

The Cochabamba Declaration: Latin America's Anti-Imperialist Offensive

Document of the Anti-Imperialist International Trade Union Conference, by the Central Obrera Boliviana and the World Federation of Trade Unions

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As a follow-up to the [June summit meeting](#) of the G77 + China leaders, held in Santa Cruz, the Bolivian government and the Bolivian Workers Central (COB) sponsored an "Anti-Imperialist International Trade Union Conference" in Cochabamba, June 30-July 2.

The conference was attended by representatives of unions in 22 countries, affiliated with the [World Federation of Trade Unions](#) (WFTU). Founded in 1945 as a postwar international labour organization, parallel to the United Nations, the WFTU became during the Cold War years a federation primarily of unions led by members of pro-Moscow Communist parties. Although it declined precipitously after the fall of the Soviet bloc, in recent years the WFTU has experienced a certain revival, and now [claims a membership](#) of 86 million in 120 countries. The Cochabamba conference marked the integration of Bolivia's COB in the federation.

At its closing plenary session, the conference adopted an "Anti-Imperialist political thesis," published below, outlining an "anti-imperialist, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist" strategy aimed at pointing the way toward a socialist world order. It is a strong statement of solidarity with anti-imperialist liberation movements and the "process of change" in Bolivia and other Latin American countries.

Addressing the closing session, Bolivia's President Evo Morales called on workers around the world to prepare to confront new forms of imperialist aggression and plunder in the coming years. In this connection, he identified four phases in history when the world's empires had agreed to "carve up" the world among themselves in spheres of influence.

The first, he said, was the [Treaty of Tordecillas](#) in 1494, when Spain and Portugal had "divided Abya Yala" (the indigenous name for the western hemisphere) with a declaration that what is now Latin America belonged to them as invaders.

The second division was the [Berlin Conference, meeting in 1884-85](#), in which the major European powers divided Africa among themselves.

The third division took the form of a [secret agreement in 1916](#) (the Sykes-Picot Agreement) between Great Britain and France to divide the Middle East between them at the end of the First World War.

Today, said Morales, the great powers are engaged in the fourth "imperial carving up" of the

world, not through treaties but through the United Nations Security Council, and using NATO to “invade and secure control of natural resources.” (Morales did not mention another division of the world: the post-WWII agreements between Stalin and his wartime allies Britain and the United States, dividing the world between imperialist and Soviet spheres of influence.)

The translation of the Cochabamba conference’s “political thesis,” which follows, was prepared by Jordan Bishop and Federico Fuentes, with some revision by me, from the [Spanish text](#).

— Richard Fidler, [Life on the Left](#).

Anti-Imperialist Political Thesis of Cochabamba

“I believe that this idea of an offensive in defense of humanity is increasingly interlocked with the reality that we are experiencing in this world.” – Hugo Chávez

“I want to propose something that concerns the social movements of this world: how can we, in a united fashion, confront capitalism? I am convinced that we must elaborate a new thesis to save the planet, a doctrine in support of life.” – Evo Morales

Introduction: The Crisis of Capitalism and its Consequences for the Working Class

The peoples of the world, and especially the popular sectors, are suffering the consequences of a crisis of capitalism. This is a crisis unlike any we have seen before, a crisis that is both global and structural.

It is a global crisis because, unlike previous crises of capitalism in the 19th and 20th centuries, in this capitalist world system the resistance movements are locally-based but have yet to create a united front that could constitute an alternative to capitalism. The peoples of the world are abandoning the belief that capitalism is democratic or that there is such a thing as capitalist democracy. However, a global alternative, one as global as the crisis we are now experiencing, has not yet emerged.

This is a structural crisis because it is the combination of various crises: economic, financial, energy, climate, food, water, institutional, political, and of values. We are suffering the crisis not only of an economic system of production that is overstretched, but of a system that in order to increase profits or maintain the surplus value produced through the exploitation of peoples, workers, and nature in the South, has to convert Mother Earth and humans into an object of its merciless, predatory domination.

We wish to highlight the climate crisis as the crystallization of all these crises. The supposed alternative of a green economy as a response to the environmental disaster that we are suffering is nothing more than the privatization of nature and all other common goods. In addition, it is clear that there is no such thing as capitalism with a human face. We are in a stage of capitalism where everything is commodified, including life itself and all common goods.

All this is occurring at the same time as imperialist wars are unleashed with the aim of plundering the peoples’ natural resources, part of a vicious circle in which these natural resources serve to fuel the war industry, thereby demonstrating the voracity of imperialism. Natural resources, energy and water are objectives of imperialism that the peoples and

workers must defend since they constitute the future that we shall leave as our legacy, the Mother Earth that we must look after, for it is our home.

Capitalism has therefore adopted a planetary geopolitical standard, and the crisis reveals the basic contradiction of capitalism: the contradiction between the social character of production and the capitalist form of property over the means of production and the appropriation of its results. In these crises, the whole mechanism of the capitalist mode of production is subordinated to the pressure of the productive forces created by capitalism itself.

The consequence of this is that there are a billion people who go hungry, according to the FAO [Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations], and since the crisis began the number of poor people has increased by some 100 million.

But while poverty and hunger are the most visible effects of the crisis of capitalism, all of this is linked to the peoples' loss of social rights, especially labour rights. Capital will attempt to ride out the crisis on the backs of the workers.

The higher phase of capitalism is imperialism and neoliberalism, which involves creative destruction and anti-worker policies. In some Latin American countries, it was possible to block the Washington Consensus and the recipes of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank that attempted to impose privatization and restrictions on social policies, but there are other parts of the world where the people continue to suffer as a result of the neoliberal recipe presented as a supposed solution to the crisis. Yet unemployment rates continue to rise, and cuts to social benefits, health, and education continue, even as whole families are evicted and banks are rescued.

Nevertheless, neoliberal recipes cannot resolve even the problems of the countries at the centre of the world capitalist system. These countries at times have parallel governments in the form of transnational corporations, which are new instruments imperialism has created to be able to operate in countries that are supposedly undergoing development. The wealth of a few presupposes the misery of a good part of the planet.

This was perfectly summed up by Warren Buffet, one of the wealthiest men in the world: "Of course there is a class struggle, and our class is winning it."

Therefore, if the class struggle is more alive than ever, the elaboration of an alternative project to confront the crisis of capitalism can only come from the popular sectors and organized labour. The struggle of organized labour therefore gains a special significance at this time.

Furthermore, the struggle of organized labour against capitalism can only have socialism as its horizon. In a globalized world in which social democracy has sold out to neoliberalism, and where 20th century socialism had serious weaknesses, the building of a socialism in the 21st century that is immune from the weaknesses and backwardness of the first attempts to implement it is an urgent and necessary task.

As the Central Obrera Boliviana explained in its Socialist Thesis of 1970, those who believe that labour organizations should limit themselves to the role of trade unions, that is to say, dedicated to purely economic struggles, are mistaken. Without abandoning the struggle to defend material conditions, workers must take part in the political life of the country in our

role as a revolutionary vanguard. This is a vanguard that, in the case of Bolivia and other countries, is complemented by the political project of indigenous nations and peoples, and campesinos, fusing labour and community struggles around the goal of “communitarian socialism.”

Bolivia's Contribution

Workers of the world have held this Anti-Imperialist International Trade Union Conference in order to recognize and learn from this Bolivia of many hues and colors, in which workers, campesinos and indigenous people have joined together in a communitarian struggle dedicated to building a socialist future.

We see in Bolivia a government of social movements, in which the direction of the process is in the hands of popular sectors, in which the state has fused with civil society. This process is based on historical struggles against colonial domination, as well as against capitalism and neoliberalism. This is a political project, uniting indigenous, worker and campesino struggles, which is still under construction but one with which the popular sectors of our countries can identify.

We recognize that in Bolivia the state has taken control of strategic sectors of the economy, hydrocarbons and energy in general, telecommunications, health and education. These now belong to the state rather than individuals, a state which is a synthesis of an epochal change in Latin America, a state that belongs to the people, because it is of the people and functions on the basis of popular needs.

In Bolivia, popular sectors and workers' organizations are not only not repressed, but are encouraged and supported politically and materially through the establishment of a participatory democracy that incorporates workers in its decision making.

This alternative model of relationship with mobilized sectors of society is something that demonstrates to us the existence of a living, participatory, intercultural and communitarian democracy. Workers' organizations of the world, meeting in Bolivia have been able to study the new Bolivian paradigm that proposes the idea of “Living Well” to confront the crisis that we are suffering. We strive for a development model and a political model that conceptualizes the economy from a community standpoint, looking to the emancipation of peoples and communities as a means of living in harmony with Mother Earth.

Commitment to Socialist Integration

The crisis of the capitalist world system and the geopolitical struggle for control of natural resources is leading the peoples and workers of the world toward a scenario in which it is necessary to choose between one of two projects in contention – socialist emancipation or neoliberal restoration.

Bolivia and the movements for change in Latin America have opted, with differing rhythms, intensities and nuances, for the emancipation of their peoples, their inhabitants, and their nature, recovering sovereignty over their natural resources in order to confront the imperialist and neo-colonial project.

Because of this today, here and now, the working peoples of the world want to build upon the thinking of our compañero President Evo Morales, and propose a thesis to save the planet, a doctrine in defense of life, as opposed to the doctrine of death embodied in

capitalism. This thesis can have only one goal, that of socialism – with the contribution that we have taken on board from Bolivia, to incorporate the communitarian dimension – and must be based on three solid pillars: anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and anti-capitalism.

An Anti-Imperialist, Anti-Colonial and Anti-Capitalist Thesis Pointing to Socialism

Our national realities have different rhythms and intensities, but we should view them through the prism of Bolivia, where the people have moved from resistance to the building of a political instrument for taking power, and from the taking of power to the construction of a political project of the people and for the people.

Now we want to create a world political instrument for the construction of a global political project that can provide a response to the structural crisis of capitalism.

Anti-Imperialism

The aerial kidnapping of President Evo Morales a year ago, putting various European countries on their knees, revealed that imperialism will not remain quiescent in the face of projects of social transformation that implement processes of change in defense of social majorities.

A project based on anti-imperialism must therefore repudiate the armed wing of the United States called NATO, the political and military instrument of imperialism.

Our anti-imperialist project denounces the military bases that imperialism has established throughout the world as a means of intervention. In Latin America there are 77 known military bases that violate the political and territorial sovereignty of the countries of Our America.

Colombia merits special attention due to the U.S. bases installed there, a beachhead for surrounding the Amazon, a central element in the geopolitical disputes of coming years. Peace in Colombia, to which we are deeply committed, requires the closure of these military bases, as well as ensuring that peace is accompanied by the political participation of the insurgency and the working class and popular sectors of Colombia as a means of guaranteeing social justice for the Colombian people as a whole.

Just as we condemn imperialist interference through the installation of military bases, we also denounce so-called “humanitarian wars,” “wars against terrorism,” “preventative wars” and “peacekeeping missions.” We express our solidarity with the popular sectors and working class in Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya and Syria, which have seen their countries destroyed by imperialist greed, military wars becoming economic and cultural wars against the peoples.

Similarly, we condemn any kind of interference against sovereign governments in Latin America in the 21st century, whether through espionage or coups d’état, as happened in Honduras or Paraguay in addition to the failed attempts in Venezuela, Bolivia and Ecuador that were defeated by popular mobilization.

These interventions have been accompanied by media terrorism against processes, unions and social movements, the so-called Fourth Generation War, the attempt to establish a hegemonic order of communication controlled by transnational media capital that attempts to impose their political, economic and social objectives, consistently in opposition to the

interests of the working class and popular sectors.

As a means of overcoming interference against the political and economic sovereignty of our peoples, we support the abolition of the Security Council of the United Nations and the democratization of the United Nations system itself.

Anti-Colonialism

We believe that the model of colonization imposed by the countries of the North involved crimes against humanity, looting and the subjugation of our peoples, and that wars have been an instrument of subjugation and domination that imperialism has employed to impose its political and economic will.

The colonial order is the nucleus of the genocide, the millions of human beings exterminated, the hundreds of languages annihilated in the interests of a supposed homogenization, the subordination of systems of economic complementarity based on barter to mercantilism, the subjection of advanced civilizations to the Inquisition, and the individualist overpowering of a social order based on reciprocity.

We strive for decolonization and the destruction of the material and subjective foundations of racism, internal colonialism and the new forms of external colonialism. Decolonization means undoing the institutional, economic, political and cultural foundations of the old regime and the construction of new institutional, economic, political and cultural foundations as a new way of organizing social life.

Decolonization is a revolutionary process that struggles against financial capital and the big transnational corporations. We must extinguish the myth of a democratic capitalism or a capitalist democracy. Decolonization also implies struggling against ideological and cultural colonialism, racism and all forms of discrimination.

We should mention here the role of women in the labour struggle. We commit ourselves to the struggle against patriarchy, celebrating the process of de-patriarchalization promoted by the Bolivian government and its social movements.

Decolonization similarly implies a struggle for interculturality, for another education model dedicated to an open, humanist, scientific, technological, productive, liberating and revolutionary, critical, education within a framework of solidarity, oriented to conservation and protection of the environment, biodiversity and territorial sovereignty.

Decolonization implies confronting the neocolonial situations that our peoples still experience. In the case of Latin America we repudiate the imperialist occupation of Puerto Rico; of Guantánamo in socialist Cuba that continues to heroically resist a criminal blockade; of the Malvinas Islands by the United Kingdom and NATO. And we undertake to support Bolivia's claim for access to the sea with sovereignty, access that was forcibly removed in an imperialist invasion promoted by Chilean economic elites to seize Bolivia's natural resources. Real Latin American integration includes a solution to Bolivia's just claim against Chile. Nor can we forget about other parts of the world; thus we reject the occupation of Palestine and the genocide of an entire people being committed by Israel.

Anti-Capitalism

Our struggle is against capitalism and all of its expressions. It is against this model that

destroys all forms of life and appropriates the surplus value generated by peoples, persons and our Mother Earth.

All of this is taking place during an historical moment marked by a high intensity financial war against the processes of change. We add our voice to the statements by President Evo Morales in solidarity with Argentina and against the unjust and immoral global financial system and the so-called “vulture funds” that are out to crush the processes of change through debts contracted by military dictatorships and neoliberal governments that served the interests of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

This international financial system uses the IMF and the WB, as well as the ILO [International Labour Organization], to weaken the economic sovereignty of the peoples and their workers. We denounce this kind of financial neocolonialism carried out by the “Wall Street Boys”, the operators of speculative financial capital, and we strive for a new international financial architecture.

The Havana Conference on External Debt will celebrate its 29th anniversary in July this year. External debt is an illegal mechanism used under capitalism to continue the colonial exploitation of the peoples. We repudiate all of the debt of the misnamed Third World and strive for the total cancellation of this debt.

The evolution of financial capitalism has in part involved free trade agreements that actually amount to territorial control over the processes of transformation and peoples’ natural resources. We especially repudiate the sophisticated re-edition of the FTAA [Free Trade Area of the Americas] that the peoples of Latin America and progressive governments defeated in 2005 in Mar del Plata, and is now called the Pacific Alliance, an imperialist tool of the United States designed to undermine the process of regional political integration in Latin America and to recover areas lost to the advance of processes of change.

In the face of the Pacific Alliance, we propose the Alliance of the Peoples of the South and of the working class in defense of the peoples’ natural resources and Mother Earth.

It is not by chance that Venezuela, a country with the biggest oil reserves in the world, has had to confront a terrorist attack, just as Bolivia and Ecuador did previously. The sovereign recovery of natural resources is fundamental, since it constitutes the material basis for the whole process, for the possibility of wealth redistribution and the reduction of inequalities in countries that have suffered 500 years of colonization.

Just as we defend sovereignty over natural resources, we must also defend food sovereignty. We join in solidarity with the struggles of campesinos against transnational corporations, agribusiness, the use of toxic chemicals and GMOs, as well as in defense of food sovereignty.

Toward Socialism

It is on the basis of these three pillars that we propose the coordination and cooperation of the working class and of popular sectors that are struggling to build socialism at a national, regional and global level.

In order to achieve socialism we must first of all achieve the unity of all revolutionary forces in a popular anti-imperialist, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist front, based on an alliance of workers, campesinos and indigenous peoples, an alliance of popular sectors.

A socialism that can only be democratic, expanding the margins and limits of liberal democracy, an anti-imperialist and anti-colonial socialism that can overcome all forms of alienation under capitalism, that emerges from its roots in the working class and indigenous and campesino movements, from the factories, fields and communities, to create the kind of society and community to which we aspire, a society in which use-value takes priority over the exchange value imposed by the market and capital.

A socialism where the means of production are socialized through a society in which basic services, along with labour rights, are guaranteed for everyone, in which everyone enjoys all of these rights.

The crisis of capitalism brings with it the need to maintain profit rates through the exploitation of workers. In almost every country in the world, the retirement age has gone up, pensions have been reduced and health care has been privatized and commodified.

Obviously, the socialism to which we aspire recognizes the struggles and aspirations of the working class throughout history. We want a public, universal and mandatory system of social security for all countries, in addition to the lowering of the retirement age and an increase in pensions, since only in this way can the popular classes live with dignity after retirement.

Our socialist project must guarantee that water and basic services are human rights, which requires sovereignty over natural and energy resources that are vital to social and labour rights.

In order to guarantee social and labour rights, we must develop a vision that differs from capitalist development.

The socialist outlook must be internationalist, an internationalism that, as Che noted, is based on the love of the peoples. We defend an internationalist alliance of the workers', campesino and indigenous movement together with all national liberation movements and all movements of the oppressed across the globe that struggle for a world and a future based on peace and social justice.

This class-based and socialist internationalism should be based on political education. If we want to confront capitalist hegemony in the economic, political, cultural and media sphere, we must prepare ourselves for the Battle of Ideas. A Battle of Ideas that, as Comandante Fidel Castro points out, is not only about principles, theory, knowledge, culture, arguments, responses and counter-responses, the destruction of lies and diffusion of truth; it must involve concrete actions and achievement.

Conclusion

We recognize the contribution of the World Federation of Trade Unions in its 69 years of existence in defense of the working class in Vietnam, Cuba, Korea, Franco's Spain, Salazar's Portugal, Greece during the heroic civil war, along with Guatemala, Angola, Grenada and Chile, South Africa, the Congo, Mozambique, Ethiopia, Egypt, the Golan Heights, Lebanon, Iraq, India, Indonesia, East Timor and the Western Sahara.

We also recall the legacy of all those who struggled for freedom and gave their lives for the national and social liberation of their peoples: Bolívar, Zapata, Martí, Sandino, Che, Ho Chi

Minh, Sankara and Comandante Chávez, in addition to recognizing the contribution that the Cuban revolution, headed by Comandantes Fidel and Raúl Castro, has made to this present moment of history.

The period of transition we are living through demands coordination between trade unions, social movements, youth, women and committed intellectuals, so that from a position of defending these processes of change we can seek to build a political project of national and social liberation of our peoples.

But our liberation is not only the liberation of our peoples. It is at the same time the liberation of all of humanity, since we are not struggling to dominate others; we struggle in order that no one shall dominate anyone else.

And on the road to liberation, it is important to maintain the achievements already made, which is why we proclaim our solidarity with the process of change in Bolivia that we hope will be strengthened once again in the October 12 presidential elections.

Long live the Bolivian process of change!
Long live the struggles of the working class!
Against capitalist barbarism, for peace and a world without exploitation! •

This document was approved during the closing plenary session of the Anti-Imperialist International Trade Union Conference organized by the Central Obrera Boliviana [Bolivian Workers Central – COB], and the World Federation of Trade Unions [WFTU], with the support of the Government of the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

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