Bolivia’s President Paz imposes starvation regime

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29 July 2026

Bolivia has just passed through its most explosive social confrontation in two decades. For 53 days, from May 2 to June 23, a general strike, accompanied by as many as 70 roadblocks, isolating La Paz and El Alto, paralyzed the country. Miners, transport workers and indigenous peasants took to the streets against the elimination of fuel subsidies, uncontrolled inflation, and an agrarian reform threatening indigenous territorial rights.

The strike erupted against a government barely six months old. Rodrigo Paz Pereira, sworn in as president in November 2025, has swiftly aligned his government with the Trump administration in Washington. Having campaigned on what he presented as a moderate, pro-corporate program. Once in power, he lifted fuel subsidies, imposing in one day an 87 percent rise in gasoline prices and a 162 percent rise in diesel.

A recently published survey lays bare the social context for these measures and the revolt from below that they sparked.

Situation confronting Bolivian people is desperate

The Bolivian working class, peasantry, small merchants and Amazonian peoples are being battered by the gravest crisis now gripping the country. According to the World Bank’s State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World and the Pan American Health Organization, 52 percent of Bolivia’s population suffers from food insecurity, and anemia afflicts 53.7 percent of young children. The Global Hunger Index has consistently classified Bolivia’s hunger level as “serious.”

The 2025 household survey, reported by the Bolivian daily *El País*, confirmed that poverty leapt from 38.1 percent to 44.7 percent in a single year—some 5.35 million people—aggravated by record inflation of 20.4 percent. The increase of 6.6 percentage points means roughly 807,000 additional Bolivians were pushed below the poverty line in barely twelve months, one of the sharpest social deteriorations registered in the country in the last two decades. Extreme poverty, reflecting the inability to cover even minimum nutrition, rose from 12.8 percent to 16.7 percent. Over two million people cannot afford staples.

Urban poverty has climbed to 38.8 percent against 58.1 percent rural, but what is most alarming is “not the level but the pace of deterioration”: urban poverty rose 7.4 points compared to 4.8 in rural areas. The poverty crisis has reached the growth poles—Santa Cruz, Beni, Tarija, Cochabamba and Oruro, the latter leaping 17.2 points to 53.8 percent. Behind this lies the destruction of formal employment: dependent urban workers fell from 51.1 percent to 47.8 percent. Food inflation reached 31.48 percent annually. Women, children and youth have been hit hardest.

A government of the Bolivian oligarchy and US imperialism

The new government that is imposing starvation policies is controlled by agribusiness. Fernando Romero Pinto, the former president of the soybean producers’ association, heads development planning; Óscar Mario Justiniano Pinto, the former president of the Eastern Chamber of Agriculture, was appointed minister of productive development. With the state in its hands, agro-industrial capital pushed through Law 157 on Agrarian Conversion (April 8, 2026), enabling the purchase of peasant lands.

For the Amazonian people, the pattern is familiar. Ruth Alipaz, an Uchupiamona Indigenous leader from the Amazon north of La Paz, told the *Guardian* that when a crisis hits, the response is always to intensify resource extraction—and that extraction takes place inside their territories and protected areas. Paz had promised to change the model. Instead, his administration doubled down on extractivism.

The general strike that erupted on May 2 forced the government into retreat on land privatization. After 53 days, however, the strike was lifted through a traitorous agreement between the Bolivian Workers Central (COB) and the government. Paz signed the revocation of Law 1341, clearing the legal path for a military crackdown. Hours later, Paz declared a 90-day state of emergency and deployed the Armed Forces to crush the remaining roadblocks.

The betrayal by Mario Argollo—COB executive secretary, an organization historically tied to the bourgeois nationalist Movement Toward Socialism (MAS)—paved the way for repression. By June 23, the uprising had been contained.

The union bureaucracy’s treachery, moreover, opened the doors to major deals with international finance capital: a $204 million Inter-American Development Bank loan and up to $2.8 billion from the International Monetary Fund. The purpose of these loans, tagged for bolstering international reserves and energy and infrastructure projects, is not to relieve misery but to purchase some social peace. International capital fears that if spiraling poverty is not contained, Bolivia will erupt again and sweep away the discredited Paz Pereira government. It is an operation to rescue capitalism, not the Bolivian people.

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Eight months into his term, Paz has been worn down by ministerial chaos and an acute loss of credibility. He nonetheless maintains his commitment to the IMF, insisting on privatizations and tariff hikes, and counts on the trade union bureaucracies to suppress the working class. The class lines are unmistakable: President Paz governs for agribusiness and its imperialist backers, not for the millions being driven toward starvation.

How the MAS prepared the way for the right

Paz did not descend on Bolivia from outside. He was elected, and the responsibility for that lies with two decades of MAS rule.

The crisis is rooted in the bankruptcy of the "Pink Tide" model—the so-called "Socialism of the 21st Century"—a populist-nationalist formula that promised a "third road": neither capitalism nor communism for the oppressed peoples of South America. The model managed to provide social improvements and mass profits for corporations as long as the government received vast revenues from hydrocarbon and gas exports during the global commodity boom that lasted from 2002 to 2014.

Evo Morales, the MAS leader who served as president from January 2006 until November 2019, announced the "nationalization" of Bolivia's oil and gas industries. In practice, he renegotiated with Brazil's Petrobras and Spain's Repsol, allowing the state to capture a larger share of hydrocarbon revenues while the transnationals retained their operations and profits. These windfall dollars financed popular subsidies: fuel, basic foodstuffs, and cash transfers to the poor. The 2009 Constitution declared Bolivia a "Plurinational State" and expanded indigenous rights and political representation—reforms that shored up Morales's popular base while leaving capitalist property relations entirely intact. During the boom years, poverty fell from roughly 60 percent to below 40 percent.

The fatal flaw of the Bolivian model was precisely this total dependence on commodity export revenues. When the boom ended after 2014, the dollars that had bought social peace dried up. Oil revenues plunged from $5.5 billion to $1.6 billion, and gas production halved. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic, in which Bolivia and Peru registered the highest per capita death rates in the world, owing to decrepit infrastructure and gutted public health systems.

If the Morales years were cushioned by the commodity boom, the MAS government of Luis Arce was catastrophic. A crippling dollar shortage paralyzed commerce, fuel scarcity produced endless lines of trucks at filling stations, and basic goods vanished from markets. Fuel was adulterated, destroying vehicle engines. As the crisis spun out of control, strikes, street marches and highway blockades paralyzed the country.

It was based on this record—misery administered for 20 years in the name of socialism, with the party finally split between the followers of Morales and Arce—that the far right, rooted in the agro-industrial conglomerates, was able to put forward Rodrigo Paz Pereira and win. The MAS produced the conditions for its own defeat.

The lessons of the 1952 miners' revolution

It is no accident that the man now imposing IMF austerity bears the name he does. Paz Pereira is the son of former President Jaime Paz Zamora (1989-1993) and the grandnephew of Víctor Paz Estenssoro, leader of the MNR (Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario), who governed Bolivia for twelve years on behalf of US imperialism (1952–1956, 1960–1964, and 1985–1989).

In 1952, an insurrection of miners and workers overthrew the military junta and created armed militias, forcing the nationalization of the mines and universal suffrage. With the assistance of Stalinism, the reformist leadership of the newly created COB, and the revisionist leadership in the Workers Revolutionary Party (POR), Paz Estenssoro contained the revolutionary insurrection of armed miners and workers, disarming their militias and subordinating the COB to the bourgeois state. The POR led by Guillermo Lora adapted itself nationally to the MNR and the COB's entry into its government, in line with the liquidationist prescriptions emanating from the Pabloite faction in the Fourth International.

Paz Estenssoro's grandnephew Rodrigo Paz has inherited a social powder keg and seeks to accomplish a similar suppression—but without the concessions that purchased social peace in 1952. Bolivian capitalism has nothing to offer the working class and oppressed masses but austerity, enforced through the COB and its pseudo-left apologists, and police-state dictatorship.

The main lesson of 1952 is summed up in Leon Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution: only the working class, leading the oppressed masses behind it, can fulfill the tasks of the democratic revolution, by taking power, destroying the capitalist state and implementing socialist measures, whose completion depends upon the expansion of the socialist revolution internationally. The globalization of production confirms at every step the necessity of world revolution.

Mounting poverty, the experience of the 53-day strike and its betrayal, and the danger of military dictatorship pose before the Bolivian working class this overriding task, which requires the construction of a revolutionary party—a Bolivian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.

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