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‘It is clear that this is U.S. neoliberal interference in Bolivia’

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Interview with Julia ‘Pachamama’ Fernández and Gualberto Arispe Maita

Struggle-La Lucha’s Scott Scheffer spoke with Los Angeles Native/Quechua/Chicana activist Julia “Pachamama” Fernández, and with Gualberto Arispe Maita, a MAS (Movimiento al Socialismo) representative and MAS deputy candidate in Chapare and the president of MAS Youth. Julia interpreted our questions to Gualberto by phone and relayed his responses to us.



David Choquehuanca Céspedes, Gualberto Arispe Maita and Luis Arce Catacora in Sacaba/Cochabamba, Bolivia, Feb. 9.

Struggle-La Lucha: Evo Morales expelled the United States Agency for International Development from Bolivia in 2013. Now, the Trump administration has sent its agents back into Bolivia in January to “assist” the coup regime. What role is the U.S. and USAID playing in the May 3 elections?

Gualberto Arispe Maita: The presence of the DEA [Drug Enforcement Administration] /USAID was to make us fight between Bolivians, dividing the social sectors in our politics. That is why President Evo [Morales] made the decision to expel them and now, after the coup, they will return to our country. It is clear that this is U.S. neoliberal interference. Those institutions have not given good results

nor have they helped the Bolivian people; on the contrary, they have always left us massive problems, causing destabilization. The OAS [Organization of American States] and other accredited institutions like them will oversee the elections on May 3, but they do not have the confidence of the Bolivians because they were the ones that supported the consummation of the coup in our country. We are asking other organizations to come to see the elections to make the results transparent.

SLL: What has been the impact on the Indigenous and working-class population of the expulsion of Cuban health care workers?

Gualberto: On the issue of our Cuban medical brothers/sisters, it is unfortunate because thanks to them many Bolivians recovered their eyesight. On the issue of literacy, they have also helped us a lot, but the so-called transitional government, which clearly is a U.S. backed coup, expelled them and their accredited embassy in Bolivia. We want the social sectors to repudiate those dictatorial acts. ... Our effort is to recover democracy for our people, which we are currently lacking.



Julia 'Pachamama' Fernández

Julia “Pachamama” Fernández: I was just told by a woman in Bolivia who does not want to have her name publicized that the Juana Azurduy program has been suspended by the de facto government today. And, it’s a stipend program that’s designed to provide health and nutrition benefits, basically for pregnant mothers and young children in underserved sectors of the population — so that’s been suspended.

And it’s clear that most of the most vulnerable communities which predominantly comprise our Indigenous peoples in the rural areas are the ones obviously being most affected. And that, along with the expulsion of our Cuban medical doctors, has basically created panic within the sectors.

And so we have elders, we have children, pregnant women and men, which includes those protectors of democracy who were assaulted and shot during those peaceful marches in Senkata and Sacaba, who still have not received medical attention, so they are the most vulnerable. For me that spells out G-E-N-O-C-I-D-E. For me that's what's happening.

SLL: The illegitimate government of [Jeanine] Áñez wants to bar Evo Morales from running for senator, saying he hasn't been a resident of Bolivia, even though it was their coup, backed by the U.S., that forced him at gunpoint to leave. They've also implied that they may try the same tactic to stop the MAS presidential candidate [Luis] Arce and vice presidential candidate [David] Choquehuanca from running. Of course, there is also continuing repression, harassment and ongoing arrests of MAS supporters. Yet, the movement seems so strong and determined. What is the MAS view on possibilities of the upcoming elections and how to move the struggle forward?

Julia: It's going to get heavier in the months to come. But I just don't want to think the worst. I'm hopeful because my people are very strong. We've been through so many different wars and we've gone through the gas war and the water wars, and we've won.

Basically, the Indigenous movement is being forced to rebuild amid all the chaos happening in Bolivia. Right now, there's like a series of intimidations, of persecution and unlawful detention of innocent MAS supporters, false accusations against grassroots journalists and against MAS political leaders — even, you know, false allegations against the presidential candidate Luis Arce Catacora. The focus—in spite of what they're facing—is to really stay together against all odds. And the Bolivian Indigenous peoples have fought and won the gas and water wars in the past. The May elections may not be fair, but international volunteers will arrive to be witnesses of the upcoming historical events happening in Bolivia. And as for the

Bolivian people, their courage and their strength will pull them through.

