

collective bargaining processes should be significantly democratized, but this is no simple matter. Indeed, local autonomy framed as “democracy” often reinforces fragmenting dynamics as members retain control over their bargaining agenda in their workplace, and refuse obligations to broader collective identities and interests. What then is the way forward? The book could have paid greater attention to such difficulties.

Despite these caveats, this book is required reading for working-class activists throughout the movement. Every union education department should adopt *Canadian Labour in Crisis* for immediate reading by their own leadership and activist cadres. Many will find the content uncomfortable, as it challenges deeply held assumptions on which lifetimes of activism have been based. And yet, as attacks on the remnants of working-class power continue to mount, this book will spark a necessary debate over what the labour movement must do to remain a relevant force for social transformation.

Webber, Jeffrey. 2011. *From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia*. Chicago: Haymarket Books. ISBN: 978-1-60846-106-6. Paperback: 21.50 CAD. Pages: 281.

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For those on the left, it has become common sense to think of the current governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador and sometimes even those in Brazil and Argentina as presenting alternatives to neoliberalism, and perhaps even capitalism itself. To some degree, this is understandable. Many of these countries witnessed impressive mass popular movements and uprisings that articulated a significant challenge to neoliberalism in the region. These included the 1989 Venezuelan uprising known as “el Caracazo,” the Argentine uprisings in 2001–2002, and the water and gas wars in Bolivia between 2000 and 2005. In all of these cases, new governments promising a break with neoliberalism were elected into office, and in Bolivia and Venezuela the phrase “socialism for the 21st-century” would soon enter everyday discourse.

However, more than a decade into Latin America’s “pink tide,” is it still possible to characterize the governments of Hugo Chavez, Evo Morales and others as presenting a challenge to neoliberalism or capitalism? Was it ever correct to depict these governments in such a manner? Addressing the case of Bolivia specifically, Jeff Webber answers these questions with a resounding and controversial no. Webber’s central argument is that the Morales government is pursuing an agenda of “reconstituted neoliberalism,” betraying many of the demands and aspirations of the popular movements that elected the MAS

(Movimiento al Socialismo or Movement Towards Socialism) into office. Challenging widespread interpretations of contemporary Bolivian politics, Webber's narrative depicts the popular insurgencies between 2000 and 2005 as constituting a "revolutionary epoch" that fell short of a full social revolution. The lack of a full socialist rupture in the country Webber attributes to the absence of a revolutionary party capable of articulating itself at the national level. Consequently, it was the MAS that became the only political instrument capable of articulating a national program.

Although, at first, the MAS maintained important links to popular movements, by 2002, Webber argues, it began to court the votes of the urban middle classes in an attempt to secure an eventual electoral victory. Originally conceived as a political instrument rooted in indigenous social movements rather than a political party, this was a crucial turning point for the MAS. Top layers of the MAS became filled with middle-class intellectuals and the party quickly moved away from street militancy. This shift became most evident during the gas wars in which the MAS prioritized elite negotiations over mass mobilization. The party's shift to a focus on electoral politics paid off in 2005 with the historic election of Evo Morales to the presidency. However, by this point the MAS, Webber explains, had already steered away from a revolutionary program.

This shift in the MAS became evident as the party, following the ideas formulated by Vice President García Linera, began to pursue the development of "Andean-Amazonian capitalism" in Bolivia, with a transition to socialism to be delayed for 50 to 100 years. In the meantime, the MAS would apply a neo-structuralist developmental model that did away with some neoliberal orthodoxies but retained a belief in the market as the central organizing principle in society. Webber strongly criticizes this "stagist" approach, arguing that it artificially disaggregates indigenous liberation and social transformation, and ignores the relatively favorable regional and global balance of forces Bolivia currently finds itself in. Another crucial aspect of the MAS's program, Webber argues, was the adoption of a conciliatory position towards right-wing demands. This was most obvious in the MAS's dismissal of a radical constituent assembly, as proposed by a variety of social movements, opting instead for a constituent assembly that would include the right wing opposition. Crucially, as Webber explains, this allowed the right wing to slowly re-articulate itself over time and eventually develop an aggressive autonomist agenda in the "media luna" region of the country.

Having outlined the MAS's origins and rise to power, Webber proceeds to assess its record since taking office, providing compelling evidence that the party adheres to a program of "reconstituted neoliberalism." First, he notes that for most of its first four years in power, the party pursued a program of high growth and low spending. Consequently, poverty and inequality remained largely unchanged. In addition, the MAS pursued an agenda of labor flexibility that intensified the labor process and therefore increased the rate of exploitation, as well as added to working-class fragmentation. At the political level, Webber continues, the MAS failed to adequately support the demands of

workers and communities at a number of crucial moments, including the 2008–2009 Colquiri mining conflict and the 2010 strikes led by the Bolivian Workers' Central. On this latter occasion, Morales himself proceeded to demonize the protests by suggesting sectors of labor had been infiltrated by the right wing. Later, the government successfully divided the workers by accusing some of being ultra left Trotskyites.

The evidence Webber presents is certainly compelling. However, there are a number of conceptual and empirical points that should be debated further. First off, although relatively low levels of social spending do cast serious doubts as to the MAS's commitment to a transformative project, looking at the *quality* of existing social spending would also be helpful when making this assessment. Webber does not fully examine whether there has been any changes on this front. A more contentious point is that Webber seems to adhere to an instrumentalist view of the state, that is, the view that the capitalist state only works for the interests of the ruling class. Hence, for him, revolutions must come from social movements working from the "outside." Not surprisingly, Webber is therefore deeply suspicious of the MAS, sometimes coming close to a one-sided analysis of events.

For example, according to Webber, the 2008 recall referendum, in which two right-wing prefects lost their positions, was ultimately more helpful to the right wing, allowing it to acquire legal legitimacy for its autonomist project. However, looking at the state as the articulation of class forces (albeit always tilted in favor of capital) might lead one to interpret this event as expressing class contradictions within the state. Hence the outcome of the recall referendum could be seen as expressing both the interests of capital and at least some of those held by Bolivian workers and indigenous movements. In addition, can we really think of social movements as ever existing *totally* outside of the state? If not, what does it mean to work from the outside? Finally, Webber's argument that the lack of a full social revolution in Bolivia between 2000 and 2005 was due to the lack of a revolutionary party needs further explanation. If, in its early years, the MAS, with its strong roots to workers and indigenous social movements, was not a revolutionary party, then what would a revolutionary party look like?

Notwithstanding the above questions and comments, Webber's book provides a badly needed corrective to the uncritical and celebratory views often presented about Evo Morales and the MAS, and their role in contemporary Bolivian politics. It is also a courageous and principled defense of Bolivian workers and communities engaged in class struggle on the ground, whether against transnational corporations or the MAS. This book therefore demands that we rethink our common sense assumptions about Bolivia, but also Latin America's "pink tide" more broadly.