

University of London  
Institute of Latin American Studies  
Occasional Papers No. 16

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31 Tavistock Square  
London WC1H 9HA

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Occasional Papers, New Series 1992-  
ISSN 0953 6825

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University of London 1998

# THE 1997 BOLIVIAN ELECTION IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

By James Dunkerley

The poll of 1 June 1997 in Bolivia might, perhaps, be thought outstanding only for its result – the constitutional election to the presidency of a man, General Hugo Banzer Suárez, who had taken that office by bloody coup 26 years earlier and held it for seven years as a dictator. Yet Banzer's election and the strong position of his party, Acción Democrática Nacionalista (ADN), in the congressional poll and its subsequent formation of a '*megacoalición*' (ADN/CONDEPA/MIR/UCS) may be seen as expressions of a wider 'consolidation' of the institutions of liberal democracy in Bolivia, marking an important shift away from the post-war pattern of corporatist politics 'by ultimatum'.<sup>1</sup> That pattern had reached its peak in 1980-85 with, first, the anarchic and drug-related dictatorship of General Luis García Mesa (1980-81) and, then, the weak constitutional administration of the Unión Democrática y Popular (UDP, 1982-85), which fell prey to syndicalist and radical demands which it could neither meet nor suppress. The poll in 1997 was the fourth national election to be held according to constitutional order since 1985, when the UDP had been obliged to leave office a year early. As a result, the election could be said to confirm a new pattern of political behaviour whereby conservative and populist forces negotiate electoral and administrative pacts and coalitions without facing stringent constraints from other domestic political forces. Yet neither Banzer nor his several allies in the '*megacoalición*' which took office in August 1997 were extravagant in their celebration or claims of achievement – a sobriety echoed by most commentators, if not the university trotskysts who cosily issued a call for armed insurrection to oust 'the fascists' from power.

That call to arms jarred particularly in the context of the exhumation of the remains of Ernesto Che Guevara and six of his guerrilla comrades to be returned to Cuba on 12 July 1997, just a few weeks short of the thirtieth anniversary of their execution. The youth of the contemporary radical left seemed blind to the popular rejection of the politics of violence, despite a dozen years of strict neoliberal policies, fiscal parsimony, and only modest success in reforming a centralised and patrimonialist state, in which corruption was widespread, if not endemic. Indeed, the smooth operation of the election and the lack of conflict

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<sup>1</sup> I have discussed this pattern in *Rebellion in the Veins. Political Struggle in Bolivia, 1952-1982* (London: Verso, 1984) and *Political Transition and Economic Stabilisation: Bolivia, 1982-1989* (Research Paper no. 22, Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 1990).

attending both its result and Banzer's inauguration is all the more remarkable given the instability and violence that had prevailed for several years previously in neighbouring Peru and the fact that Bolivia's own indigenous communities have never been properly included within the culture or institutions of a liberal state which still exhibits a marked racism. Although no administration since 1985 has been able to avoid suspending the Constitution under states of siege, in order to restrict popular protests at the high social cost of deflation, those mobilisations have not endured or grown. No serious guerrilla force has taken root since the days of Guevara, the once powerful trade union confederation (Central Obrera Boliviana, COB) is divided and disoriented, and the legal left is but a shadow of its former self. Taken together with Banzer's past and the high profile of entrepreneurs in his government, this scenario would seem to suggest an uncomplicated victory of the right, but that victory is certainly complicated, in terms of ideology as well as institutions.

## The Electoral System

Elections have been held intermittently in Bolivia since the 1840s, but they did not become meaningful in terms of the competitive allocation of office until the 1880s, and the urban masses only became actively engaged in the holding of polls from the 1920s. During the 1930s and 1940s military governments subordinated – but did not entirely eliminate – electoral contests, which could still affect local structures of power and influence in the towns and mines.<sup>2</sup> However, the restriction of the vote to those who could read and write effectively disenfranchised the rural population, which accounted for the great majority of the inhabitants of the Republic. As can be seen from Table 1, the election of May 1951 – the last before the revolution of April 1952 – excited the active participation of less than 130,000 people: a 38 per cent abstention rate by registered voters when these constituted a tiny segment of the total population.

This level of participation was in keeping with a social system in which urban trams hauled platforms behind them on which to carry those wearing indigenous dress, and in which free personal service of a servile nature was still common on the manorial estates of the Andean *altiplano* and valleys. The extent to which the 1952 revolution altered the 'formal political nation' can also be seen from Table 2, which shows the geographical distribution of the electorate following the introduction of universal suffrage by the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) when it took power through the revolution. (Table 2 also shows the decline by the 1990s of the old mining and agricultural centres in the southern Andean region of the country and the contemporary concentration of social power in the triangle of La Paz-Cochabamba-Santa Cruz).

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Laurence Whitehead (1981), 'Miners as voters: the electoral process in Bolivia's mining camps', *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 313-46.

**Table 1**  
**Electoral Participation, 1951-89**

	Pop.	Potential Voters	Reg.'d	Votes Cast	Abs. (%)
1951	3,019,031		204,649	126,123	38.4
1956	3,250,000		1,119,047	955,349	14.6
1966	3,748,000		1,270,611	1,099,994	13.4
1978	4,850,000		1,922,556	1,971,968	+2.6
1979	5,253,623		1,876,920	1,693,233	9.8
1980	5,570,109	2,525,000	2,004,284	1,489,484	25.9
1985	6,429,226	2,931,123	2,108,457	1,728,365	18.0
1989	7,125,000	3,191,000	2,136,560	1,573,790	26.3

Source: J. Lazarte, *Revista de Estudios Políticos*, no. 74, Oct.-Dec. 1991. Annex. 3

**Table 2**  
**Eligible Voters by Department, 1951-97**

Department	1951	1956	1966	1997
La Paz	72,512	260,443	436,049	1,068,900
Cochabamba	36,834	203,407	270,622	527,100
Santa Cruz	25,981	94,940	138,236	733,600
Chuquisaca	15,233	57,002	97,434	196,700
Oruro	26,116	62,485	79,057	172,200
Potosí	41,161	125,059	151,074	251,800
Tarija	16,281	29,563	44,406	157,400
Beni	10,093	15,385	40,474	132,800
Pando	2,009	3,046	8,408	19,200
Total	246,220	829,556	1,265,754	3,260,100

Source: C.Mesa, *Entre Urnas y Fusiles*; Corte Nacional Electoral.

Although the first poll under universal suffrage – that of 1956 – may be used as a point of comparison for voter eligibility and participation, it scarcely offers us a useful, or even valid, reference point in comparing precise results or party performance. The same may be said of the elections of 1960 and 1964, which were similarly held under the revolutionary hegemony of the MNR, when competition was far from free and fair. This was particularly true in 1964, with the party splitting internally at the same time as it won a proportion of the vote almost on a Soviet scale (see Table 3).

Yet, just as the victory of the British Labour party in May 1997 cannot usefully be compared with any poll prior to that of 1929 if *both* participation *and* results are taken as variables, so in Bolivia not a single poll before 1979 – 15 years after the collapse of the MNR's 'National Revolution' – properly stands the test of comparison. This is because the succession of military regimes that followed the MNR (see Table 4) either excluded the opposition and sharply restricted election campaigns (as in 1966) or simply fixed the results (as in 1978, a fact clearly shown by the 'excess voters' identified in Table 1). Nonetheless, in both 1979 and 1980 the MNR still retained the support of a considerable sector of the population, albeit at a level well short of a majority or one allowing the formation of a single-party administration (Table 3). Moreover, given that at the time of the polls of 1979 and 1980 the UDP was still strongly identified with the left-wing of the MNR, one could argue that the revolutionary party of the 1950s continued to enjoy an 'historical primacy' but was no longer able to translate this into coherent ideological advantage or electoral victory. This, however, is something of an theoretical observation since the coups staged in 1979 and 1980 overthrew the election results of those years.

**Table 3**  
**'Pre-Transition' Election Results**  
(% vote; major parties only)

	1951	1956	1960	1964	1966	1978	1979	1980
MNR	42.9	82.3	74.5	85.9		10.8	31.1	20.2
ASD	32.1							
FSB	10.5	13.7	8.0	–	12.5			
PL	5.2							
PIR	5.3							
MNRA			14.1		8.6			
FRB					61.6			
PDC						8.5		
UDP						24.6	31.2	38.7
ADN							12.9	16.8
PS-1							4.2	8.7
Blank		1.5	1.2	5.7	5.8	1.8	3.2	11.2
Null		1.1	1.2	6.5	2.4	0.9	10.0	6.3

Sources: Mesa; Corte Nacional Electoral.

As a consequence of those interventions and the dictatorships they set up we cannot talk of any election before 1985 being 'fully democratic' in the combined terms of participation, free competition, fair result and full social acceptance of that result. For this reason I have identified all earlier elections as 'pre-transition'. The watershed is certainly partial in terms of popular participation and party competition, but it is important when these are taken within the context of institutional continuity. One could certainly argue that the transition begins

before 1985 – for instance, with Banzer’s overthrow in 1978 – but it is only at that point that the transition became a profound process. Equally, one may wish to describe the position prevailing in 1997 less as ‘democratic’ than as ‘polyarchic’ on the grounds that there has not yet been a transformation from institutional continuity to a culture and popular expectation of pluralist behaviour within civil and political society.<sup>3</sup>

**Table 4**  
**Bolivian Governments, 1951-85**

1951	M. Urriolagoitia (PURS)
1951-52	H. Ballivián (military)
1952-56	V. Paz Estenssoro (MNR)
1956-60	H. Siles Zuazo (MNR)
1960-64	V. Paz Estenssoro (MNR)
1964	V. Paz Estenssoro (MNR)
1964-69	R. Barrientos (military)
1969	L. Siles Salinas (PDC)
1969-70	A. Ovando (military)
1970-71	J.J. Torres (military)
1971-78	H. Banzer (military)
1978	J. Pereda (military)
1978-79	D. Padilla (military)
1979	W. Guevara (PRA/MNR)
1979	A. Natusch Busch (military)
1979-80	L. Gueiler (PRIN/MNR)
1980-81	L. García Mesa (military)
1981	Military Junta
1981	C. Torrelío (military)
1982	G. Vildoso (military)
1982-85	H. Siles Zuazo (UDP/MNRI)

Within this evolution the poll of 1997 incorporated the result of disparate efforts to settle on electoral arrangements which would prove socially fair as well as institutionally efficient. To some degree, as in 1986 and 1991, changes in electoral law were the outcome of pragmatic – even opportunist – political trade-offs; these should not be treated as emanating from disinterested ‘statecraft’. On the other hand, the electoral system put in place over the three years before the 1997 poll was generally the consequence of informed debate over constitutional reform and the relative merits of ‘presidentialist’ and ‘parliamentary’ political systems in the post-authoritarian era. Although the MNR had firm control over the executive and legislature, there was broad agreement that the electoral

<sup>3</sup> Robert A. Dahl (1971) *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven: Yale University Press); Laurence Whitehead (1986) ‘Bolivia’s Failed Democratisation, 1977-80’, in G. O’Donnell, P. Schmitter and L. Whitehead (eds.) *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).

changes it introduced would address the difficulties of the proportional representation systems previously used: up until 1986, the D'Hondt formula, which could reward a party that won less than 1.5 per cent of the vote with up to three seats in the 130-strong lower house; thereafter, the St Laigue system, more favourable to larger political formations. The new system is very similar to that currently used in Germany and known in Europe as the 'additional member' mechanism, whereby half the deputies are elected from a party list ('*plurinominal*') and half as individual candidates for constituencies ('*uninominal*'). Under the law of 2 August 1996, article 60 of the Constitution was amended to divide Bolivia's 424,000 square kilometres – slightly less than the size of France, Germany and Great Britain combined – into 68 constituencies in an effort to match rising localist sentiment, to curb some of the patronage power of the central party apparatchiks, and to enhance constituency affiliation and responsiveness as a factor in parliamentary behaviour.

**Table 5**  
**National Elections, 1985-97: Vote**

Party/Front	1985	1989	1993	1997
MNR	456,704 (26.4%)	363,113 (23.1%)	585,837 (36%)	396,235 (18.2%)
AP			346,865 (21%)	
ADN	493,735 (28.6%)	357,298 (22.7%)		485,705 (22.3%)
MIR	153,143 (8.9%)	309,033 (19.6%)		365,005 (16.8%)
CONDEPA		173,459 (11.2%)	235,427 (14%)	373,528 (17.2%)
UCS			226,826 (14%)	350,730 (16.1%)
MBL			88,260 (5%)	67,244 (3.1%)
IU	10,072 (0.7%)	113,509 (7.2%)	16,137 (0.9%)	80,806 (3.7%)
PS-1	38,786 (2.2%)	39,763 (2.8%)		
Total	1,728,363	1,573,790	1,731,309	2,177,171
Sitting:	Siles (UDP)	V.Paz (MNR)	J.Paz (AP/MIR)	Sánchez (MNR)
Elected:	V.Paz (94)	J.Paz (97)	Sánchez (97)	Banzer
Loser:	Banzer (51)	Sánchez (50)	Palenque (16)	(unopposed)
Pact/Coal.:	MNR/AND	MIR/AND	MNR/MBL/UCS	'Megacoalición'

Note – Figures in brackets after names of elected and losing candidates refer to the number of votes cast in Congress for each candidate in the vote for the presidency.

As can be seen from Tables 5 and 6, this new system did not greatly alter the result of the poll in terms of the pattern of the vote from 1985 onwards (the 1997 results given in Table 5 are those for the *plurinominal* vote, which enables comparison with earlier polls). However, as an individual variable for the allocation of seats it was of some consequence (Table 7) since it enabled *uninominal* candidates of more regionally focused parties, such as CONDEPA



in La Paz, to benefit from the strength of their slate as well as permitting celebrated individuals to buck the weakness of any party slate with which they were attached (Juan del Granado, the prosecutor of General García Mesa in La Paz for the MBL, Evo Morales, the leader of the coca growers' movement for IU in Cochabamba). Table 8 shows the geographical distribution of the plurinominal vote for the different parties.

**Table 6**  
**Elections, 1985-97: Seats**  
 (130 deputies; 27 senators)

Party/Front	1985	1989	1993	1997
MNR	59	49	69	30
ADN	51	46		43
AP (MIR/ADN)			43	
MIR	16	41		30
UCS			21	23
CONDEPA		10	14	22
MBL			7	5
PS-1	5			
IU		11		4
Eje			1	
Arbol			1	
Others	26		1	

Source: Corte Nacional Electoral

This new, two-tier system operated with remarkable smoothness on polling day, the large majority of the electorate completing both the *plurinominal* upper-half of the ballot-paper for president, senators and slate-based deputies as well as the lower *uninominal* section. The efficient logistical preparation of the poll was notable, including the allocation of a mobile phone to urban electoral stations and extensive distribution of clear preparatory guides to the new system. It is, however, hard to comment with authority on the degree of 'tactical voting' indulged in by the electorate. In part this is because the system was completely untried in 1997, and in part it derives from the fact that the voters were generally aware that since the 1960s no single party had won the 50 per cent of the vote required by the Constitution to enable it to take power directly. Consequently, as stipulated by the Constitution, the new Congress would elect the president from the front-runners, thereby placing a premium on the pre- and post-election pacts that will be discussed shortly. In 1997 there was a general anti-MNR sentiment amongst the populist and conservative parties as well as on the left, but there was no pre-poll public agreement to form a coalition. As a result, the electorate could reasonably vote against the MNR in the expectation that this would

probably change the government but not necessarily to the advantage of their preferred party, even if they voted for slate- and constituency-based candidates from the same organisation. Equally, it should be noted that the composition of the Senate is calculated by yet another system, by which the winning party takes two of the three seats for each of the country's nine departments and the second-runner receives the remaining one. It defies belief that even the most psephologically sophisticated electorate could have calculated the probabilities of these three routes to the legislature (congressional *plurinominal*, congressional *uninominal*, senatorial) in addition to those of undeclared post-poll pacts whilst retaining the option of delivering a '*voto de castigo*' against the incumbent regime and, perhaps, reserving a separate vote for a favoured individual. In sum, it seems reasonable to suggest that the electorate simply voted according to general experience and proclivity with its calculations being no more detailed than those allowed by a broad estimation of the popularity of the alternatives.

**Table 7**  
**CONDEPA/MBL/IU: Slate and Constituency votes**

		CONDEPA	MBL	IU
La Paz	pl.	289,175	13,146	9,113
	uni.	228,086	38,969	11,430
Santa Cruz	pl.	11,233	12,170	2,521
	uni.	9,915	24,328	873
Chuquisaca	pl.	12,249	16,378	2,257
	uni.	6,870	23,759	5,869
Cochabamba	pl.	13,115	8,155	59,036
	uni.	9,164	12,087	54,416
Oruro	pl.	24,596	1,987	960
	uni.	18,257	5,277	3,214
Potosí	pl.	17,706	8,258	3,864
	uni.	12,489	11,427	3,733
Tarija	pl.	3,774	4,503	655
	uni.	2,933	11,185	585
Beni	pl.	1,321	2,196	134
	uni.	1,167	2,572	879
Pando	pl.	359	451	55
	uni.	957	491	2

Source: Corte Nacional Electoral

**Table 8**  
**1997 Presidential Election (% slate vote by Department)**  
(not rounded)

	ADN	MNR	MIR	UCS	CON.
La Paz	20.3	12.9	11.1	9.7	37.5
Santa Cruz	24.9	24.2	16.0	25.9	2.2
Beni	32.7	32.5	8.6	18.5	1.4
Pando	38.3	26.9	15.9	9.9	3.2
Oruro	21.9	15.6	17.5	15.0	20.5
Potosí	19.6	16.7	21.8	14.9	10.9
Cochabamba	23.7	11.7	19.9	16.2	4.3
Chuquisaca	20.8	18.2	19.7	14.0	9.4
Tarija	10.7	26.5	41.9	9.6	3.0
National	22.3	18.2	16.8	16.1	17.2
	MBL	IU	VS	Eje	PDB
La Paz	1.9	1.3	1.8	0.6	0.4
Santa Cruz	1.9	0.4	1.5	0.4	0.6
Beni	2.3	1.0	0.2	0.1	0.1
Pando	2.8	0.4	0.2	0.3	0.1
Oruro	1.7	1.8	1.8	0.5	0.4
Potosí	3.6	2.1	1.0	2.9	0.5
Cochabamba	2.2	15.9	1.0	0.4	0.6
Chuquisaca	9.5	1.4	1.1	0.8	0.4
Tarija	3.7	0.5	0.4	0.5	0.1
National	3.1	3.7	1.4	0.8	0.5

ADN – Acción Democrática Nacionalista; CONDEPA – Conciencia de Patria; Eje Pachakuti; IU – Izquierda Unida; MBL – Movimiento Bolivia Libre; MIR – Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria; MNR – Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario; PDB – Partido Democrático Boliviano; UCS – Unión Cívica de Solidaridad; VS – Vanguardia Socialista.

Source: Corte Nacional Electoral

Two other changes in the system deserve mention and may yet acquire more than formal importance. The first is the extension of the presidential term from four to five years. This is in keeping with a general Latin American pattern of extending executive mandates, either in themselves or – most recently and controversially in Peru and Argentina – by enabling the serving of successive terms. In Bolivia the question of re-election is not likely to become such an issue, partly because of the coalition nature of all governments over the last

twelve years, but also simply because no government in that period ever succeeded in getting itself re-elected. It is, however, possible that Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, who left the presidency in 1997 – having previously lost the polls of 1989 and 1993 – could return as a strong candidate for the MNR in 2002. Since Sánchez de Lozada – popularly known as ‘Goni’ – was a leading architect of the 1985 economic stabilisation plan which has so strategically underpinned the political transition, his presence has become one of the most notable features of public life. However, it should be stressed that he neither seeks a ‘populist’ niche of the type created by Fujimori and Menem nor, indeed, does he possess great interest in the type of ‘charismatic’ politics so often counterpoised to the administration of neoliberal policies.

Secondly, reforms to the Constitution required that at least 30 per cent of all candidates in the 1997 poll be women. This unusual experiment in affirmative action proved relatively uncontroversial, perhaps because it did not result in any significant shift in the gender balance of representatives. Eventually, women accounted for 31 per cent of all candidates, 13 being elected to the 157-strong legislature (10 as *plurinominal* candidates; two as *uninominales*; and one senator). If the stand-bys (*suplentes*) for successful candidates are counted, a total of 34 were elected (all these coming from the party lists but not gaining enough votes to gain a seat under the quota assigned to their party). In 1989, 14 out of 157 legislators (or seven per cent) were women; in 1993 the number was 12 (with four *suplentes*). At present 135 out of 1,625 municipal councillors are women although in some cities, such as Sucre, women are a clear majority of voters.<sup>4</sup> Local elections were held in 1987 for the first time since 1949 and then at two-yearly intervals, every other contest falling in the year of the national election but being held six months later, as in 1993 and 1997, which will serve as the first real test of the new system of local government discussed below.

Finally, in this regard, it is worth making a brief comparative comment. I have chosen to do this with reference to the systems pertaining to the British Isles, but not simply because both the Irish republic and the UK held general elections within weeks of that in Bolivia. There is a broader sense in which the study of Latin American politics is stymied by comparisons being limited to the region or to those extra-continental states deemed to be undergoing a similar political experience (for example, in terms of transition from authoritarianism, Spain and Portugal in the 1970s and Eastern Europe in the 1990s). Yet the debate over the British electoral system has sharpened markedly over the last decade, to the extent that the Scottish Assembly approved by referendum in 1997 will be elected according to the additional member system, combining party lists and Westminster constituency MPs. Furthermore, had the Labour Party not won such a resounding victory on 1 May its leadership might have been obliged to succumb to the significant lobby for the introduction of proportional representation in the UK as a whole.<sup>5</sup> Table 9 shows what the effect

<sup>4</sup> *La Razón*, 29 May 1997.

<sup>5</sup> The principal lobby in this regard was Charter 88. For a detailed appraisal, see Patrick Dunleavy, Helen Margetts, Brendan O’Duffy and Stuart Weir (1997) *Making Votes Count* (University of Essex: Democratic Audit, paper no. 11). Bolivia still lacks a

of the main electoral systems would have been on the composition of the House of Commons.

**Table 9**

**UK General Election of May 1997: Actual and Simulated Results**

Party	1st past post	Alternative	STV	Add. Member
Conservative	165	88	189	207
Labour	419	452	346	303
Liberal Democrat	46	90	87	111
Others	29	29	37	38

(Alternative: 2nd pref. votes by constituency; STV: single transferable vote in large, multi-member constituencies; Add. Member: 50 per cent MPs chosen from party-list and 50 per cent from single-member constituencies)

Source: *Economist*, 20 September 1997<sup>6</sup>

Equally, whilst the Irish adoption of the single transferable vote (STV) for popular elections to the most powerful chamber of the legislature (the *Dail*) is far from unique in Europe, it possesses a greater comparability with Bolivia than most. Ireland only experienced her revolution three decades earlier, the absence of subsequent military intervention allowing a prolonged competition between large and generally conservative movements, *Fianna Fail* and *Fine Gael*, to which the contemporary leaderships of the ADN and MNR might aspire. In the same way, both the MIR and the MBL might see in the Irish Labour Party an example of an influential junior coalition role although in 1997 Dick Spring's party was punished for its pragmatic alliance with *Fine Gael* only slightly less severely than was Antonio Aranibar's MBL for backing the MNR in 1993-97. What is clear from the recent Irish experience is that the small parties have failed to make an impact on the position of the traditional movements to the same degree as have the new populist formations in Bolivia. However, this might well not last if the remarkable health of the Irish economy in the 1990s starts to fail – a fact so obvious that it should remind us that electoral systems may indeed matter but, ultimately, they merely translate decisions determined in a world made up of different measurements and estimations.

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comprehensive psephological study. The polls of 1979, 1980, 1985 and 1989 are surveyed from the perspective of party results in Salvador Romero Ballivián (1993) *Geografía Electoral de Bolivia* (La Paz: CEBEM/ILDIS). A broad summary of all results may be found in Carlos Mesa Gisbert (1990) *Presidentes de Bolivia. Entre Urnas y Fusiles* (La Paz: Gisbert, 2nd ed.).

<sup>6</sup> Slightly different figures are given in Dunleavy et al., *Making Votes Count*.

**Table 10**  
**Eire: General Election Results 1951-97 (% first preference votes; Dail)**

	Fianna Fail		Fine Gael		Labour		Sinn Fein		Progressive Democrats	
	%	seats	%	seats	%	seats	%	seats	%	seats
1951	46.3	69	25.8	40	11.4	16				
1954	43.4	65	32.0	50	12.1	19	0.2	2		
1957	48.3	78	26.6	40	9.1	12	5.4	4		
1961	43.8	70	32.0	47	11.7	16	3.0	0		
1965	47.7	72	34.1	47	15.4	22				
1969	44.6	75	33.3	50	16.6	18				
1973	46.2	69	35.1	54	13.7	19				
1977	50.6	84	30.6	43	11.6	17				
1981	45.3	78	36.5	65	9.9	15				
1982 (Feb.)	47.3	81	37.3	63	9.1	15				
1982 (Nov.)	45.2	75	39.2	70	9.4	16				
1987	44.2	81	27.1	51	6.5	12	1.9	0	11.9	14
1989	44.2	77	29.3	55	9.5	15	1.2	0	5.5	6
1992	39.1	68	24.5	45	19.3	33	1.6	0	4.7	10
1997	39.3	77	27.9	54	10.4	17	2.5	1	4.7	4

Others: Greens: 1987 0.4% (0)  
 1989 1.5% (1)  
 1992 1.4% (1)  
 1997 2.8% (2)  
 Democratic Left 1992 2.8% (6)  
 1997 2.5% (4)

Richard Sinnott, *Irish Voters Decide*, Manchester University Press, 1995.

## Parties and Blocs, 1985-96

As can be discerned from Tables 3 and 4, the MNR was the dominant party in the political landscape of 'pre-transition' Bolivia: between 1952 and 1985 only one (very short) civilian government was headed by a president who was not a serving or past member of the party. If, as has sometimes been argued, the Bolivian party system is 'inchoate' this must have more to do with the fragmentation than the institutional longevity of its core political movement.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This argument is made by S. Mainwaring and T. Scully (eds.) (1995) *Building Democratic Institutions. Party Systems in Latin America* (Stanford: Stanford University Press), the editors drawing largely on that volume's chapter on Bolivia by Eduardo A. Gamarra and James M. Malloy, who themselves describe the system as patrimonialist.

Nevertheless, the return to prominence of the MNR after 1985 cannot be explained simply by its long-standing bedrock of support so much as by its capacity to exploit this in response to the economic and social crises presided over by the UDP coalition between 1982 and 1985. The key element in this regard was the *movimientista* jilting of expansionist and corporatist policies associated with the 1952 revolution and its imposition of a severe deflationary programme through Decreto Supremo 21060, introduced by President Víctor Paz Estenssoro on 29 August 1985, less than a month after coming to power. That measure succeeded in driving down the hyperinflation that had prevailed under the military dictatorships and the UDP and, despite sporadic popular opposition and mobilisation, the decree continued to operate as a constant in macroeconomic policy under all governments thereafter. This continuity has been partly due to the fact that the programme was initially designed and later implemented by non-members of the MNR, such as Juan Cariaga and Juan Antonio Morales. It also resulted from the decision of the ADN – which had publicly campaigned for this policy in the 1985 elections whereas the MNR had been distinctly pusillanimous about it – to accept with good grace the purloining of its programme as well as to support the Paz administration under a formal agreement known as the ‘Pacto por la Democracia’. This might be deemed the single most important instance of elite consensus in the Bolivian transition; it certainly enabled the government to withstand the extended popular reaction against the stabilisation plan and the collapse of the tin price at the end of the year. It is doubtful if the administration could have survived either pressure had the unions grouped in the COB not already over-reached themselves in contest with the UDP, but the experience of conservative collaboration from late 1985 onwards was itself very important.

Under Víctor Paz the MNR effectively reversed the economic policies of 1952-56 with which the president had once been so intimately associated. It is highly unlikely that Hugo Banzer could have achieved this, if Congress had recognised his heading of the 1985 poll and elected him to the presidency on the grounds of his modest yet perceptible victory in the popular vote (Table 5). Banzer was not seen as a ‘monetarist’ in the Pinochet mould, but he was still identified with military rule, and he possessed few links with other parties with which to build an alliance; in August 1985 only the ADN congressmen voted for him (Table 6). As an elder statesman and the erstwhile *compañero* of Hernán Siles Zuazo, the outgoing UDP president, Víctor Paz combined association with a radical past, unparalleled experience, and ‘imperial’ style that enabled him to pick up the votes of the many small parties which won seats in this first truly post-dictatorial poll. Such a ‘super-presidentialism’ befitted a man in his eighth decade, and it has been depicted as the magisterial manner of closing a career of 50 years. It was, though, more consequential than that. In the first place, Paz was the only figure in the political landscape to whom Banzer could at that moment defer with grace whilst retaining his political capital; Paz’s presence allowed Banzer to lose the presidential run-off in style and yet hold the legal right together. Secondly, although the vagaries of the electoral system had given the MNR a lead over the ADN in terms of seats, the *movimientistas* did not seek – and could barely hope – to repeat the run-off vote throughout a four-year term.

Instead, they sided with the ADN to form an unassailable majority in Congress over the very parties who had just voted for Paz; this alliance guaranteed the passage of virtually all legislation through Congress (Table 6). Thirdly, as a result of these factors, Paz was able to hand day-to-day management of economic policy to his finance minister Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, who scarcely needed to worry himself with the problems of parliamentary alliances or sustaining popularity as he piloted through Bolivia's remarkable stabilisation and sought, with much less success, to fire up its desultory growth.

The combination of a strong ideological and parliamentary conservative alliance, the presidency in the hands of a 'father of the nation' figure, and a highly able and confident manager of the economy was certainly felicitous for the implementation of public policy. Indeed, it may have saved Bolivia from becoming authentically 'inchoate' as the majority of its population suffered wretchedly under the impact of deflation, the collapse of the tin industry, the far from perfect rules of competition in *narcotráfico*, and the initially weak poverty alleviation programmes. Yet the strengths of this truly transitional administration spawned a backlash as well as encouraging hubris within the MNR, which predictably put Sánchez de Lozada up as its presidential candidate, and unpredictably broke off the Pacto por la Democracia prior to the poll of 1989. We still lack a detailed and authoritative explanation for this move, but all the indications are that, having benefited so handsomely from coalition politics, the MNR seriously misconstrued the reasons for this, mistakenly assumed that it would be rewarded by the voters for reducing inflation and could therefore jettison the ADN and move behind the electoral pendulum to the centre. Under the circumstances, it is remarkable that the party was not more severely punished at the 1989 poll, and although it lost both the presidency and a congressional majority, it was able to constitute a vocal opposition and retain many appointments in the state sector, particularly the senior ranks of the judiciary.

However, in 1989 the defeat of the MNR was less notable than the manner in which the new administration was formed – an experience which gave rise to the popular story that, on visiting the shrine of the Virgin of Urkupiña, Sánchez de Lozada asked that he might be granted his wish to win the election, Jaime Paz Zamora that he be made president, and General Banzer that he be allowed to run the country, and that all three had their wishes fully realised.<sup>8</sup> As can be seen from Table 5, the MNR headed the poll, just ahead of the ADN, with a considerable improvement in the vote of Paz Zamora's Movimiento de la Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR), a centrist movement which had quit the UDP government as soon as it entered crisis, despite the fact that Paz Zamora was vice-president of the Republic. No longer at the head of the poll, now plainly unable to ally with the MNR, and with the smaller parties located firmly on the left of the spectrum, Banzer played kingmaker by backing Paz Zamora, the

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<sup>8</sup> This anecdote is recounted in a most useful analysis of recent Bolivian political developments: Eduardo A. Gamarra (1997) 'Hybrid Presidentialism and Democratization: The Case of Bolivia', in Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Soberg Shugart (eds.), *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).



third-placed candidate, to be president. Despite the closeness of the MIR's result to those of the front-running parties, this decision aroused acute controversy over the legitimacy of the congressional vote for the presidency, and the Constitution was later amended to restrict the run-off to the two candidates leading the popular poll.

Banzer, whilst punishing his erstwhile allies for their fair-weather friendship, refused to enter into another formal agreement. Nonetheless, the loose Acuerdo Patriótico (AP) between the ADN and the MIR lasted up until and through the poll of 1993, and its strong parliamentary majority fortified the image of a benevolent ex-dictator generously backing a party formed 18 years before precisely in order to overthrow his regime. Again, coalition politics had contrived to throw up a strangely complementary pairing – this time in terms of generation and partisan reconciliation. The AP would not seriously tamper with the macro-economic strategy established in 1985 whilst it strove to project a more balanced approach to stabilisation and a more relaxed, modern and 'inclusive' style of government.

The fact that this failed to consolidate over the following four years owes a good deal to the role of the MIR, which was the junior party of the alliance despite holding the presidency. With its roots in radical Christian Democracy and the insecurely radical urban middle classes of the late 1960s, the MIR had never been tempted for long to dwell within the hard, 'Leninist' left of Bolivia that had such a rigorous programmatic pedigree, proletarian constituency and unsated appetite for sectarianism. Its role as a 'bridge-party' of the centre, able to operate flexibly with the populist derivations of the old MNR and the orthodox left rooted in the unions had made the MIR a vital element in the UDP and, arguably, delivered victory to that coalition in 1980. Now, though, the MIR sought to hold both the centre ground and power by blocking with the right. The tensions caused by this shift had already split the party in 1986 between a pragmatic officialist wing and a 'principled' group under the leadership of Antonio Aranibar that went on to form the Movimiento Bolivia Libre (MBL). Three years later, with its vote doubled and supported by the ADN, the MIR seemed to have extracted maximum advantage from its relocation in the political spectrum. However, it is telling that the MBL (which fought the 1989 poll as part of the left-wing pact *Izquierda Unida*) began to describe itself as 'trigo limpio' – a phrase which artfully differentiated it from the rising reputation for placemanship and corruption acquired by the Paz Zamora faction, now distributing the offices and favours of the state with an energy exclusive to those who have never previously availed themselves of the rewards of the patrimonialist circuit.

This sense of corrosion in a still incipient, fragile system was hardened by a serious dispute between the legislature (controlled by the AP) and the Supreme Court (dominated by the MNR) that came to involve impeachment of the justices of the court and a dangerous stalemate over interpretation of the Constitution, blocking much government business. The fact that the result of the elections and political manoeuvres could so readily destabilise ostensibly non-

partisan institutions of the state was both generally disruptive and a specific warning to the MNR that, just as it could not expect to win elections outright or make and break alliances at will, nor could it simply transfer the tasks of opposition to those sections of the state apparatus that it happened to control with an indifferent or neutral effect on the Constitutional order as a whole. The eventual solution of this crisis in May 1991 included the exchange of a new electoral law for retention of the justices in their posts. But, as might be expected, this did not presage the comprehensive reform of the judicial system advocated by modernisers from all parties (including the MNR's René Blattmann, who managed to introduce some important changes in custodial policy and sentencing procedure in the 1993-97 government).<sup>9</sup>

Both official placemanship and the crisis over the Supreme Court revealed the extent of drug interests in the political parties and the state, the question of *narcotráfico* returning to the top of both domestic and diplomatic agendas after a relatively low profile in the mid-1980s (despite the fact that receipts from cocaine had readily entered the banking system and palpably palliated the impact of structural adjustment). In this respect it is important to recall that Jaime Paz Zamora and the AP administration took office in August 1989, on the very cusp of the collapse of the Soviet Bloc, and that this government would witness the collapse of Communism in the company of the Bush administration in the United States, which sought to implement a comprehensive anti-drug campaign in the western hemisphere. The prior preparedness of the Paz Estenssoro government formally to collaborate with high-profile interdiction operations – such as ‘Blast Furnace’ in 1986 – that involved deployment of US forces on Bolivian soil had given the MIR what seemed to be a low-cost nationalist platform, from which it continued to proclaim in office that ‘coca is not cocaine’. This was a popular enough motif at home, and it played well with those sections of the international community convinced that Washington was seeking to shift to the south the economic, social and political costs of its anti-drug campaign by emphasising the problems of supply over those of demand. However, Paz Zamora misjudged a balance of forces that was, indeed, exceptionally mercurial. In addition to the wider international instability, including the de-escalation of the Central American civil wars that had so preoccupied Washington, his cabinet had to make sense of the unprecedentedly violent intromission of the cartels into Colombian politics; the extensive operations of Sendero Luminoso in neighbouring Peru; and the emergence there of Alberto Fujimori as a regional political figure of maverick qualities but critical importance for La Paz. Even with the invasion of Panama at the end of the year, it is not difficult to imagine how in such a scenario a policy of avowed autonomy towards the USA might commend itself, especially if conducted in harness with collaboration in practice.

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<sup>9</sup> For a full account of this crisis and the wider political and institutional landscape, see María del Pilar Domingo Villegas (1993) ‘Democracy in the Making? Political Parties and Political Institutions in Bolivia, 1985-1991’ (D. Phil. thesis, University of Oxford).

**Table 11**  
**Drugs and US Aid**

**Anti-Drug Operations, Bolivia 1991-97**

detained/destroyed	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996
processing plants	1386	1052	938	1613	2131	1660
distillation vats	2531	1913	1727	2753	3077	2819
persons	1047	1226	1376	2634	2494	2585
cocaine base (tons)	9.48	10.19	9.51	8.82	9.5	10.0

Source: FELCN

**Coca Cultivation and Eradication**

Year	Cultivated (estimated hectares)	Eradicated (hectares)
1986	25,800	
1987	30,646	
1988	38,400	
1989	41,816	
1990	44,462	
1991	39,086	
1992	36,746	
1993	35,500	2,400
1994	35,000	2,240
1995	30,000	5,492
1996	25,000	7,575

1997/8 target set by USA – 7,000 hectares by May 1998  
– agreed by *cocaleros*, 2 September 1997.

Source: *Presencia*, 20 July 1997.

**US Aid to Bolivia (\$m)**

	1993	1994	1995	1996
Economic support	59.5	31.0	16.7	15.0
Development	26.9	19.8	30.0	28.2
Food aid	43.2	36.0	19.9	21.3
Total		129.6	86.8	66.6

Source: USAID

Although drug scandals over the last decade have involved members of all the main parties together with the police, armed forces and judiciary, Washington's attention focused on the MIR, particularly once combined pressure from the embassy and press forced Interior Minister Guillermo Capobianco from office in March 1991. After the MIR left government in 1993, the party's number two, Oscar Eid, was jailed for four years for protecting traffickers, and Washington refused to issue visas to either Jaime Paz Zamora himself or to Carlos Saavedra, a senior minister in the outgoing government and effectively Eid's replacement in the party hierarchy.<sup>10</sup> This probably did the MIR little harm in the 1997 poll since it enabled the party to make a positive virtue out of its necessary distance from the USA, but it has further complicated an already critical aspect of public policy for several years. As can be seen from Table 11, interdiction operations and reduction of the *cocales* were maintained under the Paz Zamora government with roughly the same results as those registered by its predecessor and successor. These have been distinctly modest in the sense that between 1986 and 1996 the overall area under coca has been reduced little, if at all. But given that Bolivia is, in Washington's estimation, the world's second largest producer of coca and cocaine – and that cultivation of the former nearly doubled over the period – the expenditure of some \$200 million in eradication and interdiction might be said to have yielded some success.

A significant degree of compliance with Washington was always necessary for the simple reason that the USA accounts for over 30 per cent of Bolivia's foreign trade. However, the prominence under the Clinton administration of the policy of 'decertification', whereby disbursement of US aid is conditional upon local acceptance and realisation of eradication targets, has sharpened the relationship, not least because World Bank loans – and much private investment – would also be put in jeopardy. As Table 11 shows, under the Sánchez de Lozada government Bolivia received a diminishing amount of aid from the USA, largely as a result of economic recovery. However, the most vulnerable funds – those for development – have not reduced and could have been frozen or withdrawn had the administration in La Paz not been so warmly disposed towards Washington and generally able to deliver compliance on the part of the most reluctant *cocaleros*, who have replaced the miners as the most vocal and independent sector of the populace. It is telling that, once it had issued a 10-point 'ethical charter', the first public challenge faced by the Banzer government in 1997 was to extract from Evo Morales and the coca-growers of the Chaparé an agreement to meet the US-ordained targets.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, the initial weeks of the

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<sup>10</sup> The best analysis of the political consequences of the cocaine trade is Hugo Rodas Morales (1997) *Huanchaca: Model Político-Empresarial de la Cocaína en Bolivia* (La Paz: Plural).

<sup>11</sup> On 16 August 1997 the new administration issued an injunction to its members, supporters and civil servants including the following: 1. Strict adherence to the law; 2. Respect for the citizen; 3. Correct use of state property (no private use of public vehicles or cellular phones; no use of sirens except by the vehicles of the president and vice-president); 4. Austerity; 5. Discipline; 6. Sobriety; 7. Sense of self-criticism; 8. Sense of modesty; 9. Democratic collegiality with opponents; 10. Honesty. (*La Razón*, 17 Aug. 1997).

Banzer government reflected in raw form the exigencies of fiscal policy imposed by external conditionality – Vice-President Quiroga had almost immediately to attend the Hong Kong conference of the IMF and World Bank. This increasingly familiar ‘globalised’ scenario, however, included much less violence than in Colombia or even Peru or Mexico. The Bolivian experience of *narcotráfico* has at no stage involved guerrilla groups, and it has rarely thrown up producers or traders whose operations consistently depend upon violent activity. Interdiction on the scale indicated in Table 11 has inevitably involved loss of life, and the specialist anti-drug forces have regularly been accused of human rights violations (under the 1993-97 government 22 people died, 105 were wounded and 2,002 were detained in public order operations).<sup>12</sup> Yet, the dichotomy between corruption and violence is as false as it is simplistic, and the ideological and institutional trajectory of national politics from 1985 onwards cannot be seen in isolation from – or as simply parallel to – the character of the local drug economy, especially its connections with the semi-legal cultivation of the coca leaf that directly underpins the subsistence of tens of thousands of poor people. The national election of 1993 reflected this state of affairs in confirming the serious nature of the challenge to the traditional parties from two new movements of strong ‘populist’ vocation and style: *Conciencia de Patria* (CONDEPA) led by ex-folk musician and La Paz television proprietor Carlos Palenque, who had polled well in 1989, and the *Unión Cívica de Solidaridad* (UCS), set up by the Cochabambino beer magnate Max Fernández, who was equally of humble origin. Although CONDEPA began its existence as an urbanised Aymara movement focused on the poorest sectors of El Alto and La Paz, whilst the UCS was less regionally restricted and appeared to gain more success in the provinces, both parties had clearly emerged and developed in response to the deflationary climate and restructuring begun by DS 21060. Headed by charismatic figures, driven by loose rhetoric and sharp expression of complaint, invoking threats to community and cultural values, dependent upon the reputation of being as well as representing ‘outsiders’, these movements sought national as well as local office but rarely propounded precise policies that might form the basis of a platform for government. Indeed, although much interesting analysis has been devoted to their ambiguous origins, declamatory discourse and contradictory impact on cultural identity, it is possible to view both organisations as vehicles for a machine politics run by a new entrepreneurial sector of *mestizo* background.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *Presencia*, 16 Feb. 1997.

<sup>13</sup> Fernando Mayorga (1991) *Max Fernández. La Política del Silencio* (La Paz: UMMS/ILDIS); Fernando Mayorga (1993) *Discurso y Política en Bolivia* (La Paz: CERES/ILDIS); Carlos F. Toranzo Roca and Mario Arrieta Abdalla (1989) *Nueva Derecha y Desproletización en Bolivia* (La Paz: UNITAS/ILDIS); Hugo San Martín (1991) *El Palenquismo* (La Paz: Amigos del Libro); Joaquín Saravia and Godofredo Sandoval (1991) *Jach'a Uru: ¿La Esperanza de un Pueblo? Carlos Palenque, RTP y los Sectores Populares Urbanos de La Paz* (La Paz: CEP/ILDIS); Rafael Archondo (1991) *Compadres al Micrófono: La Resurrección Metropolitana del Ayllu* (La Paz: HISBOL); Roberto Laserna (1992) *Productores de Democracia* (Cochabamba: CERES); J. Antonio Mayorga (1996) *Gonismo. Discurso y Poder* (Cochabamba: UMSS/FACES); Carlos Blanco Cazas and Godofredo Sandoval (1993) *La Alcaldía de La Paz. Entre Populistas, Modernistas y Culturalistas, 1985-1993* (La Paz: ILDIS).

In 1993 each of the populist parties won nearly a quarter of a million votes (14 per cent of the turnout), in part at the expense of the AP coalition – which could only muster half of the votes that the ADN and MIR had won by running separately in 1989 (Table 5) – but also partly by swallowing up the support of the small, radical, regional and personalist parties. These had secured 26 seats in the 1985 Congress and were now all but eliminated from the scene by a ‘catch-all’ oppositional offensive which eschewed traditional ideology and yet did not sacrifice rhetorical energy to the pursuit of state position, thereby expanding an already formidable capacity to deliver clientelist favours. The ‘professional’ politicians had little difficulty in disparaging Palenque’s reliance upon the ‘culture of complaint’ stoked up by his TV programme ‘Tribuna Libre del Pueblo’, and they could plausibly doubt the solidity of support for Fernández based upon liberal distribution of free beer. Yet the 1993 poll clearly established popular proclivity for these options – whatever the degree of protest this entailed – and that of 1997 would confirm their presence on the scene, notwithstanding the recent death of both leaders and the involvement of both parties in government (CONDEPA in the municipal administration of El Alto and La Paz; UCS in the national coalition led by the MNR).

If the 1993 election result required the conservatives to negotiate with the new populist organisations, it also indicated a recurrent tendency on the part of the electorate to punish the incumbent administration, this time more severely than it had the MNR in 1989 (repeating this result in the local elections of December 1993 – see Table 12). On that basis Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada readily won both the highest popular vote and the congressional run-off, in which Banzer did not even figure. However, the *movimientistas* had learned the lessons of 1989, and they went to some lengths to construct a coalition which would include not only the centre-left MBL (not itself engaged in a pragmatic pirouette of a type it once scorned so severely) but also the UCS, which lacked any track-record or ideological basis for rejecting the lure of office, and, as vice-president, Víctor Hugo Cárdenas Conde, who headed the Movimiento Revolucionario Tupaj Katari de Liberación (MRTKL). This last appointment was seemingly a very generous sop to the rather stiff but talented and honourable Aymara intellectual who held a very modest constituency in the northern *altiplano*. However, it transpired to be one of Sánchez de Lozada’s more inspired gambles in that Cárdenas, with an awkward combination of idealism and *realpolitik*, single-mindedly promoted the idea of a multi-ethnic state through the representation of indigenous identity, this form of ‘cultural politics’ proving remarkably popular at home and abroad. The impact on hard policy was slight in the extreme – as Cárdenas’s initial supporters were quick to point out – but the longer-term influence could be much more consequential, forming a piece with Bolivia’s avoidance of the type of social disintegration and violence witnessed in Peru.

## The Sánchez de Lozada Administration

The MNR needed to form a coalition in 1993 in order to control both houses of Congress. In the event, it assembled an alliance which mustered 97 of the 157 seats at stake – more than the number needed for amending the Constitution, which would be required if Sánchez de Lozada was to realise his ambitious programme of reforms, the ‘Plan de Todos’. This had initially seemed little more than flamboyant campaign rhetoric, but ‘Goni’s’ reputation as an innovative *técnico* easily outstripped that of Banzer or Jaime Paz, whose coalition had become mired in ‘sleaze’ and inertial tinkering with the earlier MNR programme. Moreover, one should not underestimate the degree to which the decision by Cárdenas and Aranibar (separately) to cross the traditional ideological divide both encouraged a popular view of the new administration as a post-Cold War government and gave Sánchez de Lozada himself the resolve to pursue his own programme with non-partisan energy. In the event, neither of these minor coalition allies salvaged much from the experience of 1993-97 if this is measured narrowly in zero-sum, partisan terms: the MRTKL was unable even to stand in 1997, and the MBL was severely chastised by the voters. By contrast, the UCS, which was the least creative and disciplined member of the government, escaped the backlash entirely, perhaps because it was so ‘semi-detached’ that it never became associated with a programme that went well beyond DS 21060 in dismantling the institutional and macroeconomic legacy of the 1952 revolution.

The two axes of the ‘Plan de Todos’ lay in administrative decentralisation and privatisation, but both were designed with greater attention to mass ‘participation’ than most policies of this type, now familiar in the subcontinent because of their popularity with the large multilateral organisations, particularly the World Bank. Although neither policy had been fully implemented by 1997, the electorate had clearly registered their initial impact. In the case of the Ley de Participación Popular of April 1994 there had been a significant distribution of fiscal revenue from the central state to the 311 Organizaciones Territoriales de Base (OTBs) established across the country to administer health, education and other local services. In 1990 Bolivia’s total municipal budget had been \$22 million; by 1996 it was over \$150 million – more than 30 per cent of total public expenditure. Between 1994 and 1995 municipal expenditure per capita rose from \$11.2 to \$41.1, but it should be noted that a full 46 per cent of the population was concentrated in just seven municipalities.<sup>14</sup> The establishment of *comités de vigilancia* was supposed to give local support for the statutory restriction of spending on wages to 10 per cent of each OTB’s budget as well as to provide more general oversight. To the inevitable incidence of poor organisation in the transfer of services and ‘windfall’ exploitation of confusion and change by local *caudillos* and crooks, one should add the no less predictable conflicts over resources both within and between OTBs. It is as yet difficult to gain a firm sense of the impact on local structures and dynamics of power.

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<sup>14</sup> Santa Cruz (13%); La Paz (12%); Cochabamba (7%); El Alto (7%); Oruro (3%); Sucre (2.5%); Tarija (2%).

Government propaganda was often highly exaggerated. Many communities did certainly receive income for the first time, and others now managed enhanced resources, but, by the same token, their new duties implied a far greater expenditure. The electoral out-turn of this root and branch alteration of the country's local government was not sensibly predictable beyond the early success registered by the parties of the governing coalition in the December 1995 local poll as a result of a huge publicity campaign (Table 12).

**Table 12**  
**Municipal Elections, 1993 and 1995**

Party	1993		1995	
	%	Concejales	%	Concejales
ADN-PDC	7.8	262	11.4	233
ASD	1.8	10	–	–
CONDEPA	19.6	323	15.5	131
EJE	0.6	15	1.8	25
FRI	2.2	17	3.1	27
FSB	2.1	10	–	–
IU	0.8	8	3.0	58
MBL	11.7	213	13.3	216
MIR	9.4	245	9.3	138
MKN	–	–	0.2	4
MNR	34.9	1,330	21.3	478
MPP	–	–	1.9	8
MRTKL	0.2	2	1.2	33
UCS	8.4	372	17.5	231
VR-9	0.2	3	0.5	2
Total votes	1,119,854		1,716,007	
Null/void	70,042		89,625	
Registered	2,231,945		2,840,492	
Abstentions (%)	47		36	

Sánchez de Lozada dubbed his government's privatisation policy one of 'capitalisation' (Law 1544 of March 1994), insisting that the sale of 50 per cent of the stock of public companies, together with transfer of full managerial powers to the private sector, was essential in order to overhaul inefficient entities. This sale was depicted as being a necessary complement to the stabilisation policy of a decade earlier in renovating the legacy of 1952. By the time of the poll nine companies had been sold for a total of \$1.7 billion (not all of which was in liquid form). These included the national airline, Lloyd Aereo Boliviano (to the Brazilian VASP); ENTEL, the weak but potentially very profitable telecommunications company (to the Italian STET, which was soon



subject to regulatory fines); and two sales that aroused controversy on the grounds of national security – the national railway company to the Chilean Cruz Blanca corporation (which immediately closed down the Sucre-Potosí branch-line) and YPF's oil and gas distribution branch (at \$263 million, worth around 30 per cent of the company's total value) to ENRON-Shell. The prior performance of many of these companies was sufficiently poor to limit popular protest within a society generally sympathetic to the idea of public ownership. Moreover, the rise of new foreign investment from \$35 million in 1990 to \$520 million in 1996 lessened the impact of charges that Sánchez de Losada, himself a wealthy entrepreneur, was stripping the state of assets on behalf of the business community.<sup>15</sup>

If this policy was both more predictable and controversial than 'popular participation', there can be little doubt about the novelty (and strong electoral potential) of the government's proposals for the use of the receipts of privatisation – distribution to the public in the form of pensions. This required a considerable logistical undertaking since the central Bolivian state had previously run only one very modest pension system – for the veterans of the Chaco War against Paraguay (1932-5), now covering only 8,603 *beneméritos* and 13,571 widows (subject to unusual assessment in case of matrimony on fraudulent grounds by '*cazabeneméritos*').<sup>16</sup> In the event, the reorganisation of pension funds (AFPs) proved to be more restrictive for savers than even the much-vaunted Chilean system since membership of one of the two private systems in La Paz, Santa Cruz and Cochabamba and the one reserved for the rest of the country was obligatorily assigned (although mandatory levels of contribution could be enhanced in all). The closure of some substantial professional schemes was not accompanied with full guarantees for their transferred assets, and it was fiercely resisted by, for instance, the national medical association, which witnessed serious problems in public sector clinical provision as a result of the attendant amalgamation of professionally-associated hospitals and clinics. The military, by contrast, quickly accepted the proposals but appear not to have grasped the full consequences of closure and amalgamation – something that may be subject to review in the wake of Banzer's election.

By far the greatest attention was focused on the payment of a pension (Bono de Solidaridad – Bonosol: a sunny enough term to throw a shadow over any affinity with the Mexican public works system set up by Carlos Salinas) to those over 65 years of age. The plan was to pay the equivalent of \$248 to some 300,000 pensioners in 1997. This, it should be stressed, represented a considerable sum to many inhabitants of a country with such a low average

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<sup>15</sup> A. Solís Rada (1997) *La Fortuna del Presidente* (La Paz).

<sup>16</sup> By early 1997 the state had contrived to identify 1,176 '*cazabeneméritos*' of between 17 and 50 years of age. At that stage the youngest veteran of the Chaco War would have been 77 (*Hoy*, 9 March 1997). Whilst a very poor state must certainly guard against inadmissible claims on its slight resources, one feels distinctly uneasy about this particularly rigorous audit, and it is to be hoped that both younger women and elderly gentlemen derived happiness and security from even the prospect of union.

income (some \$800 per head). Indeed, the promise soon flushed out many new 'citizens'; there were 614,000 more registered voters in 1997 than in 1993, including two men of 93 and 107 years in the La Paz town of Ancoraimes who had never previously acquired any documentation from the state.<sup>17</sup> With its capacity for simple registration under pressure – let alone its actuarial skills – the state managed to pay pensions to only 150,000 people by the time of the poll, and substantial doubts remained as to the capacity of the AFPs to meet early expectations despite the fact that they had overnight become some of the most powerful and protected bodies within the national economy.<sup>18</sup> On the other hand, efforts within the MNR to exploit the Bonosol for party ends were largely contained, and Banzer was able to identify himself closely enough with a system the details of which he criticised – for example, by promising to lower the rural retirement age to 55 – so as not to lose electoral advantage.<sup>19</sup>

As with the other main planks of government policy, the brief record of the pension reform was not so poor in either conception or execution to suggest that the administration would be seriously penalised by the voters. There were understandable doubts concerning manipulation of unfamiliar systems and institutions – a response equally elicited by new agrarian reform legislation. In the past, such statutes have proved highly and justifiably controversial, especially in the *altiplano* and valleys, but the new law appeared to be wholly favourable to community and small-owner interests in its abolition of low-level taxation, the guarantees given to collective title, and the privileges advanced to the communities in terms of allocation of public lands. Nevertheless, the statute was treated in many sectors as being a contemporary expression of a free-market lineage stretching back to Bolívar's Trujillo decree, Melgarejo's piratical expropriations of 1866, and the decisive Ley de ex-vinculación of 1884. Certainly, neither the MNR's authorship nor the support of Víctor Hugo Cárdenas led to a widespread conviction that the law was a simple development or improvement on the agrarian reform of August 1953.

Perhaps in all these cases the imbrication of public and private spheres – the admixture of community and individual interest – was indeed recognised, being viewed as both potentially efficient and equitable, but it was not yet trusted to work. It has been observed that Sánchez de Losada could be seen more as a 'legislator' than a 'governor',<sup>20</sup> but even had he and his government expended more effort on the tasks of reassurance as opposed to celebration, it may be doubted whether they would have greatly soothed a popular disquiet which, as in 1985-89, had less to do with rational calculation than a more profound insecurity.

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<sup>17</sup> *Ultima Hora*, 20 April 1997.

<sup>18</sup> As the AFPs went into operation the need for regulation of the financial sector was starkly illustrated by the revelation that the country's *Fondos de Vivienda* (building associations or co-operatives) had not been obliged to maintain proper accounts before 1993 despite holding an estimated \$130 million. *Presencia*, 11 Sept. 1997.

<sup>19</sup> *Ultima Hora*, 18 May 1997; *Presencia*, 16 June 1997.

<sup>20</sup> Eduardo Gamarra, 'Goni's Unsung Swansong', *Hemisphère*, Miami, April 1997.

Something of the same reaction may be found in the voters' response to general economic performance, which was formally solid enough to give grounds for the 'feel-good factor' that has so attracted Anglo-Saxon psephologists in recent years. As might be expected, given his experience as finance minister for Víctor Paz Estenssoro, 'Goni' kept inflation under tight control, obtaining an average of 10 per cent over 1993-6 and a level of 8 per cent – the lowest in 20 years – over the 12 months prior to the poll. At 3.9 per cent the rate of economic growth was less impressive, especially with the population expanding at 2.4 per cent. However, as we have seen, investment was quite healthy in terms of Bolivia's distinctly modest record in the past, and recent export performance was relatively satisfactory – \$1.2 billion in 1996 with decreased volume but increased value in minerals and reduced sales of some non-traditional products (coffee, vegetable oil, artisanal produce) matched by increases in others (soya, Brazil nuts, wood). Moreover, confirmation of substantial reserves of natural gas (up to 9 trillion cubic feet) available from 1999 was capped by the signing of a 22-year contract to supply Brazil with gas worth up to \$500 million a year through a 3,150 km pipeline under construction between Rio Grande and Puerto Suárez.<sup>21</sup>

These, of course, were big and generally distant issues, often learned about from the mass media rather than sensed directly in daily life. On the street and in popular consciousness the image and experience of 'progress and modernity' was far more ambiguous. This can be seen in the manifestation of the market-as-modern-retailing, with the establishment in La Paz of a string of new or expanded supermarkets – Ketal; Hypermaxi; Zatt; Bonanza. By mid-1997 these had captured some 15 per cent of urban grocery sales but not on the classic grounds of the economies of scale and loss-leaders, their prices failing to undercut those of the traditional street- and covered-markets across a range of 32 basic necessities, and being markedly higher on prime cuts of meat. It is unlikely that higher standards of hygiene account for this market-share, which probably owes more to the pleasurable sensation of supermarket shopping, even if that currently constitutes an 'event' based on novelty or becomes part of a more differentiated strategy of buying by consumers. There are still millions of dollars tied up in highly profitable 'cholo' wholesale and retail enterprises in the streets and alley-ways in the north of the city and El Alto; Bolivia is very far from adopting 'mall culture' even if its most affluent suburbs may embrace the idea and institute their own mini-versions of it. However, the process is more advanced in Santa Cruz, and McDonald's decision to establish a restaurant in the capital cannot be seen as \$2 million lightly expended in a society dedicated at all levels to traditional heavy lunches. In the same vein, the growth of the telecommunications sector by over 11 per cent in the last two years – compared with the general rate of 4 per cent – is, as elsewhere, to a large extent accounted for by cellular phones. Increased use of personal computers amongst the urban middle class, together with rapid rises in the rate of connection to the Internet in both private and public spheres, suggest that this is a strong complementary source of expansion and a possible conduit for the poorest nation in South

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<sup>21</sup> *Presencia*, 20 and 26 July 1997.

America to short-cut some of the arduous routes out of 'underdevelopment'.

The need to escape that condition is underlined by its very extremity. In 1996, as we have noted, the average per capita income in Bolivia was \$800 per annum; life expectancy stood at 60 years, and the official infant mortality rate at 75 deaths per 1,000 live births. The fact that 38 per cent of children under five are malnourished indicates the principal reason for such an appalling statistic. Basic sanitation, control of diarrhoea, promotion of breast feeding, and access to paediatric care are low-cost essentials for child survival – especially in the first 12 months of life – but these remain largely dependent upon foreign aid and NGOs. The public health system is, in fact, more disorganised than it is subverted by malfeasance, but the level of corruption, clientelism and favouritism is seen as high throughout the state as a whole. In 1997 the company Transparency International ranked Bolivia as the 36th worst case of corruption in the world (Nigeria coming last in 54th position). The methodology employed in this exercise was criticised as being clumsy and 'subjective', but the ranking of Chile at half Bolivia's level does not strike one as a travesty, and objections to the league table from La Paz were not unreservedly fortified by the simultaneous announcement by the local police that they had broken a major car-rig operated out of the navy offices by one Captain Clever Alcoba.<sup>22</sup> In fact, even within the legal sphere attention to the division of the spoils remains sharp enough to suggest only a very slight reduction in patrimonialist practices. Following Banzer's victory the press reported that his allocation of the senior offices of state had resulted in the ADN receiving 54.14 per cent of the ministries and CONDEPA 14.28 per cent. At one level this is no more than a contemporary expression of Bourbon punctiliousness, but it does also suggest an instinctive suspension of belief in public service.<sup>23</sup>

One recent instance of the retrograde nature of partial 'modernity' can be seen in the case of five members of the small Uru-murato ethnic group who were arrested in August 1994 for hunting birds protected by law in their traditional grounds of Lake Poopó. Held in jail for a year without trial, they were eventually released on bail, but after three years had received no sentence from Judge Ana Rosa Quiroga; during this period one of those held, a 78-year old man, had died – 'of fright' according to his co-defendants, who were freshly charged with 'ecological crimes' in September 1997.<sup>24</sup> An equal sense of the pertinence of the past could be found in the limited success of the arms amnesty offered to the Laimé people of the north of Potosí by the local prefect in the week before the election. Although the authorities celebrated the hand-over of several modern weapons by the community, this was the third such agreement in two years and seemed most unlikely to pacify a region which had experienced violent land disputes throughout the colonial and republican eras. There was certainly nothing in the new agrarian legislation that offered relief on that score.

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<sup>22</sup> *Presencia*, 21 June; 11 Sept. 1997.

<sup>23</sup> *La Razón*, 31 Aug. 1997.

<sup>24</sup> *Presencia*, 2 and 3 Sept. 1997.

On the other hand, the continuing cultural and economic power of the *Entrada del Gran Poder* in La Paz, and the rise to prominence in recent years of the *Entrada Universitaria* represent confident and energetic expressions of indigenous tradition, no less impressive for the inclusion of Afro-Bolivian rhythms or the participation of young white women pirouetting in baroque *mini-polleras*. The idea of a 'pluri-multi-ethnic state' still languishes in the imagination of intellectuals bailed from detention in a Cold War mind-set, but civil society is increasingly proud of its non-hispanic culture, which is now sufficiently integrated into the mainstream to lose the tag of 'folklore' and foment an appreciable market. Even the notoriously Europhile and circumspect middle class of Santiago de Chile expressed admiration at the passage down their *alameda* of a large contingent of Bolivian dancers in 1995, and in the last few years La Paz tailors have become an essential element in the economy of the Rio carnival. This was the backdrop to CONDEPA's electoral success, as it was to the smooth integration of Víctor Hugo Cárdenas into the MNR government of 1993-97. It is also surely an important contributory factor to the absence of a racially charged violence that could rock the dominant market and state (sometimes described as 'Americanised' because of their integration into the wider US circuit but better understood as being 'European', rather than indigenous, in origin).

## The 1997 Campaign

The election campaign of 1997 enveloped and expressed these powerfully contradictory features as well as the more explicit display of party and personal conduct. The fact that the UCS leader Max Fernández died in an air crash in 1996 and CONDEPA's Carlos Palenque expired of a heart attack in the midst of the campaign could well account for the high vote of those parties in the June poll, just as it might explain any subsequent decline and extinction. It is unlikely, however, that the general 'style' of these parties will disappear from the national scene, regardless of the success experienced by the Fernández and Palenque children in handling the inherited *vitalicio* leadership of their parents' organisations.

The continued salience of the MIR in electoral calculations was underscored by its ability to bisect the vote of CONDEPA and the UCS. The MIR's 21-point programme opened with an appeal for 'confidence in ourselves', and it ended with the slogan, 'Solutions – Yes; Experiments – No', which is arguably in contradiction with the first point but unarguably rhetoric of the most vapid type. This characteristic feature of the MIR's politics was to some degree offset by thinly-veiled nationalist sniping at the USA, and the party did not have to concern itself greatly with radical challenges. The representative of the orthodox left, Juan de la Cruz of Izquierda Unida, campaigned on the grounds that Bolivia is a state without a nation; that it needs to be socialised, and that the only way to rid it of corruption is to throw out the entire current system. His most detailed proposal was that parliamentary business should be conducted in indigenous languages – not itself a very novel idea and equally unappealing when so few

parliamentarians were bilingual or even understood Aymara, Quechua or Guaraní. The precise prescriptions of Leninism had been removed from the socialist prospectus, but their rectilinear clumsiness was retained and simply given a graft of autochthonous allusion. The left appeared anachronistic and conservative rather than radical and innovative; its diagnosis of the country's ills was exceptionally broad, and it lacked precise propositions which might give it a more than denunciatory presence. Its only success lay in the election of individuals, such as Evo Morales and Juan del Granado, who had a record of strong personal conduct in opposition.

Nevertheless, it is the case that, between them, the MBL and IU won over a quarter of the vote polled by the MNR, which received slightly more votes in absolute terms than in 1989 but a much reduced proportion of the total ballot. This was a decisive defeat for the *movimientistas*, whose following almost fell to that of the second-string parties – CONDEPA, MIR and UCS. The MNR clearly suffered from the now predictable 'pendulum-effect', whereby the outgoing administration is conclusively repudiated, as well as from direct distrust of the economic and administrative reforms, and possibly, through this, some recycled aversion to the social cost of stabilisation a dozen years earlier. In addition, the party's original presidential candidate, René Blattmann, was precipitately replaced by the more traditional figure of Juan Carlos Durán, who was a competent minister and dependable campaigner but always looked as if he was loyally leading the party into a period of opposition.

The scale of the MNR's defeat in the popular vote was magnified by the manner in which this was converted into seats; it would seem to have suffered disproportionately from the introduction of the additional member system. Equally, it is easy to exaggerate the dimensions of the victory won by Hugo Banzer and the ADN, who were only narrowly ahead in a system that privileges marginal advantage as much as it compels coalitions. Furthermore, the ADN is so close to the MNR in ideological terms that it was possible for the electorate simultaneously to vote against the MNR and to retain its economic model.<sup>25</sup> Finally, of course, whilst the populist movements could amass considerable support, theirs remained a largely expressive politics, lacking both the programmatic coherence and administrative expertise to sustain a serious challenge for government. They still required the catalyst of an orthodox state manager in order to win ministries, and, as has been suggested, it is far from clear whether, after the death of their leaders, they can maintain momentum. Should one of them fail, it is doubtful that the other would automatically reap the benefit. The 'populist moment' may not have disappeared, but one potent electoral manifestation of it could well have passed.

These factors place the ADN's victory in context, but that party itself

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<sup>25</sup> Banzer's slogan of 'Pan, Techo, Trabajo' might sound rather corporatist, but it is a good deal less so than the 'Paz, Orden, Trabajo' motif he deployed 20 years earlier and which was reminiscent of the Pétain/Laval refrain, 'Travail, Famille, Patrie'. In any event the ADN slogan was much snappier than that dreamt up by the MNR's spin-doctors: '¡Soluciones de Verdad! Para una Cosecha Generosa'.

depended heavily on the figure of Hugo Banzer Suárez, and he overcame several important personal obstacles to win the presidency. The first of these concerned the rise in nationalist sentiment that has for some time tracked the debate over *narcotráfico*, and which was particularly stoked up by the regional 'Copa de América' soccer championship held between the poll and the inauguration (Bolivia eventually being beaten into second place by Brazil despite great hopes of repeating the famous home victory by the 1963 national side). As a traditionally pro-USA soldier trained in Argentina, and as a man who had warmly embraced General Pinochet at Charaña in 1975 in an abortive effort to open discussion of Bolivia's most important and contentious boundary dispute, Banzer was vulnerable on this front. His position was not assisted by the decision of Peru – at fierce odds over its border with Ecuador – to withdraw completely from all disputation over its southern border resulting from Chile's victory of the War of the Pacific (1879-84). This decision prompted the emergence in Bolivia of the popular saying, 'Never trust Chilean honour, Peruvian fraternity, or Bolivian justice', a sentiment which might not have stuck long in popular consciousness were it not for the high profile of the Chilean companies in the privatisation market.

Reflexive patriotism found fuller expression still as a result of Bill Clinton's decision to lift the 20-year old US ban on advanced weaponry to the southern cone countries, which prompted fears of a regional arms race. The threat of renewed tension between Chile and Argentina, together with the revelation that Chile had planted hundreds of thousands of land-mines along its northern borders, must, of course, be seen in a post-Malvinas, as well as a (partially) post-dictatorial and post-Communist scenario. The difference between the Bolivian military budget of \$149 million and Chile's of \$1,970 million amounts to far more than the cost of a proper navy; even under authoritarian regimes the Bolivian armed forces have never held or seriously aspired to the resources and status of those in Chile. It is widely accepted that access to the sea by retrieval (or exchange) of sovereign territory can only be gained through diplomatic initiative. This very recognition could have pumped up the rhetorical atmosphere from mid-1997, but the *froideur* of pronouncements – civilian and military alike – from Santiago might well have had something to do with Banzer's apparent agreement in 1978 with the Argentine high command to permit offensive operations across Bolivian territory into that of Chile. Whatever the case, and even if the new president's early waspish exchanges with the ex-leftists directing foreign policy in the Frei government stemmed directly from his electoral needs, there is reason to doubt whether the two countries will seriously seek to restore diplomatic relations in the short term.

The more publicised and serious challenge faced by Banzer was that he authorised the killing of scores of people and violated the human rights of thousands under the *de facto* regime of 1971-78 – acts for which he remained unpunished; the strong implication being that he retained a vocation for dictatorship. This latter point was not weakened by the fact that Banzer himself never disputed the general existence of repressive activity and the suppression of civil liberties in the 1970s and had made no expression of atonement or apology

for them; he openly argued that they had been justified by the circumstances of the time. However, he was evidently able to persuade nearly half a million voters that they could support him as a leader in a democratic system. Moreover, there are strong reasons for supposing that he was supported by the bulk of this constituency precisely as a democratic leader. That is, in terms rather distinct from those of his own result in 1985 or the support given to Generals Ríos Montt in Guatemala and Pinochet in Chile.

In the first place, the Bolivian political scenario in 1971, when Banzer took power, was undeniably one of social polarisation, political insurgency and the widespread collapse of law and order. His coup was amongst the most violent in national history, but it was not manifestly so because of his personal leadership. The subsequent regime could plausibly be presented as 'of its time', and was – unlike Pinochet's – generally less murderous and restrictive than the coup which opened it. Moreover, Banzer was thrown out of office by his own peers, and was not subsequently seen as representing a consensus of either the officer corps or conservative opinion. However, it is more important that his regime was followed by the anarchic dictatorships of 1980-82, which exhibited a greater proclivity for delinquency than ideology and which went some appreciable way to suppressing the memory of anterior tyranny. Nothing like this, of course, happened in Chile, where Pinochet imposed himself upon the succeeding regime by constitutional fiat, whereas in Guatemala, the regime of Mejía Victores could afford to be milder than that of Ríos Montt and understood the transition to civilian rule as an essential counter-insurgency measure.

Thirdly, Banzer's conduct in the post-dictatorial era was exemplary. In 1982 he had accepted the reintroduction of the 1967 Constitution and the restoration of the 1980 election victory of the UDP (which contained ministers from the Communist Party), and, as we have seen, he acquiesced in his 1985 loss of the congressional run-off despite winning the popular poll. In 1989 he fulfilled a minority role in government with sobriety, and even if he seemed to have decided to go into retirement, his conduct in opposition under the MNR administration of 1993-97 gave no cause for concern. These democratic *bona fides* had been won through a combination of high- and low-profile roles, in and out of office, but they had been accumulated very largely through the acceptance of disappointment and defeat.

At the same time, it should be noted that General Banzer had been subjected to an energetic and detailed impeachment by the radical leader of the PS-1 Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz, who was assassinated in García Mesa's coup of July 1980. The staging of that indictment, together with the failure of the governments of 1978-80 to proceed against the ex-president in the courts, seems to have bled off a portion of the earlier popular demand for a settlement of accounts and punishment. It stands in marked contrast to the treatment of García Mesa, who was jailed for 30 years for political crimes committed before, during and after the 1980 coup. The fact that, shortly after coming to office, President Banzer authorised an official investigation into the killing of Marcelo Quiroga Santa Cruz and the whereabouts of his remains could be seen as a theatrical



flourish and a further low-cost display of the general's lack of animus. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that at the time the sentiment was circulating quite widely that Banzer, having lost both his sons in accidents, had now paid a personal price for his own actions, whatever he said about the past and however genuine his avowed dedication to the rule of law.

In short, Banzer may not have been liked or even respected, but he was no longer extensively distrusted or hated. It was almost as if, by osmosis, the Bolivian electorate discerned that to be a democrat it was not necessary to share ideas or values, or even to have a pleasant past; the sole requisite is that one accept all the rules of the game. Very often these self-same rules require – formally or practically – a settlement of accounts over past conduct; but in Bolivia they were not applied to Banzer in this manner, and there is little expectation that they will be so. Banzer's election belies the notion that liberal democracy requires a consensual rewriting of history; there are absolutely no guarantees that it will lead to any greater social convergence (or *concertación*). It should, instead, be viewed as the outcome of a series of tough, pragmatic decisions by a political society at least as mature in its calculations as some supposedly more sophisticated electorates.

## **Che Guevara and the Importance of Historical Memory**

During the late 1970s, after the death of General Franco, a poster of Ernesto Che Guevara circulated in Spain on which the 'classic' heroic portrait by Alberto Díaz Korda was accompanied by a slogan: 'I shall return, but not as a poster'. This proclamation carries a strong echo of the last words attributed to Tupaj Amaru, executed by the Spaniards for leading the rebellion of 1781-3: 'I may die, but I shall return as millions'. The idea of a *Pachakuti* – a total cycle, renewal, even millennium – has particular resonance in the southern Andes, where it lies at the centre of a cosmivision and goes well beyond the notion of redemptive reincarnation of fallen heroes. These slogans were posthumously assigned to both men as supposed self-fulfilling prophecies, and if they possess a certain unsettling power in our day of quantifiable certainties, it is because they have not proved to be wholly false. The great insurgent leader from Cuzco had his name appropriated by the Uruguayan guerrillas of the 1960s and those of Peru in the 1980s whilst Che, of course, has never ceased to be present as more than an icon. Moreover, when he did finally return in material form through the uncovering of his skeleton near Vallegrande in July 1997, there was even a certain diminution in the power of that poster image. Discovery, return to Cuba and eventual re-interment in a pharaonic mausoleum at Santa Clara – the site of his greatest military victory – provided the kind of private relief and settlement of accounts so ardently sought by the relatives of those who have been 'disappeared' in recent decades in Latin America. Yet it also brought the public Guevara down from the sphere of myth, where many had been more than happy to keep him.

The fact that the discovery of Guevara's bones stemmed from the researches

of a biographer rushing to meet a deadline that would enable publication before the thirtieth anniversary of his execution throws light on the forensic power of the contemporary chronicle.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, however, the story of the exhumation occluded reappraisal of the life itself, the commemoration prompting celebration of a man who was heroic in the cause of a collectivist anti-heroism. This paradox did not stand alone; the response to the discovery of Che's remains excited commentary that was generally disconcerting in that – rather like that attending the death of Princess Diana two months later – it revolved around the symbolism of exemplary or sacrificial spirits, wherein rationality stands at less than a premium. Earlier debates over the more prosaic contradictions of his life – those of an Argentine youth in the post-war years; of a franciscan lover of the good-life; of the 'straight-talker' locked into a world of conspiracy – were now subsumed into this grander theme. However, the incongruity of the pulsating commodification of such an ascetic egalitarian did not seem to be drawing to a close, even in the desultory effort to create a tourist industry around the makeshift shrine at La Higuera and the sites of the bloody skirmishes around it.

In the event, most dignitaries of the continental and international left shunned the activities organised at Vallegrande, preferring to attend the large concerts and ceremonials organised in Buenos Aires and Santiago de Chile as well as Havana. It is understandable, in simple logistical terms, why a man so dedicated to rural guerrilla warfare and who died in the countryside should be celebrated in large cities; there is no real anomaly in the 'otherness' of heroism. Equally, one should not be surprised that amidst all the reflections and analysis there was little consideration of what Guevara meant for Bolivia itself, now nearly reduced to that spot on the globe where an internationalist coincidentally happened to meet his destiny. This is not the place for a full discussion of the character of the anniversary of Che's death, still less the substance of his life, but a few brief points can be made from the perspective of Bolivia and the elections held there a few weeks before his exhumation.

There is now strong evidence to suggest that Guevara had only gone to Bolivia in late 1966 as a step in a planned combative return to his Argentine homeland. It is also unlikely that his choice of this neighbouring country as a guerrilla site relied wholly on the advice of Régis Debray, even if his consultant's *normalien* assurance would have then seemed much less the construction of an *idiot savant* than it does today.<sup>27</sup> Che had already been in Bolivia himself, on tour 13 years earlier as a recently graduated doctor and before he had acquired the radicalism that crystallised the following year in his witnessing the overthrow of the Arbenz regime in Guatemala. There is, however, some hint of his developing attitude in a letter written to his father at the end of July 1953, just before the introduction of the agrarian reform which at the time provided a sharp sense of the weakness of the state but would later prove to be a

<sup>26</sup> Jon Lee Anderson (1997) *Che Guevara. A Revolutionary Life* (London: Bantam).

<sup>27</sup> Régis Debray (1968) *Revolution in the Revolution?* (London: Penguin); James Dunkerley (1992) *Barrientos and Debray: All Gone or More to Come?* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, Occasional Paper no. 2).

critical dyke against social radicalism:

I am a little disillusioned about not being able to stay here because this is a very interesting country and it is living through a particularly effervescent moment. On the 2nd of August the agrarian reform goes through, and fracas and fights are expected throughout the country. We have seen incredible processions of armed people with Mausers and Tommy-guns, which they shoot off for the hell of it. Every day shots can be heard and there are wounded and dead as a result.

The government shows a near-total inability to retain or lead the peasant masses and miners, but these respond to a certain degree, and there is no doubt that in the event of an armed revolt by the Falange...they will be on the side of the MNR. Human life has little importance here, and it is given and taken without great to-do. All of this makes this a profoundly interesting situation to the neutral observer.<sup>28</sup>

In the light of this, it is tempting to read much into Che's visit, on the day of the agrarian reform, to the Bolsa Negra mine outside La Paz. The miners had, quite naturally, taken the day off work to go to town and participate in the celebrations with *campesino* contingents (the reform was formally signed by Víctor Paz at Ucuireña, Cochabamba). Having toured the silent shafts of Bolsa Negra, Che passed the returning miners on his way back to the city, again being impressed by the explosions of dynamite and discharge of guns. It strikes one as particularly odd that during his month in the country the young Argentine should have contrived to miss both the agrarian reform celebrations and the extraordinary experience of Bolivia's proletariat in its Andean engagement. Indeed, this failed *rendez-vous* might be interpreted as reflecting less a proclivity to favour the rural over the urban than a general clumsiness when it came to 'being there'. Certainly, in 1966-7 Guevara categorically misjudged the mood, social resource and political capacity of both rural and industrial working people. In itself this probably did not cost him his life, but the lack of sensitivity and sobriety in assessing local detail always meant that escape was the best outcome awaiting the guerrillas.

By 1997 the social constituency (the 'big motor') that Che's *foco* (the 'little motor') was intended to ignite had been scattered by a comprehensive deindustrialisation and the dismantling of the corporatist institutions of the 1950s. The miners are now numbered in their hundreds, the confused COB is split over the degree of collaboration it should offer the new Banzer government, and Mario Monje, the Communist leader who once disputed Che's appropriation of the radical vanguard in Bolivia, lives out an isolated old age on the outskirts of Moscow. Yet the overall picture is far from clear. Banzer's insistent refusal in public to treat Guevara's endeavour as anything more than a red invasion appeared backward-looking and ungenerous; it was not widely echoed, even in conservative circles. Nor did the government's ostentatious listing of the 54 soldiers and civilians killed by the guerrillas and declared heroes in 1967 strike a chord of anything but sadness. In keeping with the nature of Banzer's own

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<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Anderson, *Che Guevara*, p. 104.

election a few weeks earlier, there was a marked lack of adversarialism in the political atmosphere (in November Fidel Castro did not hesitate to stand next to Banzer for the photo-call at the Seventh Ibero-American summit in Venezuela). A similar mood appears to have prevailed in Buenos Aires and Santiago; an epoch had passed, and if Che was returning, it was not as an exemplar of a precise form of insurgency but as the embodiment of higher values and ideals.

In Vallegrande and the village of La Higuera, where he was shot, Che is evidently more than a celebrity. Elsewhere in the country he might be said no longer to be an 'outsider', a source of embarrassment (or pride) in that he was killed in Bolivia. Perhaps Banzer's observations found scant response because Guevara was now seen less as an internationalist fighting against global reaction in a local setting than as somebody who had misconstrued the nature of nationalism in Bolivia – who had made a specific mistake in interpreting the country. In this he might almost be described as truer to his origins as an Argentine than to his mature convictions as a Communist. Furthermore, one gains the sense from a longer historical perspective that whilst the 1966-7 guerrilla never came to pose a serious threat of ideological conquest, it did raise fears of dismemberment of a type wearily familiar to a populace well schooled about the reduction of their national territory through wars – that of the Pacific (1879-84); in Acre (1899-1901); and in the Chaco (1932-5) – in addition to cut-price sales to Chile and Brazil by the likes of President Melgarejo. These experiences have been the traumatic testing-grounds for any logic that might lie behind the existence of a country deemed by some – not least Chilean generals and US diplomats – to have nurtured too many problems to be worthy of existence. This existence may have been upheld on the simple grounds that no neighbour has historically sought outright conquest and merely opted for maximum annexation of land with lowest social intake, but the state now confronts a new challenge in the integration of regional markets, particularly through Mercosur, of which Bolivia is an associate member.

These circumstances go some way to explaining why so much controversy should be aroused in the weeks around the 1997 election by the publication of a work of amateur history, *La Mesa Coja* by Javier Mendoza.<sup>29</sup> Making extensive use of the notes of his father, the great archivist Gunnar Mendoza, the author proposed that one of the founding documents of the nation – the 1809 proclamation of the Junta Tuitiva in La Paz – was not, in fact, signed or even composed by the members of that body, as had widely been believed for 150 years. Rather, according to Mendoza's methodological mix of strong documentary deduction and psychological induction, that document was a later 'creation'/forgery, and the real original derived from dissident jurists and priests in Chuquisaca (Sucre), who had far greater need and desire to form a state independent of Peru and the Viceroyalty of La Plata than did the merchants of La Paz. In effect, Mendoza was revindicating the place of Sucre as the capital of the nation, impugning *paceño* claims to have promoted the birth of the nation,

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<sup>29</sup> Javier Mendoza Pizarro (1997) *La Mesa Coja. Historia de la Proclama de la Junta Tuitiva del 16 de Julio de 1809* (La Paz and Sucre: PIEB).

and reviving a debate which was widely thought moribund because it had no contemporary relevance.

The exchanges over this issue combined a ferocious abandonment of common sense by traditionalist politicians with a pained reservation on the part of professional historians, for whom Mendoza's approach was too glib by half. But all participants passed without comment over the critical point that – whoever might have been responsible for the start of the independence struggle – it was completed by a Colombian (Sucre) assisted by two Irishmen (O'Leary and O'Connor), a German (Braun) and an Englishman (Miller) in the execution of a strategic plan drawn up by a Venezuelan (Bolívar). This internationalist presence at the very origin of the state has always been the source of some ambivalence. However, modern nationalists may find some solace in a sentiment expressed by Bolívar to Santander in a letter of October 1825, on his first and only visit to the country just named after him: 'if Brazil invades, I will fight as a Bolivian – a name I had before I was born'.<sup>30</sup>

Simón Bolívar accepted the existence of Bolivia, and probably for better cause than on account of it bearing his name; and he did so despite the fact that its establishment created another obstacle to his federalist design for the subcontinent – an objective and idiom so similar to those of Guevara. Moreover, it could be argued that Bolívar's secular, militarist republicanism savoured very much of that practised by Che 135 years later. Neither man would surely have much difficulty in interpreting the election of 1997 in the terms of their day. For Bolívar, Banzer's election does not quite vindicate his 1826 'Message to the Assembly of Bolivia', but it could be recognised as the intervention of a *caudillo* to sort out the *política criolla* of the lawyers and harness their disputations to the higher needs of the nation. For Che, the campaign would surely have amounted to little more than the squabbles of temporising liberals at the service of US imperialism as they extinguish the depleted legitimacy won in 1952. However, one suspects that neither man would fully grasp how and why many Bolivians could both concur with these assessments and yet still place such a politics above the emphatic pursuit of utopia to which these two historic 'extra-Bolivians' were pledged.

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<sup>30</sup> Bolívar, Potosí, 21 Oct. 1825, to Santander, see H. Bierck and V. Lecuna (eds.) (1951) *Selected Writings of Bolívar II* (New York: Colonial Press), p. 543.

