifically, 40,000 cartridges and tear gas canisters deployed to repress protests against the coup. A Bolivian court subsequently sentenced Áñez’s chancellor to three years in prison for facilitating their illegal entry.

The recently exposed “Hondurasgate” scandal exposes the political significance of Milei’s intervention. Leaked audio recordings revealed a US-backed transnational conspiracy—involving pardoned drug trafficker and former Honduran president Juan Orlando Hernández, released by Trump after being sentenced to 45 years in prison for trafficking cocaine—to build “information cells,” finance disinformation and coordinate a regional offensive to eradicate “the cancer of the left.”

The regional responses to the Bolivian crisis have exposed not only the absolute criminality of US imperialism and its fascist proxies, but also the complete rottenness and complicity of the so-called “progressive” bourgeois regimes.

Against this wall of imperialist coordination, Colombian President Gustavo Petro stood as the sole dissenting voice from a Latin American head of state: “Bolivia is living a popular insurrection. It is the response to geopolitical arrogance.” He offered his government’s mediation—“if invited”—to seek “peaceful solutions to Bolivia’s political crisis,” and called for “no political prisoners in any part of the Americas.” The Paz government rejected the offer as “interference in internal affairs,” and on May 20 formally expelled Colombian Ambassador Elizabeth García Carrillo.

The silence of Brazil’s President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is of an altogether different and more consequential order.

Brazil is Bolivia’s largest gas customer and most important commercial partner—a relationship formalized as recently as March 16, 2026, when Paz made a state visit to the Palácio do Planalto and Lula declared that “Brazil has an interest in increasing gas production in Bolivia and increasing the volume of imports.” As Bolivia’s workers faced bullets and terrorism charges, Lula said nothing. He did not condemn the killings. He did not denounce the arrest warrants against 25 union leaders. He did not reject Landau’s “coup” allegations that the U.S. State Department official had explicitly demanded he endorse.

That silence must be read alongside the events of recent weeks. On May 7, Lula traveled to the White House for a meeting with Trump that the WSWS characterized as a whitewashing of the US administration’s imperialist crimes: He dismissed Venezuela,

Cuba and the invasion of Iran as “not Brazilian matters,” offered to help Washington manage Cuba, and announced that Brazil’s vast rare earth reserves were open to any imperialist buyer.

Two concurrent events made the political meaning of that visit concrete. As Lula was photographed with Trump in Washington, the USS Nimitz nuclear aircraft carrier entered Guanabara Bay in Rio de Janeiro, leading a US Navy task force that conducted joint exercises with Brazilian frigates, corvettes and a submarine—exercises Brazil had suspended in 2025 at the height of its diplomatic tensions with the Trump regime. As *O Estado de São Paulo* wrote: “it is undeniable that the resumption of joint exercises is a clear signal of the current state of relations between the two governments.”

Then, on May 18—the most violent day of protests in La Paz—CNN Brasil reported that Defense Minister José Múcio Monteiro was preparing to travel to Buenos Aires to present the Milei government with the full catalogue of Brazil’s Defense Industrial Base: missiles, rockets, bombs and, explicitly, “less-lethal weapons,” the precise category being deployed against Bolivian protesters and the precise category Basteiro alleges Argentina has been supplying to Paz. Lula’s Defense Ministry described it as “a business visit with a diplomatic tone.” The “progressive” Brazilian government is offering to arm, through regular commercial channels, the fascist government organizing the violent crackdown against the working class not only in Argentina, but across all Latin America as a proxy for US imperialism.

What the international response to Bolivia’s uprising reveals is not a series of disconnected national positions but the interlocking components of a single apparatus—intellectual, financial, political, operational and military-diplomatic—activated the moment workers in El Alto and La Paz threatened to bring down the government.

The answer to an internationally coordinated offensive of capital can only be an internationally coordinated offensive of the working class: in Bolivia’s mines, schools and neighborhoods, in Argentina, Brazil and Colombia and in the United States itself, where the same oligarchy enforcing austerity and repression abroad is dismantling every social and democratic conquest won by workers at home.

That unified struggle requires breaking from every faction of the bourgeoisie—including those offering mediation—and building, on the foundations of the International Committee of the Fourth International and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC), the independent political leadership the working class needs and this critical moment demands.



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