

**bolivia:  
class struggle  
and social crisis**

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# evo morales, the bolivian oligarchy and the workers' movement

by David Broder, 12th September 2008

The social crisis in Bolivia is deepening as the oligarchy and the far right step up their struggle to break off chunks of the country and lay their hands on its natural resources under the slogan of "provincial autonomy". On Thursday 11th September thirty people were killed during a fascist attack in Cobija, at the same time as the right continued its occupation of municipal buildings, government treasury offices and natural gas regulators, as well as setting fire to the house of Lucio Vedia, the leading trade unionist in Santa Cruz, the country's largest city. However, although Bolivia's soft-left indigenous president Evo Morales has sent troops to guard natural gas extraction plants and has now dismissed the United States ambassador for his role in supporting right-wing coup attempts, he still refuses to organise any effective action to stop the violence waged by the oligarchy and militias such as the fascist Union Juvenil Cruceñista. Instead, the Morales government offers talks on a "negotiated re-distribution of power" and has called on what it calls the "violent minority" on the right to "return to the negotiating table". As he seeks the reconciliation of the "Andean" and oligarchic strata of the bourgeoisie, workers and indigenous people under attack from the UJC are having to organise against the violence themselves, once again showing that the class struggle underlies the near-civil war in Bolivia.

As <http://www.econoticiasbolivia.com/documentos/notadeldia/evoprefechocho.html> makes clear, Morales' project is to broker a new constitution which will hold the country together and allow himself to stand for re-election in 2010, while embarking on a developmentalist economic course designed to build infrastructure and use tax revenues to strengthen small businesses and the petty bourgeoisie: what his vice-president Álvaro García Linera calls "Andean capitalism". Such development requires heavy state intervention in the economy, but not necessarily nationalisations and certainly not the expropriations without compensation demanded by the union federation (Central Obrera Boliviana) and social movements during

the 2003 and 2005 general strikes. Most important here is control of natural gas extraction: although the poorest country in South America, Bolivia has the greatest gas reserves of any country on the continent apart from Venezuela, and although not actually taking back reserves handed over to multinationals by president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada in 1996 (at knock-down prices, unconstitutionally and without the consent of Congress), Morales' government has forced multinational energy firms like Petrobras and Repsol to sell the state a 51% stake in their holdings in Bolivia.

Although none of Morales' economic project is "anti-capitalist" or challenges the right to private property, the "Andean capitalism" promulgated by the country's first indigenous president is not in the interests of the Bolivian oligarchy, the "100 clans" who profit from exporting commodities such as natural gas, tin, and the produce of the large agricultural estates (*latifundia*) they own. Furthermore, although Morales (long-time leader of the coca growers' union), García Linera and their supporters call for the workers' movement to desist from its struggles, and want the unity of the bourgeoisie with a "great national accord" to re-balance the economy, the oligarchy do not feel that they need to negotiate with Morales. Not only do the plans of the indigenous-left face of capital endanger the oligarchy's economic well-being, but Morales looks increasingly unable to assert his authority. His vacillating rule has sapped the confidence of most of the social movements who have taken part in the prolonged popular contestation since 2000, and so his defence is weak as he tries to claw back control of the five provinces (out of Bolivia's nine) now under the total control of the parallel right-wing government: Beni, Chuquisaca, Pando, Santa Cruz and Tarija.

Whenever the oligarchy mount violent attacks against workers and indigenous people, Morales expresses his regret at the situation, calls for an "end to the violence" and then backtracks on his reformist agenda. He has repeatedly made huge concessions to the upper strata of the bourgeoisie: most recently handing over the pensions system to Zurich Financial Services with the result that only 10% of people will receive any money; in 2007 decreeing that a two-thirds majority of the Constituent Assembly have to agree to any Constitutional changes, giving the right an effective veto (an explicit concession to Cochabamba governor Manfred Reyes Villa); and not prosecuting fascist militiamen but offering to negotiate with them. But the oligarchy still want nothing to do with Morales, since he can make no concession which will satisfy their main grievance: that the right do not hold state power. Although some of the bourgeois press (e.g. [http://www.la-razon.com/versiones/20080911\\_006392/nota\\_245\\_668805.htm](http://www.la-razon.com/versiones/20080911_006392/nota_245_668805.htm)) has called for "international mediation", which would no doubt favour the interests of mul-

tinational capital, the oligarchy does have a clear strategy of its own: to seize power in the provinces they can, block any constitution which would allow Morales to run for another term (two weeks ago the National Electoral Court simply annulled Morales' call for a referendum on the constitution), and wait to take back full control in 2010.



*supporters of the union juvenil cruceñista*

Of course, this is not just a question of manoeuvring in Congress and taking advantage of Morales' concessions, but also facing down the social movements emboldened by the struggles of 2000-2005, as well as the Central Obrera Boliviana. While the movement of the urban poor and peasantry has wilted thanks to its ties to the Morales government, and the COB has suffered from the same problem (a general strike in June was called off (<http://latrincheraobrera.org/2008/06/17/cob-lucha-abortada-movilizacion>) thanks to government pressure on Morales-aligned union leaders), there are still significant working-class struggles independent of both the government and the right-wing opposition. This is what makes the 2,000 strong Union Juvenil Cruceñista properly fascist: not only that it carries out racist attacks on indigenous people from the Altiplano and that it kills women and children, but that it is a mass armed organisation of middle-class youth, a weapon the oligarchy uses to break up the revolutionary workers' movement and restore capitalist

order.

Most central to the continuing strength of the workers' movement is the miners' union (FSTMB) and in particular the union of Huanuni tin miners, many of whose members have leading positions in the COB itself. The miners, although severely depleted in numbers after a sweeping series of mine closures in 1984, are still the most effective and militant part of the Bolivian working class, not only playing a leading role in the 2003 and 2005 general strikes but also staging an arduous but successful battle against privatisation in October 2006, in which 18 miners died; until July 2007, a campaign for workers' ownership and management (<http://www.bolpress.com/art.php?Cod=2007071105>) of the Huanuni mine; and a 12-day pay strike in April 2008.

In early August the FSTMB staged a general strike against the new pensions system and demanding the implementation of the COB's own welfare reform bill: they blocked roads and marched on La Paz, with several days of demonstrations, and forced the government to review the situation. There is currently a 45-day "truce" between the government and the union. At the same time there was a prolonged teachers' strike, which also involved road blockades. Although Morales refuses to use force to counter-act the right, he did send in the police to break up miners' road blockades, resulting in two deaths and fifty injuries (<http://www.econoticiasbolivia.com/documentos/notadeldia/cobrazosiete.html>). Contrary to what might be inferred from an abstract report (<http://www.socialistworker.co.uk/art.php?id=15799>) by the Socialist Workers' Party's "man in Bolivia", there is sharp distrust between the government and the workers' movement: García Linera accused the striking miners of being "agents of imperialism", and when "labour militants addressed thick and eager crowds with defiant demands for economic transformation", it was in fact an explicit and damning criticism of the Morales administration and its concessions to the right.

Indeed, the Central Obrera Boliviana has since 2005 talked of organising its own "political instrument", a party with which to organise independently of Morales. This initiative has time and again been rebuffed by those unwilling to sap support for Morales' Movimiento al Socialismo party, and so while on 10th August two million people (67% of votes cast) voted for Evo Morales, the COB has been unable to represent a coherent alternative political centre. Another setback has been the fashion in which the Constituent Assembly has been organised: while social movements and the COB long demanded a constituent assembly alongside their economic demands, in fact they were excluded from the elections by Morales. Not only were new parties and organisations not allowed to register to stand in the 2006 election, but those activists who negotiated positions on other parties' lists were mysteriously "blanked" from ballot papers without explanation - the leading miners' union activist Roberto Chávez was

removed from three separate lists.

Furthermore, the left wing of the workers' movement, most prominently the FSTMB, faces the problem that popular political mobilisation is not on the same scale as five years ago, with Morales' own electoralist attitudes fomenting conservative attitudes to political activity amongst his supporters. Solidarity strikes and actions responding to the FSTMB's calls for general strikes are rare. Several union leaders are members of organisations like the various splinters of the once mighty Trotskyist Partido Obrero Revolucionario and the Communist Party-based Alianza Revolucionaria Anti-imperialista, but given the size and militancy of the workers' movement as a whole, these groups are very small and have minimal real implantation in the working class.

While workers and the urban poor in the eastern cities have had no choice but to defend themselves from fascist gangs who attack them, with little organisation and using whatever weapons are at hand, the right's shock troops have little implantation in the Altiplano regions of Bolivia, where the workers' movement, Morales and his party MAS are strongest, and so they are somewhat removed from the violence. However, given the fact that Morales wants to negotiate a pact between the different strata of the bourgeoisie and will do nothing to fight the fascist gangs at the same time as he cracks down on strikes, it is clear that the workers' movement has to organise militias to defend itself and the indigenous masses from fascist attacks. The demonstrations calling on Morales to fight the far-right are not enough, since there is no sign that he plans to do so.

Organising workers' self-defence is far from impossible. Miners have long used dynamite and fought to defend their workplaces from private companies (such as in the October 2006 struggle where privateer miners tried to occupy Huanuni), while in January 2007 workers and the urban poor of Cochabamba organised a militia armed with machetes and guns to resist the attacks unleashed by the egregious right-wing governor Manfred Reyes Villa, and succeeded in overcoming the fascist squads, occupying the regional capitol building and setting up a revolutionary committee to run the city before an invasion by Morales' troops. Failing to organise to fight the fascists will not only lend weight to Morales' claims to be the sole or main defender of democracy and thus boost his support in the workers' movement, but it will give the oligarchy free reign to attack indigenous people, smash the trade union organisations and mount a *coup d'état*.

11th September 1973 saw Chilean president Salvador Allende overthrown by the military after his repeated concessions to the bourgeoisie and his refusal to arm the workers bolstered the confidence of the right. The same may well happen again in Bolivia unless the workers' movement immediately starts mobilising action against

the far-right independently of Morales rather than just calling on him to intervene with the Army and Police.

## central obrera: 'neither evo nor the oligarchy'

La Paz, April 28th 2008, translated from the Spanish from [www.econoticiasbolivia.com](http://www.econoticiasbolivia.com)

Rejecting government control, the 14th Congress of the Central Obrera de Oruro, led by mineworkers, put forward a revolutionary vision to overcome the tepid reformism of Evo Morales' indigenous government and crush the rebellion of the separatist oligarchy in the east.

"Us workers do not want either the oligarchy's separatist Statutes of Autonomy or the Political Constitution of [Morales' party] MAS", declared the new executive secretary of the Central Obrera, Jaime Solares, elected by the union meeting in order to resume the revolutionary struggle of 2003, resume the line of trade union independence from the indigenous government and initiate a full-frontal assault on the bourgeoisie, the multinationals and imperialism.

When the miner Solares was the leading figure in the Central Obrera Boliviana he led the popular movements which resulted in the overthrow of neoliberal governments in 2003 and 2005. Having finished his term he went back for work for two years as an ordinary worker at the Huanuni tin mine.

The Oruro workers' congress, which marks the resurgence of the workers' revolutionary struggle, took the Morales government to task for abandoning the demands of the 2003-2005 struggles in order to seek concord and alliance with the oligarchy, rather than fighting and defeating it.

"Us workers are neither with Evo Morales nor with the fascists of the oligarchy. Us workers are for the revolution", said Solares as he put forward a "third way" as opposed to the current polarisation between the indigenous-left government and the far right who have political and economic control in the east and in the valleys.

### No more deals with the right

Trade unionists criticised the extreme "laxity and weakness" of Morales' government faced with the governors,



*the leadership of the fstmb miners' union*

bosses and right wing leaders of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Tarija, Cochabamba and Chuquisaca, who are organising illegal and unconstitutional referendums to legitimise the de facto power they exercise in their provinces, pushing aside the central government and giving president Morales his biggest political defeat of the last two years.

Having defeated government opposition, on Sunday 4th May there will be a referendum in Santa Cruz under the patronage of the governor Rubén Costas and the Civic Committee president Branko Marinkovic, the face of the 100 powerful clans who control the land, political power, the economy and the main civic, social and trade union organisations of the region.

The Morales government has faith in the idea that, once a referendum - which it plays down, saying it has consultative rather than decision-making power - takes place, it will be able to sit around the negotiating table, with the support of the Catholic Church, to try and arrange a great national accord and social peace with the traitorous oligarchy, in compliance with the law, respecting private property and with effective guarantees for human rights, particularly for indigenous people.

A section of the oligarchy also wants to negotiate with Morales, albeit from a position of strength, in order to freeze any reforms which might change the current distribution of land, to preserve all the privileges and the political and economic power of the agricultural-exporter and financial bourgeoisie, and thus put an end to the cycle which began with the 2003 popular insurrection.

### **Land for indigenous people**

This is exactly what the radical Central Obrera de Oruro does not want. It proposes, on the contrary, the deepening of reforms, with the state expelling the multinationals and nationalising natural gas, oil and the mines, breaking

up the big estates, breaking with neoliberalism and improving the living standards and working conditions of the impoverished Bolivian people.

The trade union Congress raised the slogan of the liquidation of the economic and political power of the oligarchy with measures which would go much further than the tepid reformism of a government which refuses to violate private property and private investment.

Therefore the Central Obrera called for the immediate "expropriation of the wealthy landowners' estates", and "the creation of armed self-defence militias to resist state repression and the fascists". The Oruro workers thus set out the aim of liquidating the power of the 100 powerful clans who own 25 million hectares of the most fertile land in the east and in the valleys: five times more than the collective holdings of two million poor peasants. These clans are orchestrating the revolt against Morales, manage the economy, control the land and, under the banner of autonomy and offering better living standards and working conditions, have managed to win wide support among the population, civic and neighbourhood organisations, trade unions and bosses' associations in Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija, and to some extent in Cochabamba and Chuquisaca also.

### **Revolutionary slogans**

Trade unionists believe that expropriating the *latifundistas'* land and handing it over to the poor peasants would undermine the power of the oligarchy. Combined with this, another means of getting workers in the east and in the valleys to stop supporting the agricultural-exporter bourgeoisie would be to put into effect a minimum living wage with a sliding scale of wages which would force the bosses to increase the wages they pay their workers by seven or eight times (an average monthly wage is about 100 dollars, but almost 800 dollars is necessary to maintain a family in decent conditions).

These measures, however, have not been accepted by the Morales government and even less by the agricultural-financial bourgeoisie, since such demands mean a struggle against the limits Morales sets himself, and would run up against the interests of the millionaires.

### **Trade union unity**

The congress, held last week, called "for the unity of the working class to fight against the oligarchs, the parties of the right and the multinational companies" and "for a struggle to carry out the demands of the October 2003 and May-June 2005 struggles, seeking the abrogation of the neo-liberal Decree 21060 and other neoliberal laws.

The workers resolved to fight for salary increases in line

with the cost of living and inflation, for a new pensions system and for the re-foundation of the [state energy firm] Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales Bolivianos”.

In terms of trade unionism, the workers resolved to strengthen the unity of the working class within the COB (despite the fact that it is in part controlled by the government); to defend the political independence of the workers and their trade union organisations; to implement social control; and to reject yellow unionism and strengthen revolutionary trade unionism in line with the COB and provincial Central Obrera statutes (...).

“The whole country knows that Oruro offers political direction, that it has been and continues to be in the vanguard of trade union struggle”, commented Pedro Montes, executive secretary of the Central Obrera Boliviana, the national federation which is still under the political influence of the Morales government, but which now feels the force of the Oruro radicals and their revolutionary demands.

# the political declaration of the federación sindical de trabajadores mineros de bolivia

Oruro, 1st July 2008

## “International

\* Unity of all the world’s workers to once and for all crush the capitalist curse and the neoliberal model.

\* Unity of the people of Latin America and the world to stop any war - whether carried out directly or by proxy - against our countries as we fight the multinationals and empire.

\* Condemnation of the genocide perpetrated against the peoples of the world by the United States and its allies in

its desperate attempts to keep the system afloat. The million deaths in Iraq are a cruel, bloody testament to the savagery of imperialism.

## “National

\* Unity of the workers and the people of Bolivia against the oligarchic minority and the landowners who plan to divide the country using their Civic Committees in the east, against the bosses and the multinationals and against the neoliberal political parties like UN, PO-DEMOS, MNR, MIR, NFR, etc.

\* A decisive and organised struggle alongside our mother organisation, the COB, to implement the demands of the 2003 and 2005 struggles as the only way to deepen the revolutionary process of the Bolivian people.

\* An urgent struggle for the annulment of the unconstitutional Decree 21060 [which called for widespread privatisation] and other laws which keep a neoliberal economic policy in place. Nationalisation of the usurious multinational banks.

\* A struggle for salary reform and increases in line with the cost and living and inflation, in line with COB suggestions.



*president evo morales, who has used police to break up strikes, addresses a miners' meeting*

\* Immediate struggle for a new pensions bill which will make a dignified retirement possible and give thousands of the unemployed access to work.

\* Form a workers' political instrument to carry out the historic revolutionary agenda of the Bolivian people.

\* For the re-foundation of the state oil firm YFPB and COMIBOL (Bolivian Mining Corporation) and prioritising the re-strengthening of the Primera Empresa Estatal Minera, and no longer engaging in distractions like shuffling administrative posts.

#### **“Trade unions**

\* For the unity of all Bolivian workers in the COB and its affiliates, defending its statutes and fundamental principles.

\* Defend the Political Independence of the workers and their union organisations, taking a class struggle line with no quarter given to the oligarchic, landowner and multinational minority who want to divide and bloody our country.

\* Implement Workers' Social Control in all the country's workplaces, particularly in the mines, as a step towards direct administration by the workers.

\* Reject yellow unions and strengthen revolutionary unionism in accord with the principles and statutes of our affiliates.

\* Trade union and political education of the workers to make revolutionary and qualitative change, uncovering once and for all the double-think and deference which weakens the effectiveness of Bolivian trade unionism.”

# statement by the huanuni tin miners' assembly

**Huanuni, 28th May 2008**

1.- The Huanuni mineworkers *unanimously condemn the savage attacks committed against our peasant brothers* by groups in the pay of the oligarchs and landowners in Sucre and the east. We warn that this fascist savagery will continue unless miners march in defence of our class brothers and punish those responsible for these attacks, which have become commonplace in Sucre and the provinces controlled by fascist bands financed from abroad.

2.- The cowardly repression of our peasant comrades in Sucre by fascist groups is a fresh provocation against the majority national groups and the working class, which is tired of these attacks and humiliating abuses *organised and financed by the multinational and landowning oligarchy* which is openly conspiring against the established order, *promoting systematic violation of the laws of the republic.*

3.- The class struggle is ever more polarised. Attributing these continuous attacks against our indigenous and peasant brothers, of which we are part, to racism alone, would be an error we must go beyond. *The minorities we crushed in 2003 and 2005 must be eliminated once and for all*, as these are the financiers of the anarchy and crimes carried out under the great smokescreen of regional autonomy. The written and spoken press, in its majority, lies in the hands of these scroungers, who use it to spread disinformation, distort the truth and foment discord between class brothers.

4.- Our struggle must be directed at *cutting off the sources of the economic power of this oligarchic and landowner minority*. This means fighting for the implementation of the demands raised in 2003 and 2005, nationalising the multinational companies and taking back privatised businesses. This will strike a deadly blow against the wealthy, stop the carve-up, generate jobs and overcome the poverty which capitalism and neoliberalism has long subjected us to.

5.- The government must not be irresponsible and avoid taking this path. *Enough of working with the conspirators and those who sabotage the real process of change!* Change must not be an empty slogan but rather should mean structural change to take back our natural resources: these should be extracted by the state under social control. Nationalising and developing our wealth must be the immediate objective. Experience shows that this can only be done via the state.

6.- The sustainability of the Huanuni Mining Company depends on these structural changes taking place. Investment to prevent the imminent crisis in tin prices, which could happen at any moment, is the number one priority of the workers, the five thousand of us dedicated to making our workplace *the national leader* and a model of a state mining company in the service of Bolivians.

7.- Finally, we express our solidarity to our working-class brothers and the indigenous people in the east for their valiant struggle against the fascist lodges and mafias who want to enforce statutes of autonomy which will only serve the interests of the rich minority who are in power in these provinces. *Autonomy, unless it is carried out by the workers and the majority populations, is a virtual split which only serves to sow confusion and distract from the struggles of Bolivians.*

# central obrera boliviana announces 45- day truce with morales government

La Paz, 13th August 2008 - translated from the Spanish from [www.econoticiasbolivia.com](http://www.econoticiasbolivia.com)

This Tuesday evening [August 12th] the Central Obrera Boliviana announced a 45 day truce in its struggle to win a new welfare system for pensions, but warned that it would begin mobilisations again if the Evo Morales Government did not keep its end of the bargain.

The union's meeting in La Paz also decided to give its backing to the union leaders Pedro Montes (COB), Guido Mitma (Federación de Mineros) and Jaime Solares (Central Obrera de Oruro) after the government accused them of orchestrating mobilisations to help the right wing and of inciting miners to fight the forces of law and order.

COB official Octavio Urquiza assured that trade unionists "would not tolerate any attacks on the legitimacy of their unions from the Government or anyone else".

The meeting approved the agreement reached on 9th August with the Government to draw up a new Pensions Bill in the next 45 days, but also warned that protests would happen again if it did not meet the union's demands in this period.

## Under question

However, the executive secretary of the Central Obrera de Potosí, Gerardo Coro, the leader of the Federación Nacional de Trabajadores de Caminos, José Luis Pacheco, and Jaime Solares, amongst others, maintained that the rank-and-file should not demobilise, since an adverse outcome is possible: rather, they should begin a struggle until working-class victory.

Solares argued that president Evo Morales' politics of conciliation with the ruling class had "given new life to the right", by not keeping to the mandate he was given by the people in the October agenda, which should have in-

involved nationalisation of mines, gas and oil by the state, land for the peasants, and better salaries and a decent retirement for the workers.

In the meeting trade unionists paid their respects to Luís Hernán Montero Claros (26 years old) and Roberto Cáceres Fábrica (24 years old), miners shot dead last Tuesday during the clashes with police in Caihuasi.

## Divide and rule

Given the current situation, the miners' leader Guido Mitma accused the Morales Government of trying to "decapitate" the leadership of the miners' union and other social sectors in order to avoid fresh mobilisations.

"It seems that the Government is now waging a dirty fight, since it is decapitating the workers' movement and Huanuni, which has been the vanguard of trade union struggles. For this reason we must not play the Government's game", he argued.

Shocked by the two dead and fifty wounded among their ranks, the last miners' assembly in Huanuni had decided no longer to recognise the three principal leaders of the union – Isidora Vargas, Fernando Chávez and Juan Flores – as well as the COB leader Pedro Montes; the miners' leader Guido Mitma; and the executive secretary of the Central Obrera de Oruro, Jaime Solares; all of them Huanuni miners.

"I empathise with the comrades who are shocked by the deaths in Caihuasi – this was the Government's fault – but we cannot turn in on ourselves and our leaders, since this is exactly what the Government wants: to divide the workers' movement and to rule over it", Mitma said.

"These positions in Huanuni will be filled, so that this great union is not undermined, and so that there is no crisis in the unions and the people in the leadership of the Sindicato de los Mineros de Huanuni will be able to lead the workers' struggle in the interests of the workers' movement", he added.

## Union petition

The COB had declared a general strike, combined with road blockades and a march on La Paz, to gain attention for its petition of demands, which included a new pensions law; the nationalisation of gas, oil and the mines; the expropriation of the huge *latifundia* in the east; the distribution of land among the peasants; salary increases; and the nationalisation of the agricultural conglomerates who profit from the hunger of the people and their control over food prices.

The central point of the COB document is the abrogation of the neo-liberal pensions law and its replacement with a welfare system whereby active workers, the state and businesses finance pension payments.

The current private pensions system, administered by the multinationals Zurich Financial Services and the Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria, only really offers pensions to 10 percent of the Bolivian work force, leaving the other 90 percent without pension payments and therefore forced to work until they die.

This private system is based on individual payments whereby each worker makes a monthly contribution equivalent to 12.5 percent of his salary, which goes to a personal account which will pay out as pensions when he retires. In this system, which allows multinationals to control \$3.2 billion of contributions from workers, the state and the bosses pay nothing.

The oligarchy, the parties of the right, bosses' associations and the big communications firms want to keep the system like this.

The second proposal, currently being passed through Congress, is that of President Morales' government, which in essence keeps the individual payment system, with the sole benefit that the \$3.2 billion will now not be administered by multinationals but by the state.

The COB wants reform, which fundamentally means: (i) reducing the retirement age from 65 to 55 for male workers and from 60 to 50 for women; (ii) returning to a welfare system where active workers pay into a common fund for old people's pensions; (iii) getting rid of private administration of pension funds, today in the hands of the multinationals Zurich Financial Services and the Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria, in order that these resources might be administered under the direct control of workers' organisations; and (iv) that the state, the multi-nationals and private business should have to pay enough money into pension funds as to guarantee that the system is sustainable.

## fascists attempt to split bolivia

**Evo Morales' plans to rule in concord with Bolivia's oligarchs are unravelling ever further, as the right wing of the ruling class have now effectively split the country in two and the central government has lost authority over five out of nine provinces, now patrolled by fascists. The workers' movement betrayed by Morales has been left with the task of fighting the gangs hired by the landowners to 'keep order'. La Paz, 3rd September 2008 - translated from the Spanish from [www.econoticiasbolivia.com](http://www.econoticiasbolivia.com)**

The oligarchy plans to consolidate its power in the east and in the valleys, with its fascist bands seizing control of roads and the streets as the Morales Government continues to place its trust in the ballot box.

With sticks and whips in hand and using their fascist bands as a spearhead, the oligarchy - governors, right-wingers and the 100 powerful clans who own the land and big business - are consolidating their power over the east of Bolivia and the valleys.

This Wednesday, after a marathon-length meeting, the self-proclaimed Consejo Nacional Democrático (Conalde) - a regroupment of oppositionist governors, civic committees and all the forces of the moderate right and fascism - called for an extension of road blockades across five of the country's nine provinces, stopping the referendum on the new Constitution taking place and eradicating at root the popular mobilisation against the separatists and in favour of the indigenous president Evo Morales.



*violence flares during a right-wing assault on a government building*

The Conalde also called for the seizure of oil facilities, cutting off all gas exports to Brazil and Argentina, as well as the seizure of government institutions, if the Morales Government does not meet its demands (giving up almost \$200 million a year in taxes on hydrocarbons, and recognising their separatist and unconstitutional "autonomous status").

The central axis of this right-wing mobilisation has been the oligarchy's consolidation of power in the eastern provinces of Santa Cruz, Beni and Pando and the valleys of Tarija and Chuquisaca, where since last week fascist bands have subjected the population to terror: degrading women, massacring trade unionists and trampling on indigenous people in full view of the police, who are afraid to act given the level of violence and the impunity with which fascist hit-men and paramilitaries are operating.



*miners hold a demonstration against the oligarchy's plans to split the provinces they control away from bolivia*

### **Fascist bands**

This fascist orgy started last week right in the centre of the city of Santa Cruz, not long after President Morales had published a decree setting 7th December as the date for voting on the new State Political Constitution and elections for new regional authorities, in a move soon quashed by the National Electoral Court.

According to a report by the Santa Cruz news agency ASC-Noticias "a group called Resistencia, the "wives of October", partisans of a Christian crusade, Acción Joven and other small groups of fanatics - who have little popular support but whose shock troops can shake the place to the core - are running riot, with no fear for anyone or anything, much like the Nazi "brown-shirts" who even Hitler could not control".

"The night that Evo Morales announced the referendum decree (Thursday) they were in the central square of Santa Cruz. Firstly the wealthy ladies shouted themselves hoarse with openly racist insults against Morales, such as "wretched Indian", "road-blocking coca-grower", "he does-

n't know what raising a child means", "gay" and such like".

On Friday these groups went from shouting to using weapons against the indigenous people: "The wealthy ladies, having got hold of several colepejis (whips) shared them with those who had brutally assaulted women from the Central Obrera [the main trade union federation]. They were joining up with separatist cowards who attacked women, by kicking them, whipping them and firing at them. A stall-holder woman who had nothing to do with the matter was savagely assaulted, left drowning in blood for the "crime" of what she was wearing and being very poor, that is to say colla (from the Altiplano).

### **Government regrets**

This brutal aggression was caught on television cameras and beamed around the world, but, as is de rigueur in these situations, the indigenous Government restricted itself to expressing its regret about the events.

"We are ashamed, for the country, for the region and for Bolivians. Given this situation, together with the moral

condemnation expressed by citizens, the people of Santa Cruz and Bolivians, there must be an investigation”, said Alvaro García Linera, speaking from the mountains of the Altiplano.

After his attacks on unarmed indigenous people and women, a leader of the fascist Unión Juvenil Cruceñista, bloodied club in hand, summarised in statements on Santa Cruz television the aims of the groups who attack immigrants from the west of the country: “We will not allow them into the square (...) we want independence, not having this wretched race on our land”.

### **Terror in the south**

With less blood but with just as much hatred against people from the Altiplano and trade unionists, fascist bands also mounted attacks in the south, in Tarija. The vice-minister of de-centralisation, Fabián Yaksic, denounced right-wing leaders for inciting violence in Yacuiba, the scene of blockades and anti-government protests.

“They have hired hit-men from over the border who have introduced a climate of terror, and we are going to put them on trial. The Police has to be there, and given the statements we have made we hope that the Public Prosecutor begins proceedings to put an end to this state of disquiet”. Senator Ricardo Díaz declared that behind the violence stood the interests of the 15 wealthy land-owning clans, owners of the haciendas [large estates]. “This is the strategy of the latifundistas, who are provoking violence and attacking women, and the Interior Ministry is doing nothing”, he said with dismay.

### **Attacks in Beni**

Similarly, in the north - in the fertile lands of Beni where the clans rule by the whip-hand and a peasant family is less valued than a cow - on Tuesday night fascist bands tried to seize control of the tax department offices and the regional land regulation board in the provincial capital Trinidad. For several hours fascists used molotov bombs, handguns, rocks and sticks to try and take over these institutions, which were defended by the Army.

“The traditional right has now opted for violence as its tactics. There is a state of right-wing insurgency: the president of the Comité Cívico in recent days practically made a call to arms in what was a tacitly seditious pronunciamiento” commented the President’s representative Palmiro Soria, who has been subject to fascist death-threats.

“In the eventuality that there are deaths tonight, or if I or another political leader is to be killed, I will blame governor Suárez Sattori; the president of the Comité Cívico, Alberto Melgar; and the Rurrenabaque authorities”, he said.

After a siege several hours long the fascist bands retreated, but left with a stark threat. “We will give 48 hours, starting from now, for colonel Fernando Rocabado Soto, commander of the Sixth Division of the Army, to withdraw from the province of Beni, after he ordered and led the violent repression of the people of Beni”, declared the Comité Cívico president Alberto Melgar. He made a similar warning to Soria.

Melgar also called for “a march in support of the demand for autonomy and for the dignity of the people of Beni” to take place on Thursday evening.

Such is the tension in the region that Jorge Soruco, the Human Rights representative in Beni, feeling powerless, commented: “This is racist madness, insanity, which is impossible to bear; we are living in a time where crazies in the opposition who want to take control of territory by any means necessary in order to carry out hooligan acts fight the people using an extreme degree of violence”.

### **Deadlock**

With all these actions and their decision to step up road blockades, the oligarchy are consolidating their power over the east of the country and the valleys by terror, conscious that they will not be able to advance into the Altiplano nor upset the overwhelming support President Morales has in the rest of the country.

All-in-all, the fight between Morales and the oligarchy has reached a deadlock. In Bolivia there are two governments and an overt dual-power situation, which was entrenched by the 10th August referenda, which confirmed the authority of both Morales (67% electoral support) and his main opponents. Evo cannot go to the cities of the east or the valleys, where his followers are beaten up without mercy and with total impunity.

Those attacked there by fascist hordes receive expressions of “solidarity” and “regret” from the functionaries of the Morales Government, along with an express ban on responding to these attacks and insults. “If social movements are responding to the provocations, we regret this, since this will not get us anywhere. Our response is a peaceful one”, warned the Minister of Labour Walter Delgado, who from a position of safety suggests that indigenous people and workers should turn the other cheek.

However, several youth and popular organisations, especially in the poor districts of Santa Cruz (e.g. Plan 3000) have begun to organise themselves and respond to the fascist attacks with sticks and stones. “When they come, we’ll blow them out” said one of these youths who, together with his comrades, this Wednesday evening confronted the fascist groups and forced them to run away, ignoring Morales’ functionaries’ calls for “peace” and “reconciliation”.

### Between desire and power

In this situation, characterised by many as “the catastrophic balance”, the oligarchy is seeking to consolidate its regional control, while Morales hopes to make a deal with this élite (although they dismiss the idea and want nothing to do with him) in order to make it possible to govern and secure his re-election.

For now, the oligarchy, as much as it wants to, cannot get rid of the “indigenous president” and has turned to preventing his re-election in 2010 and blocking his new Constitution, whilst maintaining control of the land and the natural resources of the east and of the valleys. For his part, Morales, although he could do so, does not want to move towards destroying the power of the oligarchy, as more radical sections of the trade unions and popular organisations would like: namely by fighting for the expropriation of the latifundistas and the agricultural firms, and properly nationalising gas, oil and the mines.

Evo’s intention is to make himself an ally of the oligarchy and the 100 clans, sealing a great national deal to defend representative democracy and strengthen the workings of Andean capitalism, whose main axis lies in private enterprise, multinationals and small producers with direct state support. He also wants to pass a new Political Constitution which would grant, at least in formal terms, more rights to indigenous people, hasten the capitalist development of Bolivia and open the way for his re-election in 2010.

Two days ago this plan was blocked by the National Electoral Court, which annulled the call for a constitutional referendum on 7th December, although vice-president García Linera today declared that “by decree or by law, we are going to hold a vote on the new State Political Constitution: they are not going to stop us”.

“This is irreversible: there can be no backwards step (...) They will do what they will, insulting us and attacking the elderly and children, carrying out terrorist acts and burning houses”, he said, after warning that “there will be complications, because although the right is in the minority and is boxed into a few provinces of the country, it has turned violent, rabid and desperate, and wants to generate conflict. For this reason it is important that we Bolivians mobilise to defend our democratic rights”.

“Victory is assured, but it will require mobilisation, awareness-raising and support so that President Morales can go forward” he said with illusions in calling Bolivians to the polls once again at a time when the oligarchy prefer to seize control of the streets.

### The insurgents’ document

The document produced by the oligarchy in recent hours

leaves no doubt in this respect. “The members of the Consejo Nacional Democrático and civil society organisations in the provinces of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Cochabamba and Tarija, meeting in the city of Santa Cruz de la Sierra, resolve:

“First - to step up road blockades immediately across the five eastern and southern provinces, using the pressure tactics used in Bolivian Chaco to get back the IDH [hydrocarbon taxes] and in defence of the gifts which represent the historic birthright of our peoples and the material basis to implement provincial autonomy. At the same time we warn that if the central Government pursues with its policy of confiscation, we will not be held to blame for any action which impedes the supply of hydrocarbons to outside the country”.

“Second - rejection of the national Government’s proposal to introduce a text for constitutional reform which lacks legality and legitimacy, and which was written with the blood of Bolivian brothers by a clique, outside the legal home of the Constituent Assembly, Sucre, for which reason we have decided not to allow any constitutional referendum to take place which would pass these measures in our provinces”



*the united states government continues to actively support the bolivian oligarchy: on 11th september its ambassador was expelled by morales*

“Third - ratification of our decision to deepen the implementation of our statutes for autonomy as sanctioned by our people, and at the same time applauding and supporting Chuquisaca’s decisive determination to call a referendum on provincial autonomy”.

“Fourth - denouncing before the Bolivian people the central Government’s persecution of provincial authorities and civic leaders, making judgments without any legal basis”.

“Fifth - calling on citizens, organisations and the democratic institutions of the country, with no discrimination of race, political positions or religion, to take part in the formation of a broad front for the defence of a democracy which works for the pacification of the country and the full return of democracy”.

# coup threat in bolivia

**La Paz, 10th September 2008 - translated from the Spanish from [www.econoticiasbolivia.com](http://www.econoticiasbolivia.com)**

The fascists are attacking policemen and soldiers, taking over airports, looting and burning state institutions, cutting off communications and denigrating indigenous people and people from the Altiplano. Evo Morales - in the Altiplano - expresses his regret and says that a right-wing coup against him is taking place, but does nothing and leaves his terrorised supporters in the country below powerless.

In an extreme case of parliamentary cretinism - which holds that popular votes and laws suffice to stop the plans of the oligarchy - on Tuesday the indigenous president Evo Morales, who in last month’s election won the support of seven out of every ten Bolivians, virtually handed over half the country to the violence of fascism and the oligarchs.

On Tuesday, faced with the capitulation and impotence of the government, which does nothing but sit in the Altiplano mountains regretting what is going on in the country below, fascist groups seized control of the public offices, roads, airports and streets of the cities of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Tarija and Sucre, breaking Police and Army resistance and consolidating the far right’s power in the east and in the valleys of Bolivia.

For there, in five of the nine provinces of South America’s poorest country, fascists are setting up shop with total impunity, having managed to raise the flag of ‘regional autonomy’ and thus to arraign behind themselves thousands of young people and large sections of the middle class and civil society organisations, terrorising trade unionists, the Altiplano immigrant population and activists loyal to Morales, many of whom have gone into hiding.

On Tuesday, the fascist brigades of the Unión Juvenil Cruceñista attacked policemen and soldiers defending public offices in Santa Cruz, seized control over the east’s airports, looted and burned several state institutions, cut off communications and made it quite clear that neither Evo Morales nor the indigenous left control the east and the valleys of Bolivia.

Faced with this situation, described by Morales himself and his ministers as a “right-wing coup by opposition governors against the unity of the country and democracy”, the indigenous government has refused to use its state power to restore constitutional order and put the brakes on the oligarchy’s plot.

“The government will resist the coming right-wing governors’ coup without using a state of siege”, stated the government news agency ABI, thus confirming the position expressed the night before by the ministers of government and defence. A state of siege would allow the Morales government to arrest the plotters and bring them to justice, stop the traitors’ political activities and allow the force of the Army and Police to be used to defend state property and citizens’ rights. But, as Evo Morales’ ministers have said, they will not do any of this against the fascists, who are using handguns, molotov bombs, dynamite, whips and sticks to attack unarmed women, indigenous people and trade unionists.

## Two governments in Bolivia

In reality, given the systematic terror unleashed by the fascist hordes and the inaction of the forces backing Morales, the existence of two governments in Bolivia has crystallised: one of them is the indigenous-peasant government led by Evo Morales which governs in the Altiplano region of La Paz, Oruro and Potosí, and partially in the valleys of Cochabamba and Chuquisaca.

The other government, the fascist-oligarchic one led by right-wing governors and the 100 powerful clans who own the land and big business, has political and administrative control of the cities of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Tarija and Sucre, and a large area in the rural east and the valleys. There, President Morales only holds authority within police and military precincts. The rest of the political and administrative apparatus is in the hands of right-wing governors and fascist bands.

This dual-power situation has been taking shape for more than a year, and consolidated by four regional autonomy referendums which, although illegal and unconstitutional, brought gains for the right in the face of Morales’ weak resistance. The last national referendum on 10th August helped entrench this dual power situation, keeping not only Morales in office (with 67% support) but also his main oligarchic opponents, who achieved similar levels of support in their own provinces.

## Two perspectives

In the last two weeks, right-wing governors, the oligarchy and the 100 clans have fought to consolidate their positions and their dominion using mass direct action, with mobilisations, strikes, road blockades and seizures of public institutions.

In response, Morales and the indigenous left government have gambled on opening dialogue and negotiations with the fascists, using an official announcement to push for a national referendum to ratify the new State Political Constitution and ensure the re-election of the president. This official announcement was at once annulled by the National Electoral Court, citing alleged legal and practical problems. Morales and the social movements which back him therefore decided to call large popular mobilisations in the Altiplano to oblige Congress to ratify the call for a referendum in early 2009. However, it remains clear that this fresh referendum is unworkable and will not be able to take place in the east and in the valleys, unless Morales either makes a deal with the oligarchy or defeats their resistance.

## Political cowardice

“We are not going to declare a state of siege. We are not going to give in to provocations”, declared the vice-minister of social movements Sacha Llorenti, illustrating the extreme political cowardice of the Morales administration, which will use neither legal measures nor force against the traitors. They are ignoring the growing cries of the popular organisations and the more radical of the trade unions, organised in the Central Obrera Boliviana, who believe that the only way to stop fascism is to wipe out the economic power of the oligarchy, which means expropriating the immense estates of the east and distributing the land amongst the poor peasants, nationalising all agricultural enterprises and taking all gas, oil and mineral production and distribution under state control.

But far from doing this, the Morales government continues to seek a pact with the traitorous oligarchy, although they want nothing to do with Morales and compare him to a ‘llama’.

In the government’s eyes, the enormous electoral support Morales obtained on 10th August (two million votes out of three million cast) meant the virtual death of the rotten Bolivian oligarchy, and so now we are witnessing the death throes of the fascist beast, which Evo Morales thinks he can bury by ignoring it.

“This is a government of dialogue (...) only small groups are using violence, breaking laws and violating human rights. We call on these violent groups to return to the table”, said chancellor David Choquehuanca, after two

days in which fascist bands, with some citizens’ support, shut off roads, seized government offices, stopped all traffic from Bolivia to Brazil and Argentina, and brought terror to the poorest neighbourhoods of the east of Bolivia, where some people are hurriedly trying to organise to defend their livelihoods and their lives.

## The traitors’ plan

The plan of the oligarchy, which can count on the backing and the support of the United States Embassy is: i) to consolidate its political and economic power in the east and in the valleys to defend its multi-million dollar businesses based on the exploitation of natural resources and the land, ii) to block the referendum on the new Constitution taking place, iii) to definitively shelve the new State Political Constitution bill, ratified by the Constituent Assembly, in order to avoid Morales’ possible re-election in 2010 and iv) to even further fence in the Morales government over the next two years.

In the immediate, the offensive unleashed by the opposition governors is working to ‘devolve’ 200 million dollars from the Direct Hydrocarbons Tax (IDH) back to the provinces, and is seeking the recognition of their illegal autonomous governments, including their provincial parliaments and their right to arm their own Police, control the land and dictate laws besides the national law. These are the conditions they demand before any dialogue looking to a grand national agreement: in reality this would mean complete surrender by Evo Morales.

For the governors, the oligarchy and the 100 clans, an agreement with Morales will only be workable if it validates the existence of two parallel governments in the country until the 2010 national elections, in which they hope to defeat indigenous-peasant forces and thus take back total power across the whole country. If there is no change in the current Constitution, Evo Morales will not be able to run.

For this reason the right-wing governors, the oligarchy and the 100 clans want to block the ratification of the new State Political Constitution, which would make it possible for Evo Morales to stand again.

## Government capitulation

The national accord desired by Evo Morales looks to achieve the ratification of his new Constitution, which, at least formally speaking, declares equal rights for indigenous people and peasants, opens up the possibility that he could be re-elected for the next ten years, and which pushes for the development of an Andean capitalism with the perspective of “humanising” capitalist exploitation, so that the bosses and the multinationals make lots of money but without looting the country.

Ever since the start of his presidency, Morales' central political objective has been to share power between the indigenous-peasant élites, the oligarchy and the 100 clans. Vice-president García Linera admitted as much a year and a half ago: they do not want to take power from the oligarchy or displace them, but rather share power, managing Bolivia in concord with those who up until now owned the lives, the *haciendas* and the great wealth of the country:

“When we got into government we elaborated a strategy to organise a negotiated re-distribution of power. What Bolivia is experiencing today is, in essence, a widespread and generalised process of struggle and re-distribution of power. It will take more than one government to get there”.

“History teaches us that the struggle for power can take any of three typical courses: i) That the social group on the offensive (indigenous-peasant) directly displaces, by whatever means necessary, the previous rulers; ii) that the former ruling bloc (the oligarchy) manages to defeat, contain, co-opt or crush the group on the offensive; iii) That they manage to redistribute power among themselves”.

“As a government we have opted for the third course. We have bet on a process of negotiated re-distribution of power with a new centre of authority: the indigenous movement”, commented the ideologue of the indigenous government, an ex-guerrilla who now calls for class conciliation and the implementation of “Andean capitalism”.

Today, every indication is that Bolivia is in transition towards the third course, although not in a negotiated fashion as Morales and García Linera dreamed. Today, the Altiplano of Bolivia is governed by Evo Morales while the country's mineral wealth, banks, industry and commerce continue to be managed by multinationals and big private firms. In the other Bolivia, in the east and in the valleys, government and political, economic and administrative power are in the hands of the oligarchy, the agricultural and financial bourgeoisie and the 100 powerful clans.

### **Bush's triumph**

Everything that is taking place in Bolivia, with the unstoppable advance of the oligarchy and separatism, is a victory for George Bush's administration, which is pulling the strings of the actions of the oligarchy and the 100 clans, according to the sociologist James Petras:

“Thanks to the complete incompetence and lack of national political leadership by President Evo Morales and his Vice-president Álvaro García Linera, the Bolivian state is breaking up into a set of autonomous provinces, and now regional governments are planning to usurp

political power and take charge of their economic assets. From the start, the Morales-García Linera administration sealed a series of political deals, adopted policies and made concessions to the oligarchic élites of Santa Cruz, allowing them to reconstruct their traditional political base, sabotage the elected constituent assembly and effectively undermine the authority of the central government.

“The right has found success in less than two and a half years, which is particularly surprising when we consider that in 2005 the country witness a significant popular uprising to get rid of a right-wing president, when millions of workers, miners, peasants and indigenous people took charge of the streets. It is a tribute to the absolute misleadership of Morales and García Linera that the country has moved so quickly and so decisively from a state of popular insurrectional power to a state of fragmentation and division in which a separatist agricultural-exporter elite has taken control of 80% of the productive resources of the country, while the elected central government just weakly protests”.

## **morales opens negotiations with the fascists**

**La Paz, 12th September 2008 - translated from the Spanish from [www.econoticiasbolivia.com](http://www.econoticiasbolivia.com)**

The indigenous president, who only has control over the Altiplano and part of the valleys, has opened dialogue with the fascist oligarchy who have absolute power in the other half of the country and who are massacring peasants and indigenous people without mercy.

Bolivia's peasant-indigenous government led by Evo Morales and the traitorous fascist oligarchy, who control the east and the valley, this evening began round-table negotiations designed to pacify the country.

The meeting took place from 6pm in La Paz, following president Morales' public invitation to the right-wing Tarija governor Mario Cossío, who represented the oppositionist governors who no longer recognise Morales' government and who have unleashed a wave of fascist terror in Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando and Tarija.

This spiral of violence was at its most savage this Thursday in Pando, on the Brazilian border. Government reports indicate that eight people were shot dead and twenty were wounded. However, according to unofficial reports by the MAS senator Abraham Cuéllar, the fascist attack against the Pando peasantry actually killed six more people than the official reports say.

Morales' government's objective is "to initiate a dialogue with no conditions and no pre-determined limits, which will allow us to find a solution to the country's political crisis", reported the government news agency ABI.



*mario cossío is a leading spokesman for the oligarchy, having won 58% support in august's recall referendum*

At a press conference the Minister for the Presidency Juan Ramón Quintana emphasised the openness to dialogue expressed by Cossío and offered a plane to take him from Tarija to the seat of government.

Quintana expressed his pleasure at the sentiment the Tarija governor expressed towards re-opening dialogue, despite the fact that in recent weeks Cossío had refused to do so, causing "so many outrages, irreparable damage and pain for the people of Bolivia".

Despite this attitude the government re-affirmed its inten-

tion to renew a productive dialogue. "This willingness to negotiate means that there must be no pre-conditions. We invite you to a meeting today [Friday 12th] at 6pm at the Palacio de Gobierno. If you need it, we can supply a small plane to bring you to La Paz", declared the Minister for the Presidency.

The negotiations have opened at the same time that the indigenous president Evo Morales, who one month ago won the electoral support of seven of every ten Bolivians, has virtually handed over half of the country in the face of the violence unleashed by the oligarchy and the fascists.

Fascist groups are staging massacres and killing peasants and indigenous people with impunity; and they have control over public institutions, highways, airports and the streets of the cities of Santa Cruz, Beni, Pando, Tarija and Sucre. The far right has consolidated its power in the east and in the valleys of Bolivia, after overcoming the weak resistance of the Police and Army, who at Morales' orders have withdrawn to their barracks, not giving any protection to trade unionists and peasants.

In five of the nine provinces of South America's poorest country, fascists are setting up shop with total impunity, having managed to raise the flag of 'regional autonomy' and thus to arraign behind themselves thousands of young people and large sections of the middle class and civil society organisations, terrorising trade unionists, the Altiplano immigrant population and activists loyal to Morales, many of whom have gone into hiding.

***For ongoing coverage of the class struggle and the advance of the far-right in Bolivia, visit the relevant section of our web site at:***  
<http://thecommu.ne.wordpress.com/category/bolivia>

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