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Washington working hand in hand with separatists

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http://www.pslweb.org/site/News2?JServSessionIdr007=jlkr241711.app5b&page=NewsArticle&id=9097&news_iv_ctrl=1261

On May 4, an illegal referendum took place in Bolivia's Santa Cruz department (state) to decide whether the region would become autonomous from the rest of the country.

From May 2 through May 4, the streets of the major cities and towns across Bolivia were filled as peasants, union members and youths protested the ploy to tear apart the country. On the day of the referendum alone, over half a million people in Cochabamba and another 200,000 in El Alto demonstrated. On the day of the referendum, protesters burned several ballot boxes.

"We will lift our flags against fascism," said Pedro Montes, leader of the Bolivian Workers Central union. (TeleSUR, May 4)

The Organization of American States expressed support for Bolivia's territorial integrity; however, the United States blocked a condemnation of the illegal referendum and their ringleaders. Ecuador, Venezuela, Cuba and Nicaragua all expressed support for Morales in his struggle against the referendum. Brazil and Argentina, which rely heavily on Bolivia's natural resources, have also thrown their weight behind Bolivia's territorial integrity.

Members of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas (ALBA), the regional bloc for trade and cooperation headed by Cuba and Venezuela, expressed solidarity with the Morales government well ahead of the autonomy vote. ALBA leaders affirmed their "staunch rejection of the destabilization plans that seek to undermine peace and unity in Bolivia," labeling it "a referendum that clearly violates Bolivia's constitution and laws." (Inter Press Service, April 23)

Within the state of Santa Cruz, several polling stations were closed by indigenous peoples who rejected the referendum. Alejandro Antezana, a local Aymara Indian, said, "We are going to fight to the death if we have to. We are not going to let them set up their ballot boxes this Sunday, even if that will lead us to confrontation and bloodshed. We have too much to lose." (Washington Post, May 4)

With Morales's support, a constituent assembly approved a draft constitution in 2007, guaranteeing the rights of the indigenous majority to their lands and tackling the country's highly skewed wealth distribution.



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International's activities in Bolivia, whose nationalization was announced by Morales three days before the referendum.

Marinkovic helped form the Media Luna coalition, which brings together the ruling circles of the departments of Pando, Beni, Santa Cruz and Tarija, to fight back the progressive reforms of President Morales. Most of Bolivia's natural gas and oil wealth is located in these states.

A battlefield in Latin America's anti-imperialist war

Since the founding of Bolivia, a white-minority oligarchy of European decent has ruled over the 55 percent indigenous and 30 percent mestizo populations through an apartheid-like state apparatus. Morales is Bolivia's first fully indigenous president, despite the country's majority indigenous population.

Following his election victory on December 18, 2005, Morales has fought hard to steer the poorest nation of South America on an independent path, much to the displeasure of U.S imperialism.

The Bolivian ruling class has felt particularly threatened by Morales's efforts at empowering the country's indigenous majority—a challenge to Bolivia's 500 years of white supremacy and racial oppression. His party, the Movement Toward Socialism (MAS), has promoted redistribution of wealth, an end to racial discrimination, nationalization of key industries and land reform as means to address the disparities faced by the indigenous population.

On May 1, 2006, Morales declared that all natural gas reserves were to be nationalized. Now, exactly two years later, Morales announced that the Bolivian government would become the largest shareholder of British Petroleum, Ashmore Energy International and Compañía Logística de Hidrocarburos Boliviana. That same day he also announced the nationalization of Entel, the largest telecommunication company in Bolivia. Until now, all were controlled by foreign capital.

Morales has brought Bolivia into ALBA, fortifying his country's ties to the growing Latin America anti-imperialist bloc. With the help of Cuban teachers, he has pushed through education initiatives aimed at destroying the high illiteracy rates in Bolivia.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have bogged down Washington and created an opening for progressive, left forces in Latin America to advance. In response, the U.S. government is now turning to the financing and arming of extreme-right elements—be they in Bolivia or in Venezuela—to reverse what it considers to be a dangerous trend.

Under Venezuela and Cuba's leadership, Latin American unity against U.S. imperialism is on the rise. Morales has asserted his confidence in the people's will to