

























crats), while by 2013 only 15 per cent had a social movement background. At the same time, even in the cocalero strongholds in the Chapare people were complaining of a top-down disciplining of different opinions by the party, and the phrase *dictadura sindical* described the MAS' attitude towards the Chapareño cocaleros. In a way, the case of the MAS once again ratified Michels' Iron Law of Oligarchy (Michels 1999).

By 2010, when the commodity boom that allowed Bolivia's growth (and redistributive state attitude) was over and the first signs of the financial crisis were starting to affect the country, Evo Morales' administration changed course towards the right-wing opposition as well (and vice versa). Rubén Costas, the governor of Santa Cruz who had led the 2008 anti-government protests was now on visibly better terms with Evo Morales, while agro-business organizations that had assisted the 2008 coup effort were now having regular consultations with the President, notes Jeffery Webber (Webber 2017b: 338). Starting in 2010, it seems that a pact was made: the Right would embrace Evo's statesmanship, and in return he would offer their agro-businesses (mainly coca, soy and quinoa) a considerable extension of their cultivated surface area that would triple their exports by 2025. This offer was accompanied by relevant infrastructural extensions and energy subsidies (ibid.: 343–44). With the pact, 'the government of social movements' was now entering a new phase.

## Conclusion

This chapter tried to evaluate the MAS' social and political performance after fourteen years in the *Palacio Quemado*, as the Bolivian Palace of Government is known. The MAS entered the *Palacio Quemado* for the first time in 2006, riding on a wave of popular protests that toppled two Presidents between 2000 and 2005 and articulated radical political proposals that evolved around: a) horizontal – or communitarian – democratic principles, and b) state ownership or social ownership of natural resources, which would reverse the until then neoliberal government policies. Evo Morales became the first indigenous President of Bolivia, while his first ministerial cabinet was characterized by the strong presence of political activists that had been involved with the popular protests. Fear and hope was the country's (and the world's) reaction: fear for the political and economic elites, and hope for the indigenous and the poor and marginalized. A new Constitution was negotiated, one that – theoretically at least – safeguards the rights of *Pachamama* (mother earth) and has *buén vivir* (living well) as its main principle, and an autonomist movement on behalf of the Right was successfully countered by the MAS and its social bases. The MAS did indeed negotiate new royalty

regimes with the multinationals that were exploiting the country's hydrocarbons (it called it 'nationalization'), and it did indeed redistribute the income it gained from this negotiation (and the commodity boom until 2010) to the least privileged Bolivians. As a result, Bolivia has experienced an impressive reduction in poverty rates and an increased GNI per capita over the past fourteen years. These are no minor feats.

However, the MAS' performance remains far from being egalitarian and equally far from fulfilling the expectations it raised with its elections. Democratic processes within the party have actually deteriorated; the 'process of change' has been personified in Evo Morales himself, while a pact with the Right was negotiated after 2010. In short: the MAS did ease the misfortunes of the poor without having to disempower the rich. Bolivia remains a deeply unequal society; the country's development model is based on the exploitation (not the protection) of nature, while dissident voices are treated as 'counter-revolutionary'. While it is important at a symbolic level to have an indigenous person for President, what really matters is the policies he/she makes; it is important at the discursive level to have a radical rhetoric, but what matters is its materialization. Identity politics became the flagship of MAS and brought it to the government seat, but *class politics* are still undermining political, social and economic dynamics, regardless of how *passé* they may sound.

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## NOTES

1. El Chapare region is the birthplace of the cocalero movement the Six Federations of the Tropic of Cochabamba, led by Evo Morales.
2. Author's translation from Spanish.
3. The Bolivian GINI coefficient was at 42 in 1990. It reached 58.5 in 2005 and dropped to 45.8 in 2015, according to the World Bank (accessed, April 2017).
4. Interview with Alejandro Almaraz, conducted by Leonidas Oikonomakis and Tomás Astelarra in Cochabamba, September 9, 2013.
5. For a detailed analysis of the first ministerial cabinet see Oikonomakis and Espinoza (2014).

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