

**PERMANENT REVOLUTION ON THE ALTIPLANO:
BOLIVIAN TROTSKYISM, 1928-2005**

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in History in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

Permanent Revolution on the Altiplano: Bolivian Trotskyism, 1928-2005

by

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In Bolivia, uniquely in the Western Hemisphere, Trotskyism acquired significant and enduring influence in the labor movement as well as sectors of the peasantry. The dissident Communist current identified with the views of the exiled Soviet revolutionary generated themes and slogans that fed into the 1952 Bolivian Revolution, one of the deepest-going national upheavals in modern Latin American history. The influence of Bolivian Trotskyism continued to be felt at subsequent turning points in the life of this predominantly Indian and peasant Andean country.

Yet it was the nationalist party (MNR) that, in a complex process of ideological and organizational cooptation, reaped the rewards. The fate of Bolivian Trotskyism is part of the ultimate frustration of the Bolivian National Revolution itself. Yet the issues posed by this process are far from settled. In October 2003, Bolivian workers and peasants drove out the latest MNR leader to occupy the nation's presidency. Among their watchwords was a "return to the Thesis of Pulacayo," a program for social revolution written by the Trotskyists in 1946, approved by the miners' union, and long considered the central programmatic document of Bolivian labor. A subsequent upheaval in May-June 2005 paved the way for the election of peasant leader Evo Morales as the nation's first indigenous president.

This dissertation will seek to answer the following questions: Why did Trotskyism achieve this degree of influence in Bolivia? What was its impact on the 1952 Revolution and subsequent upheavals? Why did its adherents fail to achieve their stated goals?

Labor leaders saw links with the nationalist MNR as a way to gain access to parliament and the national press. Trotskyist activists saw the role of advisers and intellectual technicians for labor leaders as a means to gain access to workers in isolated mining camps. They believed labor radicals would be the rider, the MNR the horse. The opposite proved to be the case: this “anti-imperialist united front” aided the MNR while frustrating the Trotskyists’ long-term objectives.

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*To the miners of Bolivia, “¡Volveremos!” habían dicho.
To the men and women who shared their story.*

My biggest debt is to the participants – named and anonymous, those still living as well as the many that died in recent years – who trusted me with their recollections. Critical analysis of the history they helped to make has deepened my admiration for their courage and perseverance.

The novelist Harlan Coben provides extensive acknowledgements in his thrillers but writes that any mistakes are the responsibility of “these people,” since “I’m tired of being the fall guy.”¹ A dissertation, however, is a different kettle of fish. I thank Herbert S. Klein for encouraging me, five years ago, to pursue this project and for urging me to extend its scope up to the present day. José Luis Rénique has been a wonderful advisor, whose innovative approach to the tasks of academic writing was a great help. I was fortunate to have a great dissertation committee: Margaret Crahan encouraged, prodded and provided meticulous comments on the text. Gerald Markowitz’s consistently warm, critical and engaged relation with his students makes him a joy to work with. Sinclair Thomson shared his intimate knowledge of Bolivian social movements and critical insight. Alfonso Quiroz generously agreed to participate late in the process and contributed incisive comments. Betty Einerman is the heart of the History Department, without whom none of us would get anything accomplished.

On a more personal level, I want to thank Roy for teaching me to ask “why” (*Warum?*); Stan for teaching me to listen; Vera for helping me understand the creative process. Roy’s

¹ Harlan Coben, *Just One Look* (New York: Signet, 2005), iii.

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PREVIEW

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INTRODUCTION: FROM PRINKIPO TO PULACAYO

“Bolivia is on the map now,” a colleague told me after the leftist peasant leader Evo Morales was elected president this January; “this is a great time for your thesis.” Garlanded in coca leaves, an Aymara coca-grower and a former “Indianist” guerrilla became president and vice president respectively, to the tune of the *morenada*, a dance portraying black slaves and subterranean devils Bolivian miners traditionally performed in homage to the Virgin of the Mineshaft.

Bolivia made front-page headlines this year, but the country is little studied and less understood. For much of the world, the remote Andean republic has been an unknown quantity. Queen Victoria drew a big “X” across Bolivia on her map of the world when a *caudillo* president humiliated Britain’s envoy. For subsequent generations, the country named after South America’s Liberator could have been summed up as the land of coups, coca and Che. Its fragmented, convulsive history often seemed incomprehensible. Rebellion ran in its veins, but was this just a fluke of the nation’s cultural and political DNA?¹

Today, Bolivia symbolizes a new shift to the left in Latin America, pushed by radical social movements of the poor, the dispossessed and indigenous peoples once crossed off the maps of “official” history. However, Bolivian radicalism has a distinctive genealogy and does not fit into ready-made patterns of the Latin American left. Centered on indigenous tin miners, the Bolivian labor movement was for decades the most politicized and radical in the hemisphere. As Herbert S. Klein notes, the “official ideology” of the miners’ union was a document – the Thesis of Pulacayo – written by the Trotskyist party.² This ideology was

¹ *Rebellion in the Veins*: title of James Dunkerley’s history of modern Bolivian politics (London: Verso, 1984).

² Herbert S. Klein, *Parties and Political Change in Bolivia, 1880-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 384.

directly inspired by the “permanent revolution” of Leon Trotsky, the Bolshevik revolutionary exiled by Stalin to the Turkish isle of Prinkipo.

That this theory of revolution made the journey from Prinkipo to Pulacayo is in itself remarkable. That it took root so deeply and so stubbornly – like a red *kantuta* (Bolivia’s hardy national flower) of the altiplano – is more remarkable still. To understand why this occurred, we must grasp the importance of ideas as a source of identity and cohesion in a society as fragmented as Bolivia’s. We must approach these ideas both in their own right and their connections to broader political, social and cultural history. This means piecing together a fragmented past to see a part of Latin American radical history overlooked for too long.

This thesis is about the influence and role of a political vanguard that exercised long-lasting effects by producing ideology that helped forge the identity of radical miners, peasants and intellectuals. Through the politics and culture of militants and miners, this vanguard acquired surprising weight in the context of a society split by class, ethnicity, region and an inequality spectacular even by Latin American standards.

This revolutionary movement provided Indian miners with a worldview that vindicated their central role in the nation’s life, providing it with international context and historical meaning. The collective memory the miners treasured would, the movement taught, enrich the class consciousness of all the world’s workers. Their rich cultural production would, instead of being derided, become part of the struggle for a different, better world.

Seventy years before “Evo,” this movement proudly proclaimed the indigenous, Andean, pre-Columbian (even pre-Inca) roots of a national majority locked out of political power. It organized Quechua and Aymara peasants to take their masters’ land, and their own fate, into

their own hands. It taught them that isolated, “backward” Bolivia could take its place in the vanguard of a worldwide revolution of the poor. This movement is Bolivian Trotskyism.

For decades, the movement was interlocutor, half-willing partner, spectre and rival to ruling parties and presidents. In what other country would the President of the Republic find it necessary to warn the populace that a “Trotskyist government” could only be short-lived?³

Evo Morales is no Trotskyist, and most Bolivian Trotskyists view him not as an engineer on the locomotive of revolution but a fireman putting out the flames of revolt. A new book on Morales’ election notes, however, that his “mentor” was former Trotskyist mine union leader Filemón Escóbar, who concluded that “the revolution will come from the Chapare” coca-growing region, where many laid-off miners were “relocalized” in the 1980s.⁴



Figure 1. From left, peasant representative, MAS vice presidential candidate Alvaro García Linera, presidential candidate Evo Morales, miners’ representative, campaigning in La Paz. (Photo from *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2005.)

³ September 1953 speech by President Paz Estenssoro. The “foreign countries” Bolivia depended on for its survival would not tolerate a “Trotskyist government,” he added; *Lucha Obrera* (La Paz), 20 September 1953.

⁴ Paulino Guarachi Huanca, “Las comunidades rurales y urbanas festejan el triunfo de Evo Morales,” in *Bolivia: escenarios futuros. Nueve enfoques de la nueva coyuntura política* (2004), published online: <http://www.democraciapartidos.org.bo/libro/escenarios%20futuros.pdf>, consulted 17 February 2006. On relocation, see Lesley Gill, “Relocating Class: Ex-Miners and Neoliberalism in Bolivia,” *Critique of Anthropology* 17:3 (1997), 293-312. On the recent history of Bolivian social movements, see Forrest Hylton and Sinclair Thomson, “The Chequered Rainbow,” *New Left Review* 35 (Sept-Oct. 2005), 41-64; Maurice Lemoine, “Puis-sant et fragmenté, le mouvement social bolivien,” *Le Monde diplomatique*, November 2005.

The recent upsurge in protests by indigenous peasants, miners and slum dwellers led to the electoral victory of Morales' Movimiento Al Socialismo (MAS–Movement Towards Socialism). This upheaval cannot be understood without tracing the radical history, traditions and concepts of the country's social movements, which Bolivian Trotskyism had a crucial part in shaping. Guillermo Lora, the Trotskyist leader whose striking Aymara features have been a fixture of Bolivian politics for decades, likes to claim that *Bolivia es un país trotskizado*: “Bolivia is a Trotskyized country.” Quite a boast, but one that could be made nowhere else.

Trotskyism and Bolivian History

In a colloquium on the Bolivian left, the country's best-known historian summed up the impact of the Trotskyist party formed in the 1930s. It was “very significant in the field of ideas and in the radicalization of the positions of grassroots, labor and political movements,” he said.⁵ He should know: the historian's name is Carlos Mesa, and in June 2005 he was the latest Bolivian president to be overthrown by radicalized movements of miners, peasants and slum dwellers.

Mesa was the successor to the previous overthrown president, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada, having served as his vice president. *El gringo Goni*, as the U.S.-educated “neoliberal” Sánchez de Lozada was known, was driven out of power in October 2003, leaving the Palacio Quemado presidential palace to the ill-fated Mesa. Peasants and workers mobilized massively in the 2003 “Gas War” against Goni, who was unable to stop the protests even when army massacres left the highway to La Paz strewn with the bodies of workers, peasants and youth from the slums of El Alto.

⁵ Carlos D. Mesa Gisbert, “Introducción al tema,” in Carlos F. Toranzo Roca (ed.), *Desafíos para la izquierda* (La Paz: ILDIS, 1991), 20.

The decisive moment in Goni's fall occurred when troops blocking the highway to La Paz allowed truckloads of miners to proceed to the capital. The decisive moment in Mesa's fall occurred when miners led columns of peasants advancing on the city of Sucre, to which parliament had fled after being besieged by the miners in La Paz. The assassination of a mine leader by an army sharpshooter took the country to the brink of civil war, a situation defused only when peasant leader Evo Morales stepped in to arrange an "orderly transition" to an interim president, the head of the Supreme Court. These events were the immediate prelude to Morales' election as president at the end of 2005.

As dynamite-armed miners toppled presidents, the press and political analysts repeated a name which symbolizes this dissertation's topic: Pulacayo. "*¡Viva la Tesis de Pulacayo!*" read graffiti on the walls of La Paz, Oruro, Cochabamba. The central programmatic statement of Bolivian labor, the "Thesis of Pulacayo" was written by the Trotskyist Partido Obrero Revolucionario (POR—Revolutionary Workers Party) and approved by the miners' union in 1946. It called for the Indian miners to lead peasants and the urban poor in social revolution. A household word ever since, it is a striking example of the influence of Trotskyism in Bolivia.⁶

This project was born years ago from a desire to understand a place where miners spoke in Quechua-inflected Spanish of Trotsky's "permanent revolution" while offering coca leaves and cigarettes to El Tío, a pre-Inca deity of the world beneath the world. Why was Bolivia home to the most persistently, heroically combative labor movement in the Western Hemisphere? Of all the world's turbulent places, how did the Andean *altiplano* foster a

⁶ The call to "return to the Thesis of Pulacayo" was voiced by labor leaders throughout the events leading up to the recent uprising. See "Mineros quieren recuperar la Tesis de Pulacayo," *La Prensa* (La Paz), 24 March 2003.

movement born from distant disputes over Marxist doctrine in the Red Square of Soviet Russia?

“Enigma, exoticism, surprise”: it is with these words that the historian Steve J. Stern begins a recent essay on politics in Peru.⁷ Certainly, Andean politics can be enigmatic and surprising. Was the prominence of Trotskyism in Bolivia simply a quirk in a society known for odd contradictions? Some historians seem to think so. Thus, a volume on revolution in Bolivia states: “One of the curiosities of Bolivia is that it has produced one of the most long-lived and influential Trotskyist parties in the world,” which has “had an ideological influence on the Left far beyond its actual numbers.”⁸

Che Guevara’s former publicist Régis Debray refers to “the continuing Trotskyist tendency among rank-and-file workers which has set its seal on the thinking of the trade-union movement from its beginnings.”⁹ Is this because of what Stern, paraphrasing the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier, calls “a Latin American tendency toward the coexistence of political times that seemed, in other parts of the world, to separate themselves in a more chronologically ordered sequence”?¹⁰

To arrive at an answer, we must examine one of what the historian Florencia Mallon calls the “palimpsests” of Latin American history. Mallon is one of those who have helped form a

⁷ Steve J. Stern, introduction to Stern (ed.), *Shining and Other Paths* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), 1.

⁸ James M. Malloy and Eduardo Gamarra, *Revolution and Reaction: Bolivia, 1964-1985* (New Brunswick and Oxford: Transaction Books, 1988), 59.

⁹ Régis Debray, *Che’s Guerrilla War* (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1975), 43-44.

¹⁰ Stern, 5. On the same page, he quotes a character from Carpentier’s novel *Los pasos perdidos*: “You must remember that we are accustomed [to] living with Rousseau and the Inquisition, with the Immaculate Conception and *Das Kapital*.”

new vision of how to study political history and gain access to “the hidden story of alternative projects of the nation.”¹¹

In the first instance, such a study calls for generating a coherent narrative of this movement, of what happened and why. This will assist reexaminations of the ideology of Bolivia’s 1952 National Revolution, one of Latin America’s deepest-going (albeit still understudied) social upheavals, as well as other aspects of Bolivian history.

Trotskyism’s Appeal to Bolivian Miners

The revolutionary movement we call Bolivian Trotskyism appealed to indigenous miners to emerge from their *socavones*, the hell-hot mineshafts that turned their lungs to dust, to lead the exploited and oppressed in a final “assault on heaven.” This would not be another in the endless series of military coups and nationalist pronunciamientos, but a permanent revolution opening the way to a classless society.

Bolivia is the one country of the Americas where, during a significant period, real influence in nation-wide mass organizations of the working class and peasantry was acquired by a movement inspired by the political views of Leon Trotsky, who was exiled on the Turkish isle of Prinkipo when Bolivian radicals first sought to contact him.

A historian of the region’s radical movements calls this “a unique and exceptional phenomenon in the history of Latin American communism.”¹² The British political scientist Laurence Whitehead notes that in Bolivia, “dissident Marxists...gained significant influence

¹¹ Florencia E. Mallon, “Decoding the Parchments of the Latin American Nation-State: Peru, Mexico and Chile in Comparative Perspective,” in James Dunkerley (ed.), *Studies in the Formation of the Nation-State in Latin America* (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, 2002), 53.

¹² Boris Goldenberg, *Kommunismus in Lateinamerika* (1971), cited in Irma Lorini, *El movimiento socialista “embrionario” en Bolivia, 1920-1939* (La Paz: Los Amigos del Libro, 1994), 192.

and established a tradition of Trotskyism more ineradicable than elsewhere in Latin America.”¹³

Trotskyism’s prominence in Bolivia did not escape the attention of mainstream U.S. media. As the Andean nation was swept by a new round of labor protests in the late 1950s, *Time* magazine wrote: “Bolivia is the brightest jewel in the crown of the Fourth International, the ‘true,’ workers-of-the-world-unite Communists who oppose the Russian Reds.”¹⁴ As I will show, U.S. intelligence agencies also made sure to follow the movement’s activities.

For Laurence Whitehead, the movement was more than a picturesque curiosity. He observes that the Trotskyists were “perhaps closer to the aspirations of Bolivian workers” than “orthodox” pro-Moscow leftists.¹⁵ Why was this the case, what did it mean for plebeian radicalism in Bolivia, and what impact did this have on the country’s turbulent history?

The impact was considerable, but the outcome was far from what these radical organizers set out to accomplish. Nonetheless, from the 1930s through the present, many radical intellectuals and labor activists maintained a tenacious identification with Trotskyism.

Shaken to its foundations by the conflict with Paraguay in the Chaco War (1932-35), Bolivia experienced a wave of radicalization in the late ’30s. Young antiwar intellectuals were attracted to slogans and concepts derived from the platform of exiled Soviet revolutionary Leon Trotsky.

“Trotskyism” opposed the program of Stalin’s Communist International, which called for Latin American workers to ally with the “national bourgeoisie” in a two-stage revolution (first “bourgeois-democratic”, later “proletarian-socialist”). Bolivian leftists were drawn to

¹³ Laurence Whitehead, “Bolivia Since 1930,” in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, Vol. VIII (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 528.

¹⁴ “Bolivia: The Fanned Spark,” *Time*, 16 March 1959.

¹⁵ Whitehead, “Bolivia Since 1930,” 528.

the Trotskyist idea that the mining proletariat could spearhead a class upheaval mobilizing the Indian peasantry in a decisive showdown (a “permanent revolution”) with the “tin baron” elite and its U.S. and British backers.

The alliance that young POR activists forged in the 1940s with the leaders of the miners’ union was, I will argue, a crucial element conditioning the impact of the Bolivian Trotskyist movement. The radicalism of the Trotskyists’ program and their emphasis on the leading role of the miners struck a deep chord among workers in the nation’s central industry, who often found themselves in bloody clashes with U.S.-aligned mine owners backed by government troops. Bolivian Trotskyism was, moreover, a nationally specific ideology which combined elements of *indigenismo* (“Indianism”) with aspects of international Marxist thought.

After World War II, the growth in Trotskyist influence was often reported in the national press. In 1946, the historian William Carter writes, “A crucial event took place involving Bolivia’s miners’ groups. In a special congress held at Pulacayo, they adopted the Trotskyite philosophy of class struggle.” He adds: “From that time on, the lines were clearly drawn” between Bolivia’s working class and the country’s old regime.¹⁶

However, this influence came at a price: fortifying the militant image of the labor wing of the Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario (MNR) of Víctor Paz Estenssoro. The objectives of this nationalist party were distant indeed from those of Marxian socialism.

The 1952 Bolivian Revolution was unleashed by miners, factory workers and Indian peasants, the very forces in whom the Trotskyists had placed their hopes. Soon Trotskyist

¹⁶ William Carter, *Bolivia: A Profile* (New York: Praeger, 1971), 61. Today, tourists considering a visit to Bolivia’s salt flats are invited to stop in Pulacayo, “a significant town in Bolivian social history, for here the famous Tesis [sic] of Pulacayo was formulated.” “The Salt Route,” online www.andes-salt-uyuni.com.bo/pc11c.htm, consulted 21 February 2004.

cadres found themselves in positions of leadership in the new nationwide labor federation and among peasants in Bolivia's bread basket, the Cochabamba Valley.

Under the impact of miners' mobilizations and peasant land seizures, the new government acceded to demands for the nationalization of the mines and an extensive land reform, seemingly echoing slogans the Trotskyist POR had raised for a decade and a half.

Yet the MNR, to which the miners' and peasants' leaders had turned over power, promised not to overstep the Cold War limits laid out by Washington. Soon enough the Revolution turned to the right, leading to sharp clashes with its labor and plebeian base, and eventually to a new military dictatorship. Bolivia's history continued to be tumultuous, from Che Guevara's short-lived guerrilla struggle in 1967 and the revival of labor-based radicalism in 1970-71 to the hard-line dictatorship of Hugo Banzer, the "popular front" experiment of 1982-85, and then the MNR's return to power in its new role as paladin of "neoliberalism" on the *altiplano*.

As will be shown in the pages that follow, Bolivian Trotskyists played a significant role in each of these phases, contributing – in ways that would undoubtedly have surprised them when they set out on their path – to "state formation" in their country. To understand the contradictory outcomes of their efforts, we will examine the patterns of political activity established before and during 1952. These patterns continued to play themselves out, leading to the repeated frustration of popular aspirations and with them, the objectives the Bolivian Trotskyists had set out to accomplish.

Trotskyism and Bolivian Culture

To situate Bolivian Trotskyism in its social context, it is necessary to supersede the artificial distinctions between "proletarians" and "Indians" that sometimes arise in debates

about the region. Most Bolivian proletarians were of indigenous origin; most grew up in Quechua- or Aymara-speaking homes. Many retained close links to family members in indigenous communities. During layoffs or political firings in the mines, radical mine unionists often returned to the countryside. As far back as the 1940s, these ex-miners played a central role in organizing peasant unions in areas like Cochabamba, as discussed below.

The lexicon of Bolivian mining is filled with indigenous words together with English technical terms like “block caving” and “sink and float.” Listening to the miners’ radio stations, one heard news in Quechua and Aymara as well as Spanish, music of many descriptions, and scores from soccer teams like “El Club The Strongest de La Paz.”¹⁷

June Nash has written extensively of cultural syncretism and its role in miners’ identity.¹⁸ Bolivian short story writer and memoirist René Poppe draws the reader into the worldview of miners for whom “El Tío” and Trotsky may both be powerful figures.¹⁹

The Argentine historian and former Trotskyist Adolfo Gilly recalled his surprise, during a political visit to Bolivia, when he learned a Trotskyist union leader would miss an important meeting because he had to dance in the Diablada. This is the “devil dance” performed, together with the Morenada, by miners’ fraternities in the Oruro Carnival, which originated as a ceremony to honor the *Virgen del Socavón*, the Virgin of the Mineshaft.

¹⁷ The miners’ radio stations played a crucial role in strikes, protests and resistance to military coups. They experienced a boom after the first “cultural conference” of the Bolivian Mine Workers Federation (FSTMB), held in 1963. Alan O’Connor (ed.), *Community Radio in Bolivia: The Miners’ Radio Stations* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 2004), 9, 70-71. Cf. Don Moore, “Bolivia: Radio Under the Gun,” *Monitoring Times* (June 1994), <http://members.tripod.com/donmoore/south/bolivia/miners.html>, consulted 13 February 2006.

¹⁸ Nash, *We Eat the Mines We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us: Dependency and Exploitation in Bolivian Tin Mines* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979); and “Resistencia cultural y conciencia de clase en las comunidades mineras de Bolivia” in Susan Eckstein (ed.), *Poder y protesta popular: Movimientos sociales latinoamericanos* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 2001).

¹⁹ See René Poppe, *Compañeros del Tío: Cuentos mineros* (La Paz: Plural, 1997) and his vivid narrative of life in the mines, *Interior mina (Testimonio)* (La Paz: Plural, 2003). Many of his stories first appeared in the Trotskyist weekly *Masas* in the 1970s. In an interview with the author (La Paz, 28 June 2005), he insisted that he too believes in El Tío.

In Oruro, the POR comrades were miners and railway workers. One of them, Paulino Joaniquina, was the leader of the San José mine... One day, Paulino didn't show up because he was in the Diablada.... Imagine that: a Marxist, a Trotskyist, in the Diablada. I went to have a look, and there he was with his devil mask, jumping and dancing.... Paulino didn't dance because of the *entrada* [in honor of the Virgin], but because you have to dance in the Diablada!²⁰

At one point the POR had its own Carnival dance group in La Paz, Los Pacochis.²¹

In Bolivia, as elsewhere, songs are a crucial part of miners' culture, inseparable from the transmission of group memory (see below). Trotskyist militants participated in creating or adapting them to commemorate historic milestones, from the Pulacayo Thesis to the Cuban Revolution, important strikes or the murder of union and party activists.²² Trotskyism and Trotskyists also appear in popular *cumbia* songs, cartoons in the La Paz dailies, and television specials on national history, for reasons discussed later.²³



Figure 2. Left: Trotskyist miner Angel Capari, to left of effigy of El Tío, Siglo XX mine, 1980. (Photo courtesy of Angel Capari.) Right: Meeting of Trotskyists at Siglo XX, early '60s. On banner, portrait of Trotsky and symbol of Fourth International. (Photo courtesy of César Escóbar.)

²⁰ Cited in supplement "La Revolución Nacional," *La Razón* (La Paz), 7 July 2004, from interview with Gilly by Sinclair Thomson and Seemin Qayum, *Historias* 6 (2003), 239-258.

²¹ Author's interviews with Emma Bolshia Bravo and Alejandro Carvajal (La Paz, 4 August 2003, 5 July 2004).

²² In June 2005 I watched a group of young Trotskyists practice a new version of an old miners' *huayño* to protest the army's killing of the miner Juan Coro Mayta as he led a march on Sucre to "shut down parliament."

²³ As narrator of a televised history of the Bolivian Revolution ("La Revolución Boliviana," PAT, 2002), future president Carlos Mesa used one "talking head" more than any other: Guillermo Lora. POR leader Lora featured both as a protagonist of the events and the foremost expert on them.

Vibrant graphics were a crucial part of the Trotskyist tradition in Bolivia from the movement's inception, giving an unmistakable stamp to posters, mimeographed bulletins, newspapers and leaflets. "Mainstream" culture also bore the movement's imprint: the country's foremost muralist, Miguel Alandia Pantoja, whose work covered the halls of government buildings and union headquarters – only to be destroyed by one dictatorship after another – was a leader of both the POR and the Bolivian Labor Federation (COB).

One of the movement's founders (José Aguirre Gainsborg) was the grandson of the "father of Bolivian letters," Nataniel Aguirre; the other (Tristán Marof) was a prolific novelist as well as a pamphleteer. The movement's literary traditions were also embodied in the noted writer Alfonsina Paredes, a cousin of the country's main *costumbrista* (author of vignettes on national customs), Antonio Paredes Candia.

Sucre POR leader Agar Peñaranda, daughter of another famous *littérateur*, organized cultural *tertulias* (gatherings) frequented by the leading lights of music and the arts. POR leader Guillermo Lora's abundant writings include not only political and historical works but literary and art criticism, as well as a 600-page dictionary of politics, history and culture.²⁴

Historiography on the Problem

Existing historiography takes note of the Trotskyist movement's influence, although no in-depth study of it exists. The most insightful secondary works take note of the movement's ideological influence, but do not sufficiently explain it. The role of Trotskyist-led peasants in changes in agrarian relations, arguably the most fundamental alteration in the social landscape emerging from the 1952 revolution, also tends to be overlooked or underestimated.

²⁴ Guillermo Lora, *Diccionario político, histórico, cultural* (La Paz: Ediciones Masas, 1985). Also see, *inter alia*, his *Arte y política* (La Paz: ISLA, 1982); *La frustración del novelista Jaime Mendoza* (La Paz: Ediciones Masas, 1964); *Ausencia de la gran novela minera* (La Paz: Ediciones El Amauta, 1979).

These gaps in historical understanding involve a failure to take seriously the appeal of a social revolutionary program to Bolivian workers, peasants and intellectuals for whom the idea of a “permanent revolution,” inspiring a continent-wide upheaval, provided an alternative to Cold War subordination to Washington. This failure of historical imagination reflects, in part, the assumption that because Bolivia was poor and “underdeveloped,” there was no alternative for its revolution but to toe Washington’s line.

The earliest studies of the Bolivian Revolution are those of the political scientist Robert J. Alexander. His most extensive work on the subject, *The Bolivian National Revolution*, refers to the role of the POR in the 1952 revolution.²⁵ Alexander is also the author of the only full-length study of the Trotskyist movement in Latin America, two chapters of which are devoted to Bolivia. Alexander attributes the POR’s ultimate failure to what he calls its “one-class or exclusivist appeal.”²⁶ My research further demonstrates that Bolivian Trotskyism appealed not only to labor sectors but to important parts of the peasantry.

Alexander’s work tends to accept the picture painted by MNR spokesmen who, especially when their regime moved rightward, caricatured the Trotskyists as hapless theoreticians with their heads in the clouds, disconnected from national reality. Yet key government figures repeatedly denounced the POR in speeches, pamphlets and the press, which they would scarcely have done if its following were insignificant. This dissertation will demonstrate that the Trotskyists were deeply involved in national life; the instrumentalities and programmatic basis for this involvement, however, wound up rendering them ineffective.

²⁵ Robert J. Alexander, *The Bolivian National Revolution* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1958).

²⁶ Robert J. Alexander, *Trotskyism in Latin America* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1973), 126. Also see his *International Trotskyism: 1929-1985, A Documented Analysis of the Movement* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).