

Volume 002
Issue No. 06



SEX WORKERS
ORGANIZE &
DECRIMINALIZE



LETTERS
NATIVE AMERICAN;
WORKERS WORLD



BOLIVIA
MANAGING
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THE RED VINE



Journal of the Red
Party

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Turning of the Tide

by Eddie Ford



(originally published in the *Weekly Worker* on February 25, 2016: <http://weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1095/turning-of-the-tide/>)

Everything now indicates that president Evo Morales has failed in his bid to amend the constitution so as to allow him to run for a fourth term in 2019. With over 99% of votes counted at the time of writing, ‘no’ has beaten ‘yes’ by 51.3% to 48.7% - representing the first time in 10 years that Morales has lost any sort of national vote or poll. The outcome also prevents vice-president Álvaro García Linera - former Túpac guerrilla - from running again. Just like in Venezuela, the ‘revolution’ is running out of steam.

Morales defiantly declared on February 22 that, whatever the result, he would not abandon his struggle - “We’re anti-neoliberal, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist - we’ve been formed that way” - and promised that the “struggle will continue”. He attributed his defeat to a “dirty war” waged by “rightwing sectors” on social media and elsewhere - an accusation which doubtlessly contains some truth.

Referring to himself and his Movement For Socialism (MAS), he said that they “don’t like us much in the city” - he was still hoping for a late surge of support from the more remote rural areas and overseas votes.

Though he may have lost the vote, the Bolivian president clearly retains a popular base in the countryside and shanty towns. His fervent supporters (‘*masistas*’) argue that he has ended five centuries of oppression against indigenous people - he won his first term in 2005 with 54% of the vote, increasing that support four years later to 63% and almost matching it again in 2014 with 61%. Bolivia’s GDP has more than tripled from \$9 billion in 2005 to over \$34 billion under his “indigenous socialist programme”. In the words of the *Financial Times*, Morales has “matched anti-capitalist rhetoric and a programme of nationalisation with prudent macroeconomic management” (February 22).

However, the economic boom presided over by Morales has started to wane. Bolivia’s revenues from natural gas and minerals, making up three-quarters of its exports, were down 32% last year. More importantly, the reputation of Morales and the MAS government has been steadily tarnished by constant stories of corruption and cronyism - some of which are bound to be true, given that he is he trying to *run*

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capitalism. For example, his personal popularity took a fairly big hammering following a 2013 scandal involving a former lover, Gabriela Zapata, with whom he admitted fathering a child - the main problem not being sexual indiscretion, but the fact that Zapata holds an important position in the Chinese engineering company, CAMC, which has secured more than \$500 million in contracts with the Bolivian government.

Whilst communists obviously have no truck with Morales's rightwing opponents, his attempts to cling onto power have become increasingly desperate and unedifying. And it goes without saying that the burgeoning state bureaucracy and semi-cult of personality around him is antithetical to genuine socialism.

Inspiration

Thinking back to only a few years ago, Evo Morales (alongside Hugo Chávez) was a great hero for those sections of the British left that looked towards Latin America for political inspiration. In fact, Venezuela's 'Bolivarian revolution' was regarded by many as a model. Similarly Morales's coming to power was excitably viewed as a *pachakuti*: the beginning of a new history, free from colonialism and capitalism.

Acting as a barometer of leftwing thought on this matter was *Red Pepper* - the "independent radical red and green magazine". *RP* featured

numerous articles assuring us that Bolivia under Morales was laying the foundations for socialism. In a September 2010 feature tellingly entitled 'The Bolivian road to socialism', Mark Geddes was typically confident that in the period since 2000 the country had "successfully overthrown a neoliberal regime and begun to build new institutions and policies".¹ He approvingly quoted Linera (described as a "Marxist intellectual"), who claimed that the MAS had been "utilising the mass support of the trade unions and a wide range of social movements" and, "when necessary", the "coercive mechanisms of the state".

The main lesson, in the opinion of Geddes, is that a "radical refounding of the state must embody an active dialectic between state and social movements" - it also required the ability of the MAS to "hold together the broad alliance necessary to win power and begin to map out and implement a movement towards socialism". As we can see, this was an extremely optimistic (or naive) assessment of Morales and the MAS.

Some other left groups, though a little critical of Morales, were also swept away by the excitement. For instance, the International Marxist Tendency of Ted Grant and Alan Woods said the 2008 referendum was a "new turning point for the revolution, in which opposite class interests are clashing."² We were also told that the results of

the presidential election the following year were a massive "vote for socialism".³ Similarly, the "ecosocialist and feminist" Socialist Resistance (formerly International Socialist Group), entertained fantasies about the "revolutions" in Venezuela and Bolivia.⁴ Yet the fact of the matter is that the state machines in both countries remain intact. No matter, for the likes of *Red Pepper*, IMT, Socialist Resistance, etc - Evo Morales and Hugo Chávez represented some kind of way forward.

But look how things are today. The tide of opinion is turning against Morales, and the MAS bureaucracy is bogged down in corruption and scandal, with the economy going into contraction. As for Venezuela, the collapse in oil prices has had a calamitous effect on the economy - president Nicolás Maduro declaring an "economic emergency", on top of a sharp devaluation of the currency (the mainly centre-right opposition now controls the assembly for the first time in 17 years).

The so-called Bolivian and Venezuelan roads to socialism have turned out to be dead ends.

Notes

- 1 . www.redpepper.org.uk/the-bolivian-road-to-socialism.
- 2 . www.marxist.com/statement-imt-recall-referendum-bolivia.htm.
- 3 . www.marxist.com/bolivia-victory-evo-a-vote-for-socialism.htm.
- 4 . <http://socialistresistance.org/169/counter-revolutionary-offensive-in-latin-america>.

The Green Party & Socialist Strategy

Editorial by the Red Party Central Committee



While the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign has re-oriented a section of the socialist movement around his candidacy, and indirectly the Democratic Party, some of these groups recognize the need for a Plan B if Sanders loses. Usually, this Plan B points to the Green Party, currently the largest and best organized party to the left of the Democrats in the United States. Socialist Alternative, which is probably the most well-known socialist organization to support Sanders, has consistently supported Green Party candidates in the past (even against other socialists), and assuming Sanders both does not get the Democratic nomination and does not run as an independent, then it seems overwhelmingly likely that Socialist Alternative will shift its support to the Green Party in the general election. Although this could raise an interesting question of what's more important in terms of developing political consciousness - a self-described socialist running as a Democrat¹ or a non-socialist left-winger running independently of the Democrats² - the hope is that a large enough section of Sanders supporters will desert the Democratic Party in an effort to build some sort of political alternative. With the possible exception of supporting Sanders directly, this perspective is held

by some other groups as well, with the International Socialist Organization, some in Solidarity, and others arguing for the Green Party as the organization most effectively able to take up the mantle of a left-wing challenge in elections.

However, oftentimes little is said about the politics of the Green Party itself. To the degree the Greens' current position as a progressive, but nevertheless non-socialist and non-working class party is acknowledged, usually not much is offered in terms of perspectives on how to overcome this in any direction. In this sense, it's refreshing to read a piece from a group called Project for a Working People's World (PWPW), which openly places its decision to join and work inside the Green Party in the context of an effort to turn it into a socialist party.³ The PWPW comrades correctly note that, while the Green Party is currently not a socialist party, neither is it a party committed to the maintenance of capitalism; rather, its program and class composition are somewhat muddled.

Following from that, it is argued, a coordinated campaign to win the Green Party to socialist politics, and transform it into a workers party, is not necessarily doomed to fail. The specific

pieces on the group's website are still light on perspectives or strategies on how to make this happen; fortunately, history can provide some suggestions on how this strategy could turn out. Unfortunately, at least for the PWPW comrades, this history doesn't suggest positive results for this strategy. More often than not, socialists entering into, or forming alliances with, non-socialist parties usually results in the socialists either being co-opted or disoriented by groups to their right. In the case of ecologist and Green parties specifically, which in many countries were formed by socialist and communist activists of the New Left, the forming of such parties ultimately became yet another step on the road to abandoning socialist politics altogether.

Finding examples of socialists entering into a non-socialist party to win it - or at least a significant section of it - to socialists politics is possible, but it requires going back to the latter half of the 19th century, when the workers' and socialist movements were in their first period of ascendancy. Even here, only two examples come forward - those of the Saxon People's Party (SVP) in the 1860s in what was to become Germany, and the People's Party in the US in the 1890s.

In the former case, the Marxist wing of the German workers' movement around August Bebel and Wilhelm Liebknecht had actually founded the SVP as a non-socialist party, but were soon able to dissolve the organization into the Social-Democratic Workers Party within a few years of its founding. In the latter case, the People's Party in the US was also more of a way station for the socialist movement than a long-term home (as has been noted before in this paper.)⁴ There, newly minted socialists that had been radicalized by labor struggles of that decade attempted to use the People's Party as a vehicle for independent working class political action, but were largely thwarted by those in the party that preferred a shorter-term, more populist political project, as well as alliances with openly bourgeois parties! While it should definitely be noted that a number of

People's Party activists did end up in the Socialist Party of America over the next decade as the People's Party slowly disintegrated, in both the US and in Germany these experiences were more episodes in a wider movement towards the formation of a socialist party in those countries rather than long-term organizing perspectives.

With this in mind, the PWPW comrades also miss the likely importance of the convergence of different socialist groups into a future party. Again, in both Germany and the United States, the eventual party that came out of these initial struggles (the SPD and SPA, respectively), were themselves fusions of multiple socialist organizations around a common program. Unfortunately, the few times the PWPW comrades avert to other socialist organizations, it is mainly to deride them as irrelevant sects with no influence in the wider working class.

Thus, PWPW seems to fall into an all-too-common trap of projecting themselves as the principal or only socialist grouping that will be involved with the building of a future party, thereby ignoring or dismissing any efforts that attempt to promote united action, political discussion and party-building among those who are already socialists. While attempting to transform the Green Party into a socialist party and working to unify existing socialist forces are not necessarily contradictory paths, the focus on the former to the apparent exclusion of the latter ignores a significant dimension of the problem of socialist politics in the US today.

Notes:

1. This, of course, leaves aside the question of Sanders' actual politics.
2. Jill Stein, the Green Party's 2012 candidate and likely nominee this year, has yet to publicly call herself a socialist, and none of the other candidates seem to do so either.
3. <http://weknowwhatsup.blogspot.com/p/sanders-our-alternative.html>
4. <http://red-party.com/history-of-the-u-s-workers-movement-from-populism-to-socialism/>

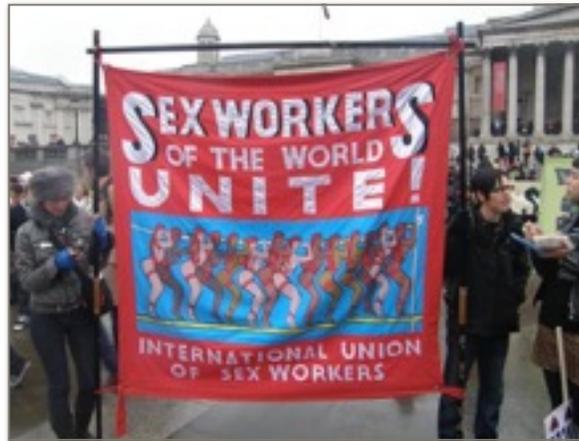
Organize and Decriminalize

by Gabriel Pierre

The question of prostitution, and sex work more broadly, is a surprisingly controversial one among self-described feminists and other supporters of women's liberation. Bourgeois feminists, notably Gloria Steinem, argued in response to last year's Amnesty International draft policy¹ on sex work that any decriminalization of prostitution would be "catastrophic" and bring about a "gender apartheid." And even on the revolutionary left, our movement has a historical tendency of proscribing sex work in the name of combating women's oppression.

In my view, this is a mistaken approach. If communists are the enemies of gender oppression, we need a policy on sex work that aims to increase the organization of the sex workers themselves and integrate them with the broader working class movement.

To be sure, prostitutes face a number of dangers on the job. When included among occupations in the above-ground economy, prostitution ranks as having the highest death rate². But illegality, far from being a protective exercise by the



capitalist state, tends to increase these dangers. For obvious reasons it's difficult to obtain accurate figures about the industry, but a study by the Urban Institute³ reported that a majority of prostitutes have faced violence on the job and that 38% had dealt with violent or abusive clients. Complaints that are brought forward are often dismissed by police as simply being a fact of the job. Left without legal recourse, they are compelled to seek the protection of lumpen-bourgeois pimps or handlers who may themselves abuse them. The periodic online "sting" operations carried out by law enforcement only drive more sex workers away from relatively safer Internet connections and toward more dangerous street work.

In addition to this general situation there are a number of irrational, moralistic laws passed every once in a

while so that politicians can be seen to be 'doing something' about prostitution. For example, until 2014 the NYPD considered carrying condoms to be evidence in prostitution cases - thus incentivizing New York City sex workers not to practice safe sex. Currently the state of California considers not only the act itself but "loitering with intent" as a criminal activity.⁴ Louisiana mandates that convicted prostitutes register as sex offenders, which is sure to do wonders for their rehabilitation and reentry into the mainstream economy.

Sometimes the increased legal restrictions have a human rights or pseudo-feminist window dressing. In 2012, Alaska passed an anti-trafficking law that redefined those who sell sex as victims of human trafficking rather than criminals as such. Aside from its patronizing foundational assumption - the idea that all prostitutes are helpless victims and rejection of the fact that some people choose sex work just as much as you might choose to work in retail or hospitality - it has done nothing to change the actual reality for prostitutes in the state, who still find themselves subjected to mistreatment by johns and police

despite the change in terminology. Another liberal variant of prohibition is the so-called ‘Swedish model’, where the criminal act is paying for rather than selling sex. This arrangement actually hands more power to the client, not less, as described by the International Union of Sex Workers⁵:

“Since paying for sex was made illegal, sex workers in Sweden report greater violence, rape and harassment by the police, being made homeless by threats to prosecute landlords for pimping if they accept rent money from by tenants who sell sex, discrimination and expressions of contempt by “support” services unless they present themselves as victims seeking rescue. Criminalisation of our consent has not even been successful on its own terms (seeking to eradicate commercial sex) with Swedish police recording substantial

increases in the number of clients, massage parlours and estimations of trafficking.”

It should be clear that, whatever punitive policies are in place, the ‘world’s oldest profession’ will endure for at least as long as class society. Any attempts to deny this only drive the sex trade further underground and into more exploitative conditions, and robs those involved in the industry of their agency. What’s needed is an approach based on organizing sex workers (including not just prostitutes but porn actors, exotic dancers et cetera) to fight in their collective interest. This is exemplified by the International Union of Sex Workers, which through its affiliation to the main British trade union federation is able to link its struggles with the labor movement as a whole in addition to its own admirable work.

Alongside this is the demand for decriminalization of prostitution, the central policy named by the organized sex workers themselves. This is

distinct from legalization, a situation in which the state acts as pimp, a new restrictive legal apparatus is introduced, and an artificial dividing line is drawn between sex work and other types of labor. Rather than the state stepping in as exploiter, decriminalization simply removes the act of prostitution from the criminal code and extends the already-existing legal protections against theft, rape, forced labor and trafficking to sex workers. More rational than pointless repression or the ‘Swedish model’ and a necessary precondition to greater collective action by sex workers.

Notes

1. http://tasmaniantimes.com/images/uploads/Circular_18_Draft_Policy_on_Sex_Work_final.pdf (the Amnesty International report) and <http://catwinternational.org/Content/Images/Article/617/attachment.pdf>
2. <http://www.pnas.org/content/97/22/12385.full.pdf>
3. <http://www.urban.org/research/publication/estimating-size-and-structure-underground-commercial-sex-economy-eight-major-us-cities>
4. <http://www.shouselaw.com/loitering-intent-prostitution.html>
5. <http://www.iusw.org/2015/10/iusw-condemns-womens-equality-partys-harmful-choice-to-seek-criminalisation-of-commercial-sex/>

Party Update

by Gabriel Pierre

Last month’s editorial (“Vote Soltysik!”) was well-circulated, with a mix of responses both supportive and critical from our readership. One such comrade wrote into our letters column; I’d encourage other

readers to jump into the discussion as well. Surely out of 330 online readers in January, at least a handful more want to help us continue to develop the letters column as an avenue of political exchange and polemic - so jump in!

Letters

RE: Marxism & Native Americans, Edited by Ward Churchill, South End Press, 1983

by David Smithers

The years I've lived vastly outnumber the years I likely have left, yet I am a relatively young socialist, committed, only since 2010, though running as a Green Party candidate for state house that year. In articles and podcast segments, I have largely concerned myself with the issues and actions of people of color, myself being white privileged and male. Why? In short, it is only because people of color have always been the movement against capitalism and imperialism. I'm not being generous or ingenious.

People of color are caught in the racist tentacles of white men's borders, suffering genocidal intrusions on indigenous and tribal lands, intrusions tearing families and cultures to shreds, and people of color, such as blacks and Native Americans in the United States, daily murdered by cops, cops being ready servants of capital, people of color are the most advanced elements of the oppressed, the troops of anti-capitalism, much more so than most white labor union members, those union members I've encountered being comfortably unconscious of any oppression

under capitalism.

A commitment to internationalism, open borders, and freedom of migration, a cornerstone of socialism does appear to clash with support for protection of the autonomy of tribal peoples' lands and cultures. The experience of tribal peoples in the Soviet Union, China, Vietnam, Venezuela, Ecuador, and Peru seem to show that socialist states were or are as ruthless as the capitalist and white United States, Canada and Australia. But, I am optimistic that Marxists have much to learn from tribal peoples and their nationality yearnings. The same must be said relative to Marxists and African Americans, whether in the Black Lives Matter or more nationalist black movements.

This is the discord between the liberationism of Marx and the supposed non-alienation of tribal spiritualism that is continually reflected in the selections edited by former professor at the University of Colorado, Ward Churchill, who some might remember as a victim of right wing savaging after his reflection about the victims of the 9/11 World Trade Center collapse in 2001, being capitalist financiers, were, in Churchill's words, little

Eichmanns, "persons participating in society whose actions, while on an individual scale may seem relatively harmless even to themselves, taken collectively create destructive and immoral systems in which they are actually complicit." (Wikipedia)

Of course, in much of Churchill's public discourse then and since, the comparisons between prisoners in Nazi German concentration camps and the fate of Native Americans in the United States and Canada reflect poorly on that fate. Particularly, the very survival rates of prisoners at non-death camps in Hitler's Germany were better than of youths separated from their parents and culture at militarist residential schools in North America.

Particularly repugnant is the "Searching for a Second Harvest" response by the Revolutionary Communist Party to the somewhat misguided Libertarian tainted spiritualism of the late Russell Means, a Lakota leader of the 1970s American Indian Movement, in his essay, "The Same Old Song". The regrettable charge that Indians ate shit makes no more sense than the notion that a Marxist world should not

accommodate and learn from the rich traditions of tribal peoples.

Moreover, just as Marxists in the 21st Century are not the same as in the 20th,

neither, are tribal peoples. Marxists must be humble and learn. Humility comes before wisdom. I remain a humble 63 year old white man, a new socialist.

Unfair Treatment of WWP Presidential Campaign

by L.G.

The article on Red-Party.com expressing support for Soltysik is ambiguous on a very good many points. The only substantive reason why socialists should support Soltysik and the SPUSA candidate is that the SPUSA is not a ‘Stalinist’ or “bureaucratic” organization. Nothing is said about the history of right-wing positions taken by the SPUSA and its social-democratic faults, not to mention its blatant denunciation of democratic centralism, a principle that I understood to be the bedrock of Red Party. Unfortunately, I don’t think that there is any major organization on the left that isn’t run on lines of bureaucratic centralism or a bureaucratic, decentralized “invisible dictatorship.” A presidential election isn’t going to change any of that, so I don’t see how it is relevant. I would even argue that in their nature, US presidential election campaigns have to be bureaucratic to win, so if anything, strong bureaucracy would be an ironic plus for an organization seeking the position

of Commander in Chief of the United States.

Red Party dismisses the campaigns of PSL and WWP as being limited to “bread and butter issues” and saying almost nothing about democratic demands. I will not go into my differences with Red Party on the role of democratic demands in leading to a workers’ socialist revolution. However, I will say that this is really too dismissive, since from what I could pick up, the Soltysik campaign website has *nothing* in terms of a program or platform. All that is said is a few nice things about workers democratically running economic enterprises and participatory democracy, which are all very important but hardly amount to a program or a plan of action. PSL has their ten point program, which I would agree does omit a lot of important political demands, but at least seems to be a bit more concrete than is being offered by the Soltysik campaign. The WWP and Moorehead’s campaign, in my opinion, goes leaps and bounds over anything that the SPUSA and most other socialist

organizations by advancing the slogan “elections will matter when Black Lives Matter.” Whatever criticisms one may have of WWP, they have been much more involved with the Black Lives Matter movement than most other left organizations, and I find this to be a much more relevant issue to a presidential campaign right now over whether or not this or that sect allows tendencies within itself, etc. I don’t think “Black Lives Matter” can be reduced to being a “bread and butter issue.”

In short, the article does not say much in terms of substance why the SPUSA candidate should be supported over the WWP or PSL candidates, other than that the WWP and PSL are bureaucratic organizations who only put forward bread and butter issues and ignore democracy. In terms of WWP, this is a gross distortion since the issue of Black Lives Matter, a pressing democratic demand, is strongly integrated into their campaign platform. The article is also lacking any criticism whatsoever of the SPUSA, of which many criticisms could be made.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

The Red Party is a U.S. political organization that fights for working class unity in a single socialist party-movement. A united organization, based on a Marxist program, would turn politics as we know it upside down, injecting the labor and social movements with a renewed sense of confidence and strength.

* A united workers' party-movement would combine political action with economic and social action, including running socialist candidates for office, protests, strikes, co-operatives and mutual aid societies.

* Our organization has the word party in its name, but we recognize that in the world-historic sense there is no revolutionary party in the U.S. today. Instead we have a fractured array of competing sects organized on a bureaucratic basis. Their work is hampered by hyper-activism with little to no long-term strategy, lack of internal democracy and lack of deep roots in the working class. The Red Party organizes day-to-day resistance against injustices spawned by capitalism within the context of strengthening working class organization and building support for socialism.

* Marxists operate through democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we

seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members have the right to speak openly and form factions to advance their views.

* Marxists oppose all imperialist wars and interventions, from Iraq to Syria, but recognize that ending war permanently means ending capitalism.

* Marxists are internationalists. We strive for the closest unity of the working class and oppressed peoples everywhere. We oppose nationalism in all its forms. We advocate a new revolutionary workers' International. Without an International (a world party), the struggle against Capital is weakened. Capital organizes across borders; so too must we.

* Marxists support industrial unions (organizing workers by industry) rather than the more narrow trade union structure. We support the highest possible level of pan-American union coordination for workers' rights. Bureaucratic leadership and class collaboration, particularly support for the Democratic Party, in the unions must be replaced with democratic revitalization and class independence.

* Marxists are champions of the oppressed. Women's oppression, racism, national oppression and LGBT/QI

oppression are just as much working class questions as are higher pay, union rights and struggles for quality health, housing and education. Marxists demand self-determination for American Indian nations, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and all other territories.

* World capitalism, based on exploitation and a reckless quest for profit, is increasingly putting the future of humanity at risk through war and climate change. World capitalism must give way to world socialism - a society based on freedom, solidarity and a radical extension of democracy.

* Marxists oppose Stalinism, a system of bureaucratic dictatorship that rules in the name of socialism the same way the capitalist class claims to rule in the name of liberty.

* Socialism itself is the first stage of the global transition to communism - a society where war, exploitation, money, classes and states exist only as museum pieces. Communism is the negation of class society and provides the maximum individual and collective freedom.

If you agree with these principles, join the Red Party!

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