



Nahuel Moreno

Letter to Gonzalez Moscoso (Bolivia)

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September 1965

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English translation: Daniel Iglesias

Editor notes: Daniel Iglesias

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www.nahuelmoreno.org

www.uit-ci.org

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cehus2014@gmail.com



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Foreword

On 4 November 1964, a Military Junta headed by General Barrientos overthrew the nationalist bourgeois government of the MNR, chaired by Víctor Paz Estenssoro and with Juan Lechin as vice president. Throughout 1965, important differences began to emerge with the policy of Hugo Gonzalez Moscoso's POR-Combate.

In his letter to Gonzalez Moscoso, dated 20 September 20 1965, Moreno criticised the POR's definition of the regime, saying that it was not a fascist but a reactionary Bonapartist. And he warned about the wrong path favoured by the followers of Castroism: organising the rural guerrilla. He proposed to orient the party towards the COB and the unions' militias, which at first would be clandestine, and towards their armament, surrounding the miners with solidarity. He also pointed out, among other things, Gonzalez Moscoso's refusal to raise the call for the united workers' front.

This letter was published in *Revista de America* No 6-7, July-October 1971, which was dedicated in part to the events that were taking place in Bolivia at that time. The workers' rise that began in 1968 had taken on explosive characteristics, and in 1970 General Torres took office and the Popular Assembly was formed. (See on this page *Argentina and Bolivia — the Balance Sheet, 1969-72*).

In 1973, it was widely cited in Moreno's work *A scandalous document*, in controversy against Mandel. It can be read in full on this page with the title *The Party and the Revolution*, and in particular chapter 1, in its final part, "Moreno, advisor of the POR".

All notes are by the editors.

The Editors

March 2021

Letter to Gonzalez Moscoso (Bolivia)

20 September 1965

Dear Hugo,

We take advantage of the return of Comrade S, to send you this letter with some suggestions about your policy. The enormous, almost decisive importance that your revolution has acquired for the general process of the class struggle in our continent makes us follow with a magnifying glass all the events that take place in your country and also your politics.

In our last Central Committee, one of the most important items on the agenda was the course of the Bolivian revolution. As a result, we drew up a resolution that we attach for you and that will be published in *Estrategia*.

Immediately after the Central Committee, we received the latest issue of your newspaper. When we read it, we verified that, as opposed to what happened when Paz Estenssoro¹ fell that we had coincident lines, at this time it was not or at least it did not seem to be so. We are far, we believe kilometres away, from Posadas² claim to be omniscient and omnipresent. On the contrary, we believe that not living in Bolivia and our ignorance of reality in its details already give all our documents an extremely limited character, in the best of cases. We have tried to obviate these deficiencies by generalising our conclusions as much as possible. We would not fulfil our duty as Latin American and world revolutionaries, militants of the same world party, if we did not send you, in a fraternal way and without any pretence, our opinions. By doing so, we are only continuing our trajectory, given that since 1952 we have been dealing preferentially with the course of your revolution. It is no secret for you that we have passionately disagreed with the line drawn up by the International Secretariat and Posadas for Bolivia, which forced them to critically support the MNR, precisely when real power was in the hands of the COB and its armed militias immediately after April 1952.

The need for a newspaper and revolutionary political course

If I remember correctly, Lenin was the one who said that all the art of a politician is to know how to grasp the first link in the chain. Put another way, revolutionaries are characterised by knowing how to distinguish at each stage of the class struggle which are the fundamental political and

1 **Víctor Paz Estenssoro** (1907–2001) was a Bolivian lawyer and politician; four times President of Bolivia for the bourgeois Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR – Nationalist Revolutionary Movement).

2 **J. Posadas** was the pseudonym of Homero Romulo Cristali Frasnelli (1912–1981) an Argentine Trotskyist leader. Since the Second Congress of the Fourth International in 1948, Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel supported Posadas, who held positions of total capitulation to the Peronist government. Since the Third Congress, they gave the GCI, Posadas' group, official section status against Moreno's group, which had critical positions and polemised with Pabloism-Mandelism.

organisational slogans. In other words, we cannot consider a conscious revolutionary or a Bolshevik party worthy of the name that limits itself to giving a hodgepodge of revolutionary slogans without distinguishing which is the most important or fundamental and which is the secondary. We get these observations from the reading of your newspaper. Three fundamental slogans emerge from it: “Fight without quarter against the fascists!”, “The army out of the mines!”, “Down with the military boot!”, “Long live the POR!” (pages 1, 4 and 7 respectively). These fundamental slogans are accompanied by other secondary ones such as: “Freedom for the workers and university students in prison!”, “Prepare and organise the armed struggle!”, “Expel the fascists from power!”, “For lower wage, less work!”, “Do not leave the miners alone!”, “We must mobilise the cities!”, etc. And these slogans of secondary importance are accompanied by others of third, fourth or fifth importance, such as: “The clandestine union defence committees that have been emerging in the mines have to be extended to all unions”, or “The POR calls to mobilise the cities and place the urban masses in a fighting footing alongside the miners”, “The sectors and parties that claim to be revolutionaries must organise to paralyse the army, to hinder its displacement towards the mines”. This is the slogan: “The army and the police out of the mines!”; it should be the battle cry.

We may be over exaggerating. We imagine a worker activist or a grassroots worker from Siglo XX, Catavi or Colquiri mines, or a construction, factory or flour worker from La Paz, or a student or teacher from Oruro or Cochabamba who reads our newspaper. It is difficult to extract from it what is his most immediate task. Let us think of that worker who, exhausted after eight or ten hours of work, arrives at his home, at his miserable home, full of hatred for the sinister military government and meets the joy of *Lucha Obrera* [Workers’ Struggle], the organ of the undisputed vanguard of the Bolivian proletariat. He is short on time and is in a hurry to do his best against the government.

From a careful reading of the newspaper and possibly the flyer in favour of the guerrillas that has also reached him through another channel, he draws the following conclusion or conclusions: that the only way is armed struggle, that the guerrillas must be supported, that we need to fight without quarter against the fascists, that we need to get the release of the imprisoned workers and university students, that for a lower wage they must achieve less work, that the fascists must be expelled from power, that the POR must be strengthened, that sectors and parties that claim to be revolutionary must organise to paralyse the Army, etc.

It is logical that such worker, at this point, will tell us: Everything is very good, your program is formidable, I have nothing against it, except for two objections: what should I do? or what is the first thing I have to start doing? And I am not with the POR, since I belong to the MNR, the PRIN,³ the Falange⁴ or the Christian Democracy, the Pekingese CP or no party since I am directly a trade unionist, therefore I am against strengthening the POR. Possibly we are confused and 90 per cent of the Bolivian proletariat, whether or not of the POR, are in the process of becoming confused and we sin because of an excess of imagination. And he also mentions that important sectors of the workers continue to sympathise with or are active in other parties. If this last variant were to take place and if the situation were as we imagine it, our newspaper would not answer the most pressing questions that every Bolivian worker must ask at this time: “What do I do immediately?” and “How do I strengthen my party and my leaders?” As long as we do not have a categorical answer to these two questions and as long as our newspaper does not revolve around these answers, we will have neither a Bolshevik policy nor a party.

3 The **Revolutionary Party of the Nationalist Left (PRIN)** was a left-wing political party in Bolivia. It was founded in 1963 by the labour leader Juan Lechin. The PRIN seceded from the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (MNR) in protest against Víctor Paz Estenssoro’s decision to seek a third elected term as president in 1964, rather than permit then Vice-President Juan Lechin to have the MNR’s presidential nomination. The PRIN combined the left-wing of the MNR and former members of the Revolutionary Workers’ Party (POR).

4 The **Bolivian Socialist Falange (FSB)** is a far-right Bolivian political party established in 1937, drawing inspiration from fascism. It was the country’s second-largest party between approximately 1954 and 1974.

It is urgent to agree on the nature of the stage and the government

You repeatedly define the government as fascist in *Lucha Obrera*. As it is clear from our resolution, we disagree with your characterisation. We believe that it is a reactionary Bonapartist government, an agent of the Pentagon, the product of a semi-counterrevolution, but we do not believe it is fascist. Thus, in the article “The Civilian Front: A Reactionary Trap”, you yourselves foresee that “... the Military Junta has its days numbered and the military has noisily failed in their mission to destroy the masses and contain the revolutionary process” and “... the calculation of these parties is very simple. They do not want to fall with the military, and they want to organise a civilian front that plays as opposition and is the alternative of power. We warn against this manoeuvre displaying the imperialist seal.” We do not understand how a government can be defined as fascist when it has no mass base and could not contain the revolutionary process and destroy the masses. Nor do we understand a fascist government that when the time comes, forced by imperialism itself, plays the game of the civilian front or the national revolution. Precisely these two possibilities, that you point out so well, and also the deep crisis in the governmental apparatus itself, clearly indicate that it is a Bonapartist and not a fascist government. To put it bluntly: in Bolivia, the pre-revolutionary stage has not closed with the victory of fascism but has been exacerbated by the victory of an ultra-reactionary, Bonapartist government, which has failed to crush yet the mass movement and for which it is impossible for the time being to achieve a mass base to crush the workers’ movement.

The current situation

As necessary as agreeing on the character of the stage and the government, it is to specify in detail the current moment of the class struggle. In this regard, we believe you are completely right when you specify: “... the mines, vanguard of the struggle against fascism” and “Do not leave the miners alone! We must mobilise the cities!” And you develop in the same article: “The mining rebellion is the beginning of the end of the fascist government. The miners are still at the vanguard of the people. But there is a danger of being isolated, as in the conflicts in May. It is the duty of all workers from the revolutionary layers of the countryside to come out in support of the mining workers. But lyrical support is not enough, a fighting support is needed.”

This analysis of yours is the key to the current Bolivian moment. It is the first link in a chain of class struggle in Bolivia. From this analysis, a whole strategy and a tactic arise and the whole newspaper should have revolved around it.

We believe, rather we stress, what you say: there is a colossal danger in Bolivia that its revolutionary vanguard, the miners, will once again be isolated from all the workers. This would greatly ease the work of repression of the Military Junta and its possible advance towards fascism.

This is the key to the current Bolivian situation and a whole policy clearly emerges from it, which cannot be other than to prevent an isolated struggle of the miners and to organise the rest of the workers to give a battle, together with the miners. If we achieve this, the defeat of the Military Junta is certain. Our newspaper, our politics, have to focus on achieving these two sides of the same policy. Our newspaper, for example, on the front page must get a big headline and insist in all its articles that armed support for the miners must be organised, on the one hand, and that the miners must wait until this organisation is developed before launching into battle, on the other. Our newspaper doesn’t do any of this and, from what it follows, neither does our party. It is not a question of the newspaper in a sub-chapter or in passing saying it brilliantly, as it has done, but rather that all our activity and our propaganda is concentrated on this point: let’s organise aid to the miners and prevent them from giving an isolated battle against the regime. Starting from this urgent and general slogan, with a systematic policy and propaganda, all other slogans and tasks are subordinated to it and then the different articles in the newspaper, for example, would take on other headings and other content.

From which organisations will we help the miners?

You never tire of repeating in the face of every problem that we have to organise to solve, be it the release of political prisoners, support for the miners, etc. However, nowhere do you point to the general slogan of organising the mass movement to confront the government. This is doubly dangerous because in Bolivia there is a trend towards the organisation of four major movements: the civilian front, the front of the national revolution, the guerrilla front and the union activists, as you report in your union editorial and in the article on the Colquiri workers where you announce “union defence committees”. Our party and newspaper must give a categorical answer to the form of organisation of the mass movement, which we consider essential, or the relationship between the different forms of organisation of the mass movement. And it is precisely from this form of organisation of the mass movement that we will demand that, as a primary task, to prepare armed support for the miners. There can be no confusion in this regard since the forms of organisation we advocate for the movement of the masses are as important as the skeleton and the muscular system for the organism. We believe that the phrase you say in passing in the trade union editorial “the clandestine trade union defence committees that have been emerging in the mines have to be extended to all unions” cannot, nor should it be, a phrase among hundreds of phrases but our main organisational slogan. In other words, we are, essentially, for the reorganisation of the COB through the clandestine union defence committees and we will concentrate all our efforts on propagandising and carrying out this colossal task.

The problem of the United Front

You say in the newspaper “this is why the POR calls all the Bolivian masses, students, workers, peasants and intellectuals to fight against the Military Junta”, and before you had said, “the struggle in defence of our country is not the heritage of a party but the obligation of all the people”. On page 4, where you state the need not to leave the miners alone, “it is compulsory for the sectors and parties that claim to be workers’ or leftists to prepare and organise the mobilisation of the cities”. We do not understand, frankly, this mysterious call to the united front to unnamed parties.

Even before the military coup against the miners, you insisted and had succeeded in forming a front of the COB, the left-wing of the PRIN, the two communist parties and Trotskyism. We do not understand why you have given up on continuing to fight for this front. What is more serious is that it seems you have replaced the struggle and the call to this front by the sectarian desire to make a front with the ranks totally led by us, the POR. As you say, “it is about the confrontation of the bourgeois program with the socialist program raised by the masses and the POR. Only by fighting under the banner that the POR has displayed, which has now become the people’s banner, will the national and social liberation of our country be conquered.” This plain and simply means the total abandonment of our previous united front policy with the communist parties and with the left of the PRIN.

We may be pessimistic but we do not believe that all the Bolivian people accept our banners, as you say. On the contrary, we believe that the offensive of the Military Junta strengthen the prestige and the memory of the bureaucratic and petty-bourgeois tendencies of the masses, at the same time that it promotes their vanguard sectors to understand our revolutionary politics. In other words, there is a highly contradictory process: in the vanguard, we strengthen ourselves and, possibly, in the ranks, Paz Estenssoro, Lechin⁵ and the left of the PRIN.

We have the same to say about the Falange in relation to the urban petty bourgeoisie. We do not believe like you do, that the Falange is a monolithic party that raises guerrillas against the Military Junta as a mere manoeuvre. On the contrary, we get the impression that the contradictions

5 **Juan Lechin** (1914–2001) was the most important trade-union leader and bureaucrat of Bolivian unionism. He was head of the Federation of Bolivian Mine Workers (FSTMB) from 1944 to 1987 and founder of the Bolivian Workers’ Union (COB) in the revolution of 1952, which he headed until 1987. During the presidency of Victor Paz Estenssoro, of the bourgeois party MNR, between 1960 and 1964, he also served as Vice President of Bolivia.

of the Falange (one wing openly collaborates with the government and another raises guerrillas against it) do nothing but reflect the deep contradictions that exist in the petty-bourgeois ranks of that party, where the vast majority are oriented against the Junta, finding no solution to any of its economic, social and political problems.

The United Front in relation to the problem of power

If all of the above is correct, we have the necessary elements to formulate our essential programmatic slogans, which must be the realisation at all times and places of the general task of achieving a workers' and peasants' government. Put another way, we must formulate slogans of power that respond to the needs and aspirations of the working class and all Bolivian workers. We believe the first slogan that responds to the problem of power is "Down with the Military Junta!" We all agree on this slogan. And by all, I mean the entire popular grassroots and all parties with popular influence, from sectors of the Falange to the MNR, the two CPs, the PRIN, the POR and the COB in hiding. The problem arises when we must answer the following questions: How to overturn the Military Junta? Who should overturn it? And why to overturn the Military Junta?

Let's start with the answer to the last question: why overturn it. If we are to be guided by your newspaper, we must overturn it to implement socialism: "the only real alternative, which is socialism", "it is about the confrontation of the bourgeois program with the socialist program." We believe you are making a serious mistake of method here — to confuse your aspirations with those of the masses and the class dynamics, the methods, with the great tasks that the masses have posed, which are three aspects of reality that are closely related but not identical. For example, the great tasks of the Russian Revolution were democratic, although its methods and class dynamics were proletarian. We are convinced that the great present task that unifies all Bolivian workers, the proletariat with the peasantry and the middle class of the cities, is to overturn the government to call for free and democratic elections and not overturn it to establish socialism, as you propose.

This task, much more modest than establishing socialism, requires the proletariat to direct it and insurrectionary methods to achieve it. This is how to achieve it. We now have to answer who or to whom we should propose the achievement of these objectives, or in other words, what formula of power we advocate as a replacement for the Military Junta that we want to overturn. We believe it is appropriate that we call for the constitution of a front whose support base is the COB, in a united front with the students, teachers and peasants centrals, with the support of all the parties that are against the government, that have a popular base and that are for the call in 60 days for absolutely free and democratic elections. In other words, we believe the military coup in May has expanded the need for the call to the united front and has not biased it. We also believe the petty-bourgeois parties will sabotage this United Front, the same as the union bureaucracy, and they will not accept the leadership of the COB and the workers' movement; we have no doubt. But this will serve to unmask them before the mass movement if we make this call to the united front according to the general guidelines of Trotskyism, to do it not only with the ranks but also with the leaderships with mass ranks; we have no doubt either.

The big task: To prepare for the armed struggle

We fully agree with you that the big issue is preparing for the inevitable armed struggle that will take place against the Military Junta. This problem has different facets. First of all, the relationship with the heroic fighters who want to organise guerrillas, following the teachings of Castroism. We must try to link these comrades to our fundamental strategy and tactics of getting armed support for the inevitable miners uprising. In this sense, we must demand from them to coordinate their action with the clandestine trade union organisations and mainly the COB. Without expecting much from these comrades, the great task for us to prepare for the armed struggle goes through the organisation of an armed defence apparatus of the COB and its union organisations and, in parallel to this, of the

unitary organisations of the front, which will be neighbourhood based, peasant. or urban. Our party must begin now, where it can, to put this policy into practice. We have to reorganise unitary armed defence committees of three or four comrades and, where possible, to centralise and discipline them. This fundamental task is closely linked to another one just as important, which is the work on the ranks of the army. If we combine and organise all these tasks, we will accelerate the crisis of the regime and its defeat will be a matter of a short time. If, on the contrary, we let the masses act at their own risk, quite possibly the regime can defeat each of its sectors.

The use of legality

From our characterisation of the regime, the possibility arises that at certain times legal loopholes may open. Our justified hatred of the military dictatorship should not make us forget that we must use those loopholes. We must use them to propose wage increases or minimum slogans, if possible unified, to accelerate the crisis of the regime. As we say of wage increases, we could say of any loophole within the recognised yellow unions or a future rigged national election. Before declaring a boycott of these loopholes, we must take the pulse of the situation of the class struggle very well and only if there are optimal conditions, declare it.

Conclusions

Before finishing, we would like to summarise our most important conclusions: 1) There is a grave danger that the dictatorship will be able to give a battle against the vanguard of the movement, which is the miners, isolating them from all the Bolivian workers. Our great historic task at this time is to prevent this manoeuvre and this possible victory of the regime. 2) It is essential to specify that our fundamental slogans for the entire stage are: “Down with the military dictatorship!” and “Immediate, free and democratic elections! For a government of the COB, the centrals of teachers, students, and peasants, supported by a Junta of workers and popular parties, which will call these elections within 60 days!” 3) Our great task is to organise the trade union movement underground, mainly the mining, manufacturing, construction and flour unions, restructuring the leadership of the COB respected by the rank and file. This great organisational task, the most important that our party faces, is linked to a call to the leadership and the ranks of all the workers’ and popular parties to organise the great front against the government and which will call for elections. 4) All these tasks are synthesised in the need to organise armed defence committees of the reorganised trade union organisations and the party itself, as well as the united front committees. 5) For the better development of all these tasks, we must use all the legal loopholes that are offered to us.

Unfortunately, we have had to write this letter in a single day because we have just received your newspaper and Comrade S is going back. Hence its nature as a draft. In any case, we believe it may be of some use to you. Thus, we ask you to send it and make it known to the Central Committee of the sister party. On our part, you will have our political and organisational support so you can continue heroically fulfilling the colossal tasks that history has set for you.

A hug from Nahuel