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José Antonio Gutiérrez D.
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Interview with Mónica Apaza, Youth Secretary of FEJUVE, El Alto, Bolivia
August 14, 2005

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On the June mass demonstrations and the current situation for the Bolivian people. On the power conflict between the Bolivian government and the Originary Popular Assembly and directions for the future. This interview, as well, was done through the telephone line, and we want to thank the support of LASC that made it possible. Though the two interviews are a couple of months old, still we think they might give an interesting insight on the Bolivian situation and on the contradicting nature in the origins of popular power organisms…

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Interview with a Bolivian Community Organiser

Interview with Mónica Apaza, Youth Secretary of FEJUVE, El Alto, Bolivia

José Antonio Gutiérrez D.

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What's your opinion on the current situation for the Bolivian people?

I believe that in this very moment we are going through structural changes, political, economical and social ones. The demonstrations that we've seen over the last three weeks, where organisations have stood up, where the people has organised to deal with the nationalisation problem, so we can consider that the people are more aware that this resource (ed. Gas) belongs to us, that it should be under the people's and their institutions' management, and not of some capitalist or multinational enterprises. Now, this social aspect is changing loads, for the government is already scared of doing anything without consulting the people. And I think the organisations have taken a paramount role in organising and taking up the demands. And the government has had to give more power to the demonstrations and the organisations, both here, in the city of El Alto and at a national level.

How do you view the power conflict between the Bolivian government and the Originary Popular Assembly?

Well, the Originary Popular Assembly has been formed at the front of the El Alto city's organisations, such as the FEJUVE, the COR-El Alto, and some others, that have formed the Popular Assembly. Now, in this Popular Assembly, many of the organisations that represent different sectors, in all legitimacy and legality are represented through their delegates. Well, now the government is trying to unify this two positions, the Central government and the Popular Assembly. So, in the Popular Assembly we have very clear cut tasks: This Popular Assembly has been organised for the issue of nationalisation and, later, with the issue of the Constituent Assembly. Now, the government has been given ten days of truce to recognise this Popular Assembly, and therefore, we will organise at a departmental level, and then at a national level. Now, I think this is a really important thing, because the different struggles are represented as a whole in this Popular Assembly.

So the government has been given ten days to come up with a position on the nationalisation too…

Well, it was given in the beginning two days as a deadline. But the different organisations did call assemblies of representatives, assemblies of the rank and file in the different groupings formed during the demonstrations, and now it's been said that the deadline will be ten days. If the government does not respond in ten days, with something that is concrete, new demonstrations will be summoned, and that's why the Popular Assembly is important…

Bolivian people seem to be well aware of their capacities to stop the government plans and to pressure it at the time of taking measures…

As you say, the people is no longer in slumber, the people is like an awakened giant and well aware of its demands, of its place as a people. And apart from this, there are four years of pressure, happening with this system and this neoliberal model. For a few get the benefits and the vast majority of the population are consumed in misery and poverty. People has craved, has gone out to demonstrate, has blockaded, has gone out to march and well, the consciousness of the people around this problem, that is burning, wants to be heard, and the way to be heard is organising, and I think the only weapon it has is to demonstrate, because if there is a movement, the government will listen. If there was no movement, the government would not listen to, it would only be on dialogues, chatting and drafting documents, but not in concrete life, that is what the people as a whole demands.

What is the way to go for the struggles of the Bolivian people?

Well, among the different organisations, both in the city of El Alto, and in La Paz, and in the departments like Cochabamba, Tarija, or in others, there are more and more coming on board, what gives more weight to the Popular Assembly. This will be the one to represent the demands of the different organisations. I think it is a different way to demand the government, if they don't want to answer back. I think this is the best way for us to organise, to constitute this Assembly with different sectors and different legitimate representatives to go and talk the demands of their people in the rank and file. This Assembly, that is adding new organisations and departments, is strengthened by a judicial-technical branch, dealing with this sort of professional, technical aspects, that organise talks and documents about this, in order to give them some political use, to strengthen the proposals, in the legal aspects, to give them more of a technical content.