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By Bill Van Auken
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Morales' MAS in talks with Bolivia coup regime on how to quell unrest

As mass demonstrations continued in the capital La Paz and throughout the country, leaders of the Movement toward Socialism (MAS) party of Bolivia's ousted president Evo Morales have entered into crisis talks with representatives of the coup regime that overthrew him.

The stated aim of these discussions—which are being mediated by the Catholic hierarchy, which supported the coup, the ambassador of the European Union, which has refused to condemn it, and a freshly appointed envoy from the United Nations—is to bring about the “pacification” of Bolivia.

This is no small task as tens of thousands of workers, peasants, indigenous people and youth continued to pour into La Paz for a fifth straight day Friday, laying siege to executive and legislative headquarters of Bolivia's government. Demonstrations and confrontations with security forces have also continued in Cochabamba and other areas of Bolivia, South America's most impoverished country.

The protests began after Morales, his vice president, and the president of the Bolivian Senate, a MAS member who was third in line of succession, all resigned last Sunday following a wave of fascist violence against MAS supporters and a televised pronouncement by the country's military command “suggesting” that Morales step down. The next day, Morales, Vice President Álvaro García Linera and others fled to asylum in Mexico.

The Bolivian right, backed by the US Embassy, launched a campaign seeking Morales' ouster following October 20 elections in which they claimed the government carried out fraud. There was no question that Morales won the most votes, but the right, supported by representatives of the Organization of American States (OAS) claimed that the results were manipulated to give Morales the percentage lead he needed over his right-wing challenger, Carlos Mesa, to avoid a runoff election. No proof has been provided of such manipulation.

Anger over Morales' overriding of a 2016 referendum that denied him the right to run for another term—after nearly 14 years in power—provided the coup campaign a certain popular base, particularly among middle class layers in Bolivia.

According to press reports, the so-called “dialogue” between the MAS and the coup regime has included the participation of Adriana Salvatierra, the president of the Senate who resigned under pressure, and was then turned away by police and right-wing thugs when she attempted to return to the legislature, along with other party legislators.

On the other side, there is Jerjes Justiniano, the minister of the presidency in the “interim” government. He is also the lawyer of Luis Fernando Camacho, a fascistic businessman and evangelical Christian who oversaw much of the right-wing violence and who has cast the coup as a holy crusade against the “satanic” traditions of the country's indigenous majority. Carlos Mesa has joined as an “observer” along with other figures on the Bolivian right.

The principal objective of the talks is to quell the mass unrest and set the stage for new elections within 90 days. The MAS representatives have also pleaded for guarantees that officials of the Morales government will not be persecuted and that the party will be allowed to field candidates.

The demand that Morales be allowed to return to Bolivia and run for re-election was apparently withdrawn in the face of the right wing's veto. Morales himself told Reuters in Mexico, “For the sake of democracy, if they don't want me to take part, I have no problem not taking part in new elections.”

Jeanine Áñez, the little-known right-wing opposition senator and strident anti-indigenous racist who was unconstitutionally installed as “interim president” after the ouster of Morales, said on Friday that if he were to return to Bolivia, he would face criminal charges for electoral fraud. She added in relation to the MAS that it would be up to the courts to decide if the party could participate in a new election.

The statement was one of a number of extreme right-wing threats issued by the coup regime, which has warned that journalists may be arrested for “sedition” and has launched a witch hunt against Cubans and Venezuelans in Bolivia, including ordering the expulsion of hundreds of Cuban doctors providing medical services to the poorest sections of the population.

In sharp contrast to the combative reaction of the Bolivian population to the coup regime, the MAS has largely capitulated to the power grab. After being barred from entering the legislature, MAS senators and congressmen—who hold two-thirds of the seats—were allowed back in on Thursday. They voted for a new president of the Senate, rather than re-instating Salvatierra, who would constitutionally succeed Morales as president. They also took no vote on Morales’ own resignation, which they had the constitutional power to reject and overturn.

Áñez’ self-swearing-in as “interim president” was carried out in the presence of a minority of right-wing legislators, the fascist opposition led by Camacho and the military command, with no legal basis. The MAS has granted this illegitimate president and puppet of US imperialism de facto recognition.

This acquiescence to a right-wing, US-backed coup is not a matter of personal cowardice, but rather an expression of the real class interests that the MAS represents. Its “socialist” rhetoric notwithstanding, the MAS government of Morales had forged a strategic alliance with the transnational corporations involved in extraction of the country’s energy and mineral wealth as well as the agricultural oligarchy, using a small portion of the wealth created by the commodities boom to provide minimal social assistance to Bolivia’s impoverished masses.

The ongoing mass upsurge against the coup in Bolivia is posing an increasing threat to capitalist interests. Having left at least a dozen dead, over 500 wounded and hundreds more arrested, the protests only continue to grow.

Protest blockades have brought vehicular traffic in Bolivia to a virtual halt, leaving thousands of trucks bringing goods to the cities stranded. Peasants have vowed that they will stop sending food into La Paz and other urban centers. And, most damaging of all, the distribution of gasoline, diesel fuel and natural gas, which is used to power much of the country’s industrial sector, has been interrupted with the main plant of the state-operated energy corporation, the YPFB, in Senkata outside of El Alto, blocked by demonstrators. The gas pipeline between Carrasco and Cochabamba has also been cut off.

Bolivia's National Chamber of Industries (CNI) issued a frantic call Friday for the YPFB to "attend with the greatest urgency to the repair of the Carrasco-Cochabamba gas pipeline to prevent a paralysis of industrial productive activities."

Gas and diesel fuel are running low in La Paz, along with food supplies.

The Confederation of Private Business of Bolivia (CEPB) issued a statement welcoming the installation of Áñez as "interim president," while demanding that the government create "conditions for the pacification and normalization of activities in the country." It added that it was vital that "security" be restored in order for Bolivia to project "an image of a country that is a good destination for investments, both national and foreign."

These capitalist elements are calling for the mass protests to be drowned in blood. As yet, the security forces have not proven capable of completing this aim. In several instances, troops have refused to carry out orders to put down demonstrations.

Morales' bowing to the dictates of the coup regime and his MAS' negotiations on the terms for an "orderly transition" are helping to pave the way to the kind of bloodbath that the Bolivian oligarchy and US imperialism require.

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