

NEWS FROM BOLIVIA

Fresh news about Bolivia was arriving this morning, Thursday April 9, on the Bolivian television channel, reflecting tension in the country.

Everything was going well. Important changes were being produced. Evo's prestige in Bolivia and in the world is growing. He is constantly receiving more support from the people in spite of the fact that the oligarchy controls most of the media resources. An exemplary literacy campaign has wiped out illiteracy in record time; today the media services reach the entire population; important historical necessities of the people are being looked after by native and new methods. The economy and currency reserves are on the upswing. This infuriates the oligarchy which is blocking the parliamentary elections announced for the end of this year.

The maneuver has forced Evo, the party in power and the masses to adopt battle measures characterized by the moral strength they imply.

President Evo Morales, the National Coordination for Change (CNC) and the Bolivian Workers' Union (COB) have declared a massive hunger strike from the Government Palace, demanding respect for the Constitution and the Provisional Electoral Law which has been postponed for months to sabotage the elections.

Evo Morales has stated:

"We, the comrades from the country's various social organizations, faced with the negligence of a group of neoliberal lawmakers, are being forced to defend the peoples' mandate.

"The members of parliament knew they had 60 days to pass the Provisional Electoral Law.

"Nevertheless, they do not want the passage of a law that will allow for the implementation of the Constitution to be ensured.

"Asking for new election registration simply says that there will be no national elections at the end of this year, nor will there be prefecture or municipal elections next year.

"Thus, I reiterate this endeavor by the union leaders and the chief authorities at the head of COB and CONALCAM in the defense of the sacred vote by the people.

"At a press conference I explained how the proposal made by some senators was saying that the election registration of residents abroad had to be passed by two-thirds of Congress, when they know that two-thirds cannot be attained.

"But that is not what the currently valid constitution states.

"What they want is for no voting to occur abroad.

"Bolivians residing abroad also have the right to decide about the future of their country and about who shall govern their homeland.

"This is a matter of defending the vote.

"Last year they came from Argentina asking that that right be passed by the Senate; but it was not passed.

"When they were also talking about population density to ensure special electoral districts, the real reason is so that they would not exist.

"Thus, this endeavor is also in defense of the special electoral districts of the indigenous movement.

"We have heard some of the media saying that the government, the president, is shutting down the Congress.

"We are not talking about putting on pressure; rather it is a matter of calling on the passage of the law.

"We are calling upon this measure in defense of democracy.

"The anti-democratic elements of yesterday are now portraying themselves as the great defenders of democracy.

"Here we have comrades who have given their lives and their time on behalf of true democracy.

"Therefore, in order to undertake real democracy, we are passing regulations in the National Congress.

"In the Congress, members of parliament have one of the best opportunities to ensure democracy and profound structural transformations as well.

"I am asking the opposition members of parliament that we make history together, all of us.

"We must think of equality and the social solutions that the people want; here there is no room for egoism or sectarianism.

"First are the people, first is the homeland and then the interests of the sectors or the regions.

"My regards, truly, so that together we may take on the defense of democracy, of the peoples' vote, of the vote abroad and the other structural claims, using the endeavor of a hunger strike.

"Thank you, very much."

With this appeal, he concluded.

Throughout the course of the day, we shall see how the events unfold.

At 2:25 p.m. I talked with Rafael Dausá, our ambassador in La Paz. I asked him for news.

Evo is well, full of spirit and calm. He is only drinking water. He is being accompanied at the Presidential Palace by leaders of the Bolivian Workers' Union and peasant leaders from the National Coordination for Change. As vice president of Bolivia, Garcia Linera presides over Congress. Exchanges with the oligarchy opposition are being held in a commission. A matter under considerable discussion is the number of indigenous legislators on Evo's proposal about representation of those communities, according with the adopted Constitution, without setting figures. Evo proposes 14; the opposition only accepts 3. I sent my greetings to Evo. There has been no violence reported up to now.

At 4:01 p.m. I speak with Dausá again. He had passed on my greetings to Evo who had planned on visiting Cuba on April 9. He found him absolutely calm. He was playing chess with his comrades. The people are joining the hunger strike; it had extended to El Alto, Cochabamba, Santa Cruz, La Paz and to other cities. Mass organizations are constantly calling him offering support. The House of

Representatives supports him overwhelmingly. In that sector of Congress, their advantage exceeds the required two-thirds. The problem lies in the Senate where the oligarchy has the majority.

Passage of the Provisional Electoral Law would require two thirds in each House, therefore it is easy for blockage in Congress. However, Evo has a legal avenue. Among his constitutional powers is the possibility of issuing a Supreme Decree in order to pass the law under discussion. In that case he can also dissolve Congress and call for parliamentary elections, but he doesn't want to do that in his desire to preserve the country's unity. For that reason he is constantly inviting the opposition to share in the effort to develop the nation for the benefit of all sectors. Internationally, he is recognized for his honesty and his democratic spirit.

A few minutes ago I was listening to the debate in Congress. It is incredible to hear the oligarchy leaders' hatred and insolence. They are trained in the art of insults and personal affronts. They are outraged by Evo, the first indigenous person in the history of our America to govern a country that also has ancestral indigenous origins and customs.

The Law in dispute has just been passed in the House, 100 votes to 30. The debate is taking place in La Paz, in the pertinent chamber of the legislative building located a few meters away from the Government Palace.

At 6:40 p.m. I again get in touch with Dausá, briefly. He tells me that representatives of the mass organizations are arriving at Murillo Square in front of the Palace. He also comments on the insolence of the positions even though he expresses to me that not all the oligarchy deputies are that rude; there are some who behave themselves correctly. Negotiations are also continuing and perhaps late at night a decision will be reached.

On the television, I am listening to the Senate debate which has already begun.

The transmission ended at 7:20 p.m. after a request by an opposition senator to recess for negotiations, joined by other senators. In the last two and a half hours they had not yet resumed.

I called Dausá at 8:42 p.m. Evo is well, in constant communication with his cadres on the cell phone. People continue arriving at Murillo Square. Our ambassador knows that negotiations are moving forward but the opposition is asking the people to leave the square and Evo to desist from the hunger strike. It is difficult they will achieve both things. Dausá thinks that perhaps an agreement will be reached by the end of the night. I promised to call him again.

I called Dausá two more times, at 10:20 and at 10:49 p.m.

My first call coincides with Garcia Linera's explanation of the situation up to that moment. The impasse continues in Congress. He explains what has been achieved at the negotiating table during the day. He complains about the intransigence of the senate minority. They continue to demand that Evo ceases the hunger strike and that the people leave the Square. Now there is no possibility of reaching an agreement today Thursday. Perhaps early Friday morning, but that isn't certain. Evo is well and calm. His attitude has not changed. In the second call after some contacts that were pending he confirms the foregoing to me.

It is midnight and there has been no agreement. The opposition has left Parliament. I must deliver this material to Cubadebate so that our press can print it on time. This is no baseball Classic game, but in spite of that one has to go to bed fairly late. I haven't the slightest doubt that Evo will come out victorious.

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