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**Prepared for the conference
“Populism of the Twenty-First Century”
Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars
Washington, D.C.
October 8, 2009**

**From the MNR to the MAS:
Populism, Parties, State and Social Movements in Bolivia since 1952**

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The probable re-election of Evo Morales Ayma later this year as president of Bolivia for a further five-years invites reflection on the nature of political power in this country, and in particular the relationship between the state, party(ies) and a wide variety of social movements. Much of the published academic literature on contemporary Bolivia reflects on how the MAS came to power in 2006, and the relationship it had with social movements. Much less has been written on what the MAS is today and how it operates in governing the country in conjunction with those social movements. There is good reason for this: it is arguably premature to make hard and fast judgements about a political phenomenon that is continuing to evolve. But at the same time, as we approach a ‘*segundo fase*’ of the MAS government, it is important to note some of the key features of the way in which this government operates, subject of course to obvious caveats.

The *convocatoria* to this conference, however, invites us to think historically, comparing existing regimes in Latin America with earlier ones. A theme that runs through this paper is the changing nature of the relationship between parties, the state and social movements over a fairly long (60 years plus) period of time. I think that any discussion of

Bolivian politics in this period has to take into account the achievements and limitations of the 1952 revolution, an event which not only represents a decisive turning point in modern Bolivian history but also helps mark out some of the differences between the country's politics and those of its neighbours. The legacy of 1952 has proved remarkably enduring, helping to establish a context in which politics have been discussed ever since. I therefore begin with a section that discusses the development of politics prior and subsequent to 1952, in particular the way in which the state responded to the social pressures that expressed themselves with the revolution itself. Then, I move on to a consideration of the neoliberal period, post 1985, in which the axis of Bolivian politics shifted substantially towards a model that many at the time applauded as a vindication of the principles of the Washington Consensus. This then provoked a sharp reaction in which, in which social movements returned to the fore. Finally, I seek to provide some preliminary thoughts on the nature of politics in Bolivia today, and particularly on the way in which the country's ruling party, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) actually works. There are no entirely new beginnings in history, and the MAS government – as we shall see – is embedded in long-running traditions of politics while, of course, contributing important new elements to those traditions which will have an important imprint on the way politics are conducted in the future.

The *convocatoria* also invites us to compare populisms, old and new. In what sense was the Bolivian revolution an exercise in populism? In what sense does the government of the MAS or the protest movements that preceded it provide evidence of new forms of populism in the making? Is there a 'populist' tradition in recent Bolivian history? The literature on populism, of course, involves a wide variety of definitions that sometimes cause

the utility of the term to be brought into question. Problems in defining populism are, as we all know, almost as old as the concept itself.

Broadly speaking, 'classical' populism has been used to describe those regimes which challenged the old oligarchies (weakened by the economic crises of the late 1920s and early 1930s) by seeking to draw in previously excluded sectors of the population, but on a basis less of empowerment than control from above. With an emphasis on nation-building, it was concerned with social mobilisation against a status quo in which large segments were excluded. Populist movements and regimes tended to be poorly institutionalised, top-down in the way they were managed, and usually personalist in their political projection. Ideologically, they tended to be ambiguous in the traditional 'left-right' sense – neither capitalist nor communist – but imbued with a strong sense of nationalism and (sometimes) anti-imperialism. Their social base was heterogenous and poly-classist, and the economic policies associated with populist regimes in Latin America often geared towards a process of industrialisation through the substitution of imports. Their economic project in turn helped strengthen a new social and political alliance – between organised labour, industrialists and the state – that was to prove fairly durable and long-lasting in many cases. Such characteristics were not universal, and the classifications far from water-tight. Arguably the exceptions to the rule (for example the existence of populism in a mainly agrarian setting in countries like Bolivia or Ecuador) were suggestive of the difficulties in giving precise meaning to the term.

The notion of populism has once again become the preoccupation of Latin American scholars in the last ten years, partly because of the techniques used by several political leaders in the region to rally public opinion against a political system that was also seen as

exclusive, reviving charismatic patterns of leadership around policies designed to restructure economic relations; this time, however, it was to foster economic liberalisation rather than state-building. One of the hallmarks of the ‘neo-populists’ was the attempt to forge a new relationship between the leader and the led in ways that bypassed representative institutions. However the term ‘populism’ has also been used to describe rather different sorts of movements and regimes with different projects over recent years, those which have sought to rally popular discontent against the shortcomings of neo-liberal policies and the politics associated with them, and to launch alternatives that challenge globalisation and the market economy. A new variant has come into being, of which Presidents Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Rafael Correa in Ecuador and Evo Morales in Bolivia are sometimes seen as exemplars. So far as Bolivia is concerned, one of the purposes of this paper is to see whether the term as applied to Morales and the government of the MAS fits, but we begin with a consideration of the 1952 revolution and its legacy.

The MNR and its sequels

The 1952 revolution was a product of the social changes which had taken place in Bolivia in the two previous decades, and the way in which new social actors had entered the scene and begun to challenge the political control of a small elite, known in Bolivia as the ‘*rosca*’. Not only did the 1940s see significant peasant mobilisation but also the formation of the mineworkers union, the FSTMB. It also saw the emergence of a nationalist political party, the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR), inspired in no small part by European fascism, by Peronism in Argentina and the impact of APRA in Peru. It provided a link between a small but developing middle class and some more leftwing political currents

with influence in the union movement. The MNR had become an important force during the Villarroel presidency (1943-46), when it had sought to rally popular movements behind this nationalist and authoritarian government with its pro-Axis sympathies. More immediately, 1952 was a response to a political crisis provoked by the decision to overrule the results of the 1951 elections in which MNR leader Victor Paz Estenssoro won an outright majority. The 1952 revolution, therefore, was led primarily by middle-class reformists anxious to break with traditional oligarchic political control, but it involved the mobilisation of a significant albeit shifting alliance of workers and peasants.

It therefore approximated to (and indeed was inspired by) the model of modernising populism that had emerged with force in Latin America and elsewhere in the decades preceding 1952. The ideology that emerged and which was to remain dominant for the following 30 years was driven largely by nationalism and developmentalism. The revolution, of course, resulted in important structural reforms, notably the introduction of universal suffrage, the nationalisation of the country's main mines and the initiation of a widespread policy of agrarian reform. These were policies that reflected the interests of those who had participated actively in the revolution, and indeed were 'made' by them. The revolutionary governments that followed built on these reforms, embarking on novel policies of national development that revolved around a high degree of state participation in the economy (in the face of a very weak private sector) and the policies of 'nation-building' involved in the so-called '*marcha hacia el oriente*'. The colonisation of the eastern lowlands with peasants from the highlands formed part of this project, providing an important opportunity for these governments to organise new sectors of the workforce. 1952 was therefore the moment at which a new type of regime came into being based on much broader public support.

The changes brought about by the revolution thus helped empower those sectors of the population which had been involved, particularly the mineworkers and other incipient sectors of a small working class, along with a large number of peasants which had occupied the lands they previously worked as peons, ejecting traditional landlords. The formation of the Central Obrera Boliviana (COB) in 1953 became the institutional expression of this, particularly of the former. The COB, organised largely around the FSTMB, enjoyed an important degree of autonomy from the state, dominated as it was by the MNR. Conflicts between the two were not slow in emerging, particularly as the MNR government sought to impose fiscal discipline on the newly nationalised mining industry. The key figure in this awkward and conflictive relationship was Juan Lechín Oquendo, who with one foot within the regime and one foot outside, played an important role in managing relations between the new state and powerful sectors of the workforce. The COB itself became a highly conflictive space between pro- and anti-government factions in the labour movement.

At the same time – and as the conflicts between the government and the FSTMB became more fraught – the MNR increasingly sought to build its own, independent powerbase. It turned initially to the peasant sector, creating a clientelist structure designed in part to counterbalance the power of the FSTMB and the COB. It did so with the support of the US embassy, specifically under the Alliance for Progress, which helped finance its agrarian policies, specifically its colonisation policies in the tropics of Cochabamba and Santa Cruz. The MNR adopted policies designed to break down ethnic identities into a more homogenous ‘peasant’ class. To this end, it established a hierarchy of agrarian unions with corresponding branches at the local, provincial, departmental and national levels. Nominally

at least providing a system of grass-roots participation, the agrarian unions that developed in the 1950s and 1960s came to constitute more of a system of top-down control. This system of control became increasingly authoritarian after the MNR lost power in 1964 to the military and the subsequent creation of the Pacto Militar Campesino.

Another area of state building related to the armed forces, effectively destroyed in the 1952 revolution. The rebuilding of the army during the 1950s – again with strong support from the United States in the context of Cold War superpower rivalries – represented the other main prop of the MNR's powerbase. The size of the military was greatly expanded and, under direct influence from Washington, its ideological stance became notably anti-communist. The strength of the military was limited, but it leant itself to internal repression, particularly geared towards curbing the power of the more radical sectors of the union movement and putting down agrarian dissidence. By 1964, when the period of military governments began with that of General René Barrientos (1964-69), the army had become a key political actor in its own right. It was able to dispense with the need to kow-tow to the MNR and civilian rule, while concentrating – through the Pacto Militar Campesino – on building up a social powerbase of its own. But its achievements in this respect were always limited. Even the relatively lengthy dictatorship of General Hugo Banzer in the 1970s failed to build a lasting institutional base of this sort. The circumstances under which it fell in 1978 showed that top-down political mobilisation was a project based on weak foundations. Bolivia's return to democratic rule in 1978 was initiated with strikes in the mining camps and protests from other social sectors. The Pacto Militar Campesino did not outlive its creators.

So in what sense were the 'national' revolution and the governments of the MNR an exercise in populism? The MNR had gained prominence as a party built on corporatist lines, managing to mobilise popular sectors in ways that challenged the oligarchic status quo. It involved a progressive alliance that cut across social classes which in a way was dedicated to a new form of national development. It adopted a strongly nationalist discourse. In terms of economics, the development model it employed sought to diversify the economy and to reduce its dependence on a single export commodity, tin. In its way, the model sought to promote industrialisation, although the sort of import substitution as practiced elsewhere in Latin America remained elusive in a setting in which conditions for industrial growth were largely missing. The role of the state in the economy was preponderant, reflecting the weakness of the private sector. Nurtured on corporative ideas, the MNR was never a 'liberal' party, but the weakness of state structures meant that corporatism was always relative. While it used state resources to mobilise support – giving a voice the previously excluded sectors – its ability to satisfy the needs of client groups was limited. There remained large parts of Bolivia where the influence of the state was weak, if not non-existent. At the same time, there were important sectors of the politically active population that consciously resisted attempts to co-opt or suborn them, and indeed were ready and willing to resist attempts to clip their wings. Bolivia's class-conscious trade union movement – exceptional by Latin American standards -- proved remarkably resilient in spite of the severe bouts of repression it suffered and partly because of them. Unlike its counterparts elsewhere, the COB persisted as a single institution, encompassing the ideological divides within it but maintaining both its unity and a large measure of autonomy from the Bolivian state. Whatever the populist

intentions of post-revolutionary governments, the limited reach of the state meant that they tended to fall short in reality.

Economic and political liberalisation, and the popular reaction

If 1952 represented a watershed in terms of Bolivia's recent economic and political development, 1985 represents another. And just as it was the MNR which spearheaded the changes that followed 1952, it was the MNR again – indeed under the very same leadership of Victor Paz Estenssoro – which set about undoing many of the structures created by the Bolivian revolution. The New Economic Policy of 1985, introduced by the recently re-elected Paz, set in motion a series of policies designed to reduce drastically the scale of state intervention in Bolivia and free up the economy to market forces. These were the policies pursued with different degrees of intensity and conviction both by Paz and his successors: Jaime Paz Zamora (1989-93), Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada (1993-97), Hugo Banzer (1997-2001), Jorge Quiroga (2001-02) and Sánchez de Lozada again (2002-03). In the political sphere, a party system of sorts came into being, in which three main parties (the MNR, the Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR) and Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN)) shared power in various combinations for nearly 20 years, along with smaller, less formal groupings like Conciencia de Patria (Condepa) and Unión Cívica Solidaridad (USC). Bolivia enjoyed a period of unusual political stability, and for a while seemed to provide a powerful vindication for the sort of liberal policies advocated by the Washington Consensus.

It was indeed a period of considerable political as well as economic change. The New Economic Policy, amongst other things, dealt a heavy blow to the trade union movement (which only a few years previously had helped bring down the Banzer dictatorship) by closing down the vast majority of public sector mines. Some 25,000

mineworkers lost their jobs between 1985 and 1988. The FSTMB, and with it the COB, found themselves bereft of their most militant members. Then, subsequently, the policies of privatisation, pensions reform and labour liberalisation pursued by Sánchez de Lozada further reduced the capacity of the unions in other sectors as well. The mineworkers, with their traditions of class consciousness and independence, found themselves disarticulated and physically dispersed to other parts of Bolivia in the search for alternative livelihoods of one sort or another. With the demise of the mineworkers, other social forces lacked the sort of protagonistic leadership that the miners had provided over the years, both through the COB and more indirectly. At the same time, the armed forces found themselves politically weakened, following their involvement in drug manufacture and trafficking during the governments of General Luis García Meza and his immediate successors (1980-82). As drugs replaced the Cold War as a key preoccupation in Washington, so US foreign policy shifted in its previous unwavering support for the Bolivian military. Indeed, in the Siles Zuazo administration that ensued (1982-85), Washington even tacitly accepted the participation of members of the Bolivian Communist Party (PCB) in the cabinet.

As we have seen, between 1985 and 2003, Bolivia was governed by a series of coalitions made up of three main parties. Elections were held regularly and fairly, and – until 2001 at least when Banzer was forced to retire due to ill health – presidents managed to serve out their allotted terms of office. The parties that formed this new party system were a mixture of old, like the MNR; the not-so-old, like ADN and the MIR; and the new, like UCS and Condepa. But while the tonic here was one of consensus-building and ideological convergence around a liberalising economic credo, the parties increasingly failed to represent popular feelings or harness popular causes, except at election times. Disaffection with party

politics solidified around opposition to their clientelistic methods and patrimonial practices. The system came to be called *cuoteo*, whereby party elites took it in turns to divide up the spoils of the public sector depending on their electoral weight. The parties reflected the interests of new political elites, ignoring the interests of those who voted for them in elections. Even the so-called ‘populist’ parties like Condepa and UCS – those more attuned to the culture and interests of less moneyed sectors of society – were seen to operate along the same logic. While the institutionalisation of political parties may have produced stability and facilitated technocratic policymaking it was at the expense of representation and – ultimately – of democratic legitimacy.

This was the context for the sudden challenge to the existing political system that erupted in the last few years of the 20th century and first ones of the 21st in ways that were to transform the political landscape once again. This is not the place to detail the series of protests, beginning with the Cochabamba ‘water war’ of 1999-2000 and culminating with the El Alto ‘gas war’ of 2003, but simply to note how social movements of one sort or another re-appeared after a decade or so of relative inactivity to impose themselves on the state and, finally, to oust an elected (albeit unpopular) president in October 2003. This renewed activity was, of course, coincident with the rise of the Movimiento al Socialismo-Instrumento Político por la Soberanía de los Pueblos, to give the MAS its full name. The challenge to the *partidocracia* thus came from below, not from above as was the case in some other countries of Latin America.

As is well known, the MAS arose out of the politics of the *cocaleros* of the Chapare whose opposition to the coca eradication programmes of successive governments led them to organise politically, taking advantage of some of the decentralisation reforms that had taken

place in the mid-1990s. Influenced by the legacy of union organisation – many of the sacked miners from the highlands settled in the Chapare – the *cocaleros* sought to build their own political ‘instrument’, independent of the existing political parties whose acquiescence with outside demands for coca eradication further reinforced the need to create a party of their own. The coca leaf therefore became a symbol of national defiance as well as one that could be identified with the revaluation of indigenous culture. The electoral success of the MAS, first in the Chapare and then more generally in Cochabamba, showed that there was scope for new party alignments critical of the status quo and Bolivia’s seeming subservience to pressures from outside.

The growing public disenchantment with the politics of ‘pacted democracy’ became particularly evident after 1997, during the so-called ‘mega-coalition’ led by President Hugo Banzer Suarez. Beginning with the Cochabamba ‘water war’ of 1999, the activities of social movements – long quiescent – became sustained and infectious. Politically uncoordinated and involving movements of a variety of characteristics and agendas, the social movements gained force, exploiting the political opportunities that presented themselves. Reflecting deeply embedded Bolivian traditions of popular mobilisation, their methods involved a combination of direct action (protests, marches, road blockades and the like) and involvement within the existing political system. They took full advantage of the strong communitarian traditions in Bolivian political culture. The emergence of *indigenismo* as a potentially mobilising force had been apparent from the late 1970s with the development of the Katarista movement, but it gained force in the late 1990s, partly as a consequence of the decentralisation and educational reforms of the Sánchez de Lozada government and partly out of the 500th anniversary of the Spanish invasion..

The success of the MAS was its ability to take full advantage of this mood of popular discontent with the workings of the traditional political system and the latter's estrangement from the concerns of grass-roots politics. The choice of the title of '*instrumento político*' was in itself revealing, since the MAS did not wish to call itself a political party as such, although it was in fact obliged to do so for the purposes of electoral registration. Indeed, the loose way in which the MAS was organised – initially as a 'political instrument' for the six federations of *cocaleros* in the Chapare tropics – was very different from the way in which traditional parties did their business. Indeed, these local links to social movements and the idea that the movements provided the nucleus for organisation, not the party, made the MAS a novel sort of party characterised by decentralisation and active participation at the grass-roots. The idea was to create a party that would be at the service of social movements, beginning with the *cocaleros*.

The phenomenal growth of the MAS as a political option between 1997 and 2002 (when it only narrowly missed winning the presidential elections of that year) was evidence of this political vacuum. However, it also owed much to the MAS's ability to transcend its origins and broaden its appeal to a mass electorate. Within this five-year period, the MAS went from being a one-issue party in the Chapare to developing a discourse that encompassed the views of a wide range of voters across the country. It managed to join together into a coherent platform a number of different issues: hostility towards coca eradication, the need for land reform, opposition to privatisation, opposition to Bolivia's involvement in trade liberalisation schemes with the United States, the desire to improve ordinary people's living standards etc. In short, the MAS was able to articulate a latent hostility towards the politics of the Washington Consensus in general and the politics of the United States in particular and

weld them into a political movement with strong support, not just in Cochabamba but most other parts of the country too. At the same time, the MAS demonstrated a capacity to appeal to the defence of indigenous values, but linking these to wider issues such as the defence of the country's natural resources. The MAS was therefore able to build up an alliance of constituencies whilst identifying common threads that would hold them together. The experience of the MAS contrasts quite vividly with the politics of the *indigenista* Movimiento Indigena Pachakuti (MIP) led by Felipe Quispe, one of Morales' chief rivals within the pro-indigenous movement. Rather than build a broad movement, the MIP sought to mobilise around strictly indigenous issues among the Aymara-speaking peoples of rural La Paz. Its electoral support ended up being very narrow by comparison with the MAS.

In what sense, then, can this political reaction against the politics of 'pacted democracy' be called populist? In one sense, it seems to be quintessentially populist if we take as a definition of populism that offered by Ernesto Laclau and his followers. It was the ability to move from particularist to a more universal claim, and by so doing create a new hegemonic discourse, that marks the MAS out. The growth of the MAS was, indeed, a story of creating a 'chain of equivalence'. The story of the MAS was also built around antagonism with the status quo involving an appeal to a marginalised and under-enfranchised population which was largely ignored by existing political institutions, which Francisco Panizza has recently emphasised as a criterion of populism. However, taking other definitions of what populism is, we can reach rather different conclusions. If for example, we interpret populism as a 'top-down' mode of mobilisation designed to rally support for policies of structural reform of one sort or another, involving the incorporation of new sectors of the population as political participants, then the story of the MAS would not appear to be so populist. Indeed,

it would seem to be quintessentially a 'bottom-up' movement which in the process of challenging the established elite gained widespread political traction. Nor is this the story of political leaders seeking to bypass representative institutions in a direct appeal to the 'populus'; rather it seems to be a self conscious attempt to build new institutions that represent popular interests in a much more genuine way. This after all, as we shall see, was involved in the attempt to 'refound' the way in which politics is conducted. Here, an important distinction would seem to emerge between the MAS in Bolivia and the movements spearheaded by Hugo Chávez in Venezuela or even Rafael Correa in Ecuador. But this will become clearer as we now seek to make sense of what the MAS is and how it has evolved since it came to power in 2006, following Evo Morales' landslide election victory in December 2005.

The MAS and its experience in government

As we have seen, the MAS is a party that stands out compared to many others in Latin America for the strength of its roots in base-level social movements. Possibly the closest parallel in this respect is to be found in the origins and growth of the Workers Party (PT) in Brazil. The MAS is in no sense an elite party.

The nature of Bolivia's social movements varies considerably from place to place, reflecting the heterogeneity of the country as a whole. Two powerful organisational traditions persist: the union tradition and that of the indigenous or ethnic community. The structures of the agrarian *sindicato*, many of which came into existence following the 1953 agrarian reform, still prevail in much of the country, modelled on the forms of organisation that typified the miners' unions. At the same time, the indigenous community has persisted, especially in the highlands; and with the resurgence of indigenous politics, and some

communities have reverted to these time-honoured forms of organisation. In the eastern lowlands too, indigenous movements have emerged as strident and articulate defenders of their interests. New forms of popular organisation have also grown up that reflect the process of urbanisation in cities like El Alto where the neighbourhood committees (*juntas vecinales*) have become key actors at the local level. Despite their differences, there are some important unifying characteristics of all these social movements. One is a strong communitarian tradition in which decisions are taken collectively. Among Bolivia's social movements there is strong pressure on those involved to participate in decision making and to adhere to the decisions made. There is also strong pressure on leaders (*dirigentes*) – whether elected or traditionally chosen community elders – to be held accountable to those (the *base*) who put them in positions of authority. Of course, in practice, there is a good deal of clientelism and patronage involved in community politics, but these more democratic principles continue to provide an important framework as to how decisions are made and how power is delegated. Chains of representation – from the local level, to the provincial, to the departmental and finally to the national level – inevitably involve the delegation of authority, but they also create important lines of accountability by which *dirigentes* are judged and often recalled.

The MAS has grown up infused by this culture of delegation and accountability which – in the eyes of many – was vitiated and ignored by the traditional parties in their ostensible quest for money and jobs (*prebendalismo*). But such democratic principles can run counter to the efficacy of government, particularly central government. When the MAS took office in January 2006, some commentators believed that the practicalities of governing the country – in which local interests tend to be subsumed to wider concerns – would lead to

a process of institutionalisation within the MAS that would force it to become more bureaucratic and to prioritise the demands of running the state to those of articulating the interests of social movements. The bottom-up politics of *protesta* would thus give way to the more top-down logic of governance. Four years on from the inauguration of the new government, it is possible to reach some preliminary judgements about the nature of the MAS in government and the extent to which it has undergone this sort of bureaucratisation. This is of some relevance to the discussion about populism, and it would seem that the Morales government has gone to great lengths not to sacrifice its original social links on the altar of governmental efficiency.

One of the first indications of this was Morales' choice of cabinet ministers. Several came from humble origins, had little or no experience in government, and had risen to political prominence through leadership roles within social movements. They were a far cry from the technocratic elites who had served in previous administrations. The same was true of many who took their seats in Congress, particularly those elected as uninominal deputies most of whom were unknown figures in national politics. While some were 'appointed' from above, a large number had emerged from a complex nomination procedure involving different echelons within the social movements. Likewise, most of the candidates put forward by the MAS for the election to the Constituent Assembly in July 2006 were drawn from the leadership of social movements; the president of the Assembly, Silvia Lazarte (derided for her popular origins by some opposition figures), was typical of the involvement of ordinary people of indigenous origin who made up a large part of the assembly. They were a far cry from the traditional political class and, often inexperienced in such matters, found themselves in the difficult process of drafting a new constitution.

Since 2006, Evo Morales has given huge importance to maintaining the links between the party 'apparatus' in government and the social movements that (loosely) constitute the MAS and provide its social base. He is highly conscious of the need to avoid the same pitfalls that beset the traditional parties which lost legitimacy because they had lost touch with the electorate. Much, if not most of Morales' time is given up to meeting delegations from social movements or to visits by helicopter to communities across the country. Such linkages reaffirm his political leadership, but also serve to provide channels of articulation, providing a way by which the government reports back fairly regularly on its activities to the social movements. The daily agenda of the president, usually beginning well before daybreak, is unrelenting and a source of strain for those around him. Probably the most difficult issues for Morales have the (fairly frequent) instances in which social movements find themselves in conflict with one another, usually in terms of competing claims to natural resources. The armed confrontation in November 2006 between the unionised mineworkers of Huanuni and the large numbers of informal miners working in cooperatives there was one particularly difficult instance, but there have been many others. Morales has also been careful to avoid groups that are more radical than he in gaining the upper hand and mounting an opposition to the government from the left in the name of *lo popular*. His policy of constantly engaging with social movements has paid off in this respect, as well as his use the public purse to resolve specific social and political problems.

Morales, indeed, has become the point at which such disputes and discrepancies tend to resolve themselves, not inferior levels of the state bureaucracy. This pre-eminence is enhanced by the lack of structure within the ruling party. Notwithstanding four years in government, the loose nature of the MAS as an organisation has persisted. There have been

some institutional innovations, however, that have helped provide something of a structure to the relationship between the executive and the social movements. The most important is the Coordinadora Nacional para el Cambio (Conalcam), an organisation set up in 2007 to provide a semi-institutionalised space in which policy issues could be discussed between government and the social movements. This was an initiative taken by the MAS deputies in Congress, concerned by the lack of institutionalised mechanisms of mediation between state and civil society. Conalcam involves 27 national level organisations, including representatives from the COB, peasant unions, women's organisations and different labour sectors. Originally the idea was that it should be a permanent institution with a staff of its own, but it has evolved more as an ad-hoc body that swings into action when needed. As well as facilitating bottom-up dialogue, it has proved a useful instrument for mobilising the government's supporters against its adversaries, particularly those of the eastern departments or *media luna*. However, in no sense is it a structure with a permanent existence or life of its own.

The existence of a permanent body of elected representatives in Congress has provided a further impetus towards institutionalisation in the party, not least because of the system of congressional committees that encourages specialisation in specific areas of government. The *bancada* of the MAS has tended to enjoy a degree of autonomy from the executive and the party, which sometimes reinforces its isolation from the points at which policy decisions are actually made. The elected representatives of the party therefore have only a limited input into the way decisions are reached in practice, and discussion in the Chamber of Deputies tends to limit itself to issues that are not ones of major controversy or liable to cause serious friction with the executive. Since the majority of representatives in the

legislature were elected as representatives of social movements, they seek to maintain their own linkages with those who elected them, but there are also many who were 'invited' to stand for election (mainly more well-known political figures with trajectories on the left) who lack this organic link with the grass roots.

While the MAS is loose and decentralised in the way it works, decision-making is highly centralised in the person of the president, albeit in consultation with social movements and a small inner grouping of trusted colleagues who are often the target of criticism from those in the party who do not belong to this small circle. As we have seen, the relationship with the *bancada* in the Congress is at one remove from the circle of decision making. It is therefore difficult to overstate the importance of Morales within the political system as presently constituted. Not only does he stand head and shoulders above all others within the MAS, but he commands extraordinary legitimacy in the eyes of those in the street simply because of who he is: Bolivia's first-ever *popular* and indigenous head of state, a person of humble origins who symbolises the sort of values and practices that are widely shared among the poor and indigenous majority of Bolivian voters. That he received more than two-thirds support in the August 2008 recall referendum stands as a tribute to this public standing. But while decision making is centralised in the figure of the president – much more so than his predecessors – his power is by no means absolute. As well as having to yield to pressures from his opponents on the right, not least with respect to the constitution, Morales is keenly aware that neither he nor the MAS controls the social movements which sustain them politically. The ability of social movements forcefully to put pressure on the government on matters of concern to them has been made abundantly clear at a number of points over the last four years.

The MAS sees itself as building a political system that supplants liberal representative democracy, creating a much more participative system with important elements of direct democracy. The extent to which it succeeds in doing so is yet to be made clear. The constitution creates a system of indigenous and other autonomies designed to enhance participation, but how the constitution is implemented in practice will only become clear in Morales' second term. The government's critique of liberal representative democracy is evident from the number of referendums and *consultas* that there have been since the MAS took office. The last four years have been ones of non-stop electoral activity of one sort or another, something which has helped sustain the standing of Morales and the government and to circumscribe the potential of the opposition to organise against them. Morales has repeatedly been able to translate his personal popularity into electoral victories, although not without conceding certain spaces to the opposition. While it is important to point out that though the use of referendums had been previously largely absent from the Bolivian political tradition, the rules that allowed these to take place predated the Morales administration. It was President Carlos Meza who set an important precedent through his holding of the July 2004 referendum on gas policy. However, it would be wrong to overstate the extent to which representative democracy has been buried in Bolivia. The new constitution, the result of seemingly endless wrangling between the government and the opposition, resulted in a compromise which promises to uphold many of the institutions inherited from the past. It conspicuously did not uphold the ideas of the supremacy of social movements which many *asambleistas* from the MAS had pledged to include in the constitutional text as part of the 'refounding' of the republic. The December 2009 presidential elections involves the election

of a new Plurinational Legislative Assembly in which MASistas may win a majority of seats, but will be forced to share power with opposition groups.

In office, the MAS has adopted a deliberately antagonistic discourse towards those it sees as its enemies. These include variously the US administration, the '*oligarquía*' of Santa Cruz, the presence of transnational companies etc. This is a way of orchestrating unity among a heterogeneous political public in ways that create a community of interest among its various supporters. In practice, of course, the treatment of these 'enemies' varies a good deal according to the circumstances. Similarly, in terms of Bolivia's 'friends', while the official discourse tends to adopt a pro-Chávez or pro-Cuba line (within the context of the Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas, ALBA), in practice the range of countries with which Bolivia enjoys good relations in Latin America is considerably wider than this would suggest. Frequently, the mobilising discourse adopted has had complicating effects in the more pragmatic business of government, giving the impression of incoherence in policy.

Depending then on the definition of populism we chose to adopt, the Morales government can be seen as populist or not. It makes a strongly anti-status quo appeal, aimed at those who feel that they have been inadequately represented in the past within the Bolivian political system. There are certainly elements of charismatic leadership that use notions of 'nation' in such a way as to create a strong community of interest. There are few institutional checks and balances to restrain that leadership. The government's public discourse also tends to highlight perceived 'enemies' in such a way as to underscore that community of interest. A great deal of presidential time and energy goes into cultivating the support that the government enjoys. The MAS government has espoused a system of direct democracy that arises from its critique of the workings of liberal representative democracy. At the same

time, however, it would be wrong to suggest that Morales appeal to the '*pueblo*' is simply a top-down manoeuvre to control the popular movement. Within the social movements and in their relation with government and the state, there are powerful 'bottom up' influences with which Morales is permanently at pains to connect and listen to. There is a great deal of popular participation in Bolivian politics today, and the social movements – to varying degrees – maintain their own agendas and seek to ensure that government complies with them. The MAS does not control them as such; indeed, even if it wanted to, the state lacks the power and reach to be able to manipulate social movements to its own ends. The democratic impulse of grass-roots democracy is alive and well in Bolivia today.

Conclusions

The history of social movements, political parties and the state in Bolivia over the last 60 years provides a fertile terrain to examine the way in which these interact. Bolivia stands out in Latin America as a country in which the state is relatively weak in terms of outreach, and where social movements (partly as a consequence) have developed in ways that have given them a considerable degree of autonomy. Political parties have demonstrated their limitations in providing a bridge between the two. Although ties of clientelism are by no means absent from the Bolivian story, particularly in some parts of the country, there is a strong tradition of 'bottom-up' mobilisation that counteracts the 'top-down' tendencies of social control. This is, at least in part, a legacy of 1952.

Of course, as we have seen, the relationship between these elements has fluctuated considerably over time. During the post-1952 period a new state came into being, as a result of the mobilisations of the previous period, and sought to impose order on the activities of social movements. The MNR, the party that had emerged in defiance of the old order,

became the party that sought to organise the relationship between an interventionist state and society, at once channelling popular demands and seeking to control them. After, 1964, the armed forces tried to create a new institutional structure to replace the MNR, particularly in articulating social demands. The period of neoliberal hegemony in the 1980s and 1990s sought to restructure this relationship between state and society, offering greater space to political parties to institutionalise politics. Their failure to create new, lasting representative structures helped create a political vacuum in which resurgent social movements were able to assert themselves. The MAS gave these movements political leadership, and after 2006 sought once again to restructure the relationship between state, party and social movements.

The achievements of 1952 cast a long shadow over the decades that followed, deeply affecting political culture in Bolivia. Although the rise of the MAS was due to much more proximate factors, there can be little doubt that the ‘national revolution’ – as it is called in Bolivia – continues to exert considerable influence. For many, the MAS has picked up the agenda which the MNR failed to pursue in the 1950s, in translating the promise of citizenship into reality and in creating a nation in which the principles of popular sovereignty prevail. At the same time, however, the project of the MAS differs considerably from that of the MNR, particularly in respect of ethnic affirmation. The MAS sees itself not just in picking up where the MNR left off, but in pursuing a project of transformation of a neo-colonial state based on ethnic exclusion. There is a constant tension in the discourse of the MAS between these two objectives: the nationalist and the indigenous.

The legacy of 1952 is also powerful in terms of legitimising popular protest, a tradition of mobilisation with roots stretching back to colonial days. The memory of the

miners and the COB still acts as a powerful trigger to popular mobilisation today. However, this tradition exists alongside one of top-down mobilisation by the state. The two traditions continue into the present period, with the MAS at once involved in top-down mobilisation, as well as responding to mobilisation from the bottom up. However, what makes the Bolivian experience unusual is the importance of participation within social movements and the responsiveness and accountability of the *dirigente*. As a *dirigente*, Morales sees the need to make himself accountable to these, as well as using their backing for his own political purposes.

Whether or not this pattern of mobilisation and participation can be classified as populist depends on the definition of populism one wants to use. There is a long tradition of appealing to *lo popular* in Bolivian politics in ways which seek to forge a sense of unity around an appeal to a collective identity, both in opposition to government and from government. That appeal has often been antagonistic towards domestic 'enemies' (such as the *rosca* in the 1940s and 1950s) and more recently towards the '*oligarquía*' of Santa Cruz, as well as external foes. At the same time, however, while political elites have sought to rally public opinion in this way, Bolivia's social movements have managed to maintain much of their autonomy as well as basing their actions on an important degree of responsiveness to the *base*. In this sense, at least, 'populism' emerges from the people itself.