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Studying The Gas War with the ideal of Rosa Luxemburg

An ideal type analysis on the case study of Bolivia

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the ideal type analysis drafted from Rosa Luxemburg's ideas in the case of the Gas War events in Bolivia. The ideal type has been created from the ideas of mass strike, the works of reform and revolution. The aim of the ideal is to show how close the Bolivian case comes to the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg.

In the year 2003 the Gas War broke out in Bolivia in what was first considered to be a question of the natural resources and its exploitation. Soon roads were blocked, hunger strikes were started and after a couple of days a general strike was declared. The president had to resign and shortly after the very first Indigenous president of the country was elected, Evo Morales.

This thesis shows that the events in 2003 and its aftermath are a very complex composition. In some aspects they come close to the created ideal type but all-over the Bolivian context is too complex to analyze in mere conceptions such as revolution or mass strike. The ideas of Rosa Luxemburg should though not be rejected since they are a product of her own time and social context.

Key words: Bolivia, Rosa Luxemburg, Gas War, ideal type analysis, mass strike, reform, revolution

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Qhallalla!

Preface

“The leadership has failed. Even so, the leadership can and must be recreated from the masses and out of the masses. The masses are the decisive element, they are the rock on which the final victory of the revolution will be built. The masses were on the heights; they have developed this 'defeat' into one of the historical defeats which are the pride and strength of international socialism. And that is why the future victory will bloom from this 'defeat'.

'Order reigns in Berlin!' You stupid henchmen! Your 'order' is built on sand. Tomorrow the revolution will already 'raise itself with a rattle' and announce with fanfare, to your terror:

I was, I am, I shall be!” (Rosa Luxemburg 1919)

“Freedom without loss of our historical and national identity.

Our liberation will be the result of our own efforts.

It will never be granted by generals, intellectuals or the new rich.

We are oppressed but not defeated!” (Second National Congress of the CSUTCB 1983)

“The 500 years of Indian resistance have not been in vain. From 500 years of resistance we pass to another 500 years in power.

We have been condemned, humiliated and never recognized as human beings.

We are here and we say that we have achieved power to end the injustice, the inequality and oppression that we have lived under.

The original indigenous movement, as well as our ancestors, dreamt about recovering the territory.” (Evo Morales 2006)

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1 Introduction

In the year 2005 Evo Morales was the first Indigenous president to be elected in Bolivia. Since he came to power there have been several changes within the state apparatus, the constitution, the civil society, in short: within the national politics. To many Bolivia has become the land of hope while the oppositional minority has tried to restrain the new political process with different tactics.

The political consciousness among the Bolivian people is huge. It is spoken of politics in the homes, amongst street vendors, in almost every radio- or television channel political debate programs are being sent round the clock.

This is the Bolivia I travel to in the summer of 2009 to work on a miner field study. At once I was thrown in political activities with meetings, demonstrations and campaigns. In all of this it struck me how much potential there is in the country and the width of capacity of the grass roots movements.

The Swedish social movements have a lot to learn from the grass roots movements of Bolivia. The focus of this thesis lays in one of their most common means of defense, namely the strike.

1.1 Statement of Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to give an insight on the uprisings in Bolivia during the Gas War and its aftermath with allusion on some of the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg. The aim is thus to give a basis for a broader understanding of the social movements that brought this conflict to its culmination and thereby facilitate the ways of critically examining such terms as revolution and reform.

When I was working on my field study it crossed my mind how many resemblances I could trace in the Bolivian labour union and the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg. It is for this that I found it to be an interesting twist to create an ideal type out of the ideas of a theorist from a totally different time period and socio-cultural context from today's Bolivia. And in this form of contrast one can more or less estimate whether or not Luxemburg's ideas are timeless. The fact that the labour movement of Bolivia today is much more advanced and multiple than the German labour movement when Luxemburg was living gives this paper an excellent ingress to further contemplation. Could it be that her ideas are more applicable to the case of Bolivia? Are her ideas timeless or are they brief designs only suitable for her own time? Could a Western thinker and her ideas even be applied in the South American context of Bolivia? Questions like these have been a driving force during this paper with the purpose of saying something about the character of the political messages.

The research question:

- How close do the Gas War and the present politics of Bolivia come to the ideal of Rosa Luxemburg?

1.2 Method and Material

I've chosen to implement the descriptive analytic ideal-type throughout this paper (Beckman, 2005 p.49). The ideal-type analysis is very suitable in cases where one wishes to study a case and its similitude to an ideal-type. This does not necessarily mean that the ideal-type is to strive for but instead that it contains some interesting variables that are worth taking in consideration. Since the ideal type isn't a direct image of reality it can't be rejected by the empiric. "If reality doesn't agree with the ideal type then that's so to say the problem of reality." (Peterson, 1987 p.30) The ideal type never has the aim of reproducing reality it's rather a type of method with a benchmark function. In the case of this thesis one can see in what perspectives the chosen cases of Bolivia has a resemblance to the ideals of Rosa Luxemburg.

Since there is no developed template on how to create an ideal type I've had very free hands on forming the analytic instrument (Bergström et al, 2005 p.177).

The material in this paper comes both from first and second hand sources and has mainly been collected in Bolivia.

1.2.1 The Case study

The empirical research in this paper was conducted in Bolivia in the cities of La Paz and Cochabamba during two months in May – July 2009. It was foremost in contact with leaders and members of the rural peasant union CSUTCB that I was able to collect my interviews. I also had the chance to meet other union members, the former head of the department of Cochabamba and two Bolivian sociologists. I also participated in a top-level conference in Puno, Peru, for the Indigenous people of America. I was able to take part in several workshops which gave me a deeper understanding on how democracy is crafted within these conferences. Apart from the interviews and the observations I was able to gather material such as books, reports and documentaries. All have been helpful in giving me a better insight in the Bolivian grass roots movements.

I almost exclusively worked with semi structural interviews and only one was a group interview. The rest was done in either offices of the respective interviewee or in social gatherings. I was very fortunate to have a "snowball selection" (Esaiasson, 2007 p.291) where my interviewees guided me to further contacts.

One of my biggest helps to learn and understand the present process in Bolivia came from the families I lived with during my stay. For a month I stayed in El

Alto which is a suburb to La Paz with a family consisting of Maria Luisa, a sociologist and Ilich, an activist and artist. In Cochabamba I first stayed with a family consisting of Beto and Luisa both working in the school system of the country and later I lived with the family of Giovana who works as the personal secretary of the executive secretary of the union I was studying.

1.2.2 Difficulties and challenges

In the beginning of each interview I had to inform the person at hand why I was doing this study and what the purpose of it was. In a way of loosening the tension I had to tell them more about myself and my personal life. It was only then that I got the approval of making interviews. This effects my study in the sense that I have not been able to stand as an objective researcher (which hardly ever is the case), but instead the expectations of who I am made them willing to participate in my work.

1.3 Definitions and Limitations

There are some recurrent words in this paper that needs to be defined:

First of all it is the name *Social Democratic Party* which occurs in chapter 2. Today's definition on a Social Democratic Party implies a reformist organization with hardly little strives of a totally planned economy (NE – Socialdemokratiska partier 2010). The Swedish Social Democratic Party has several liberalistic features and has its goal by coming to power through elections and not through revolution (NE – Sveriges Socialdemokratiska arbetareparti 2010). When referring to the Social Democratic Party in chapter 2 it is essential to know that this implies the party as it was shaped in the beginning of the 20th century with much more radical ambitions than today.

Secondly it is the term *proletariat* which refers to the worker that sells its labour in a free market and the *bourgeoisie* is the name for the ruling class in the capitalist society (NE – proletariat - bourgeoisie 2010).

I've chosen to analyse two different actualities in Bolivia to implement the chosen ideal type. This means that the conclusion that will be made in this paper can only speak for the chosen examples and cannot be generalized.

When talking about the ideal or ideal type of Rosa Luxemburg it only refers to the constructed ideals in chapter 2. Also in this case they are not to be taken for general assumptions of being a complete ideal of all her theories but only refer to my own construction of the ideal type.

There have been three different languages in the employment of material which is worth mentioning since some expressions and ideas inevitably get another touch when translated, in this case into English.

1.4 Disposition

In the following the ideal type of the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg will be presented in both text and illustration to make the ideal more comprehensible. Thereafter follows a map of Bolivia and a historical background of the country. After that the most prolific labour union and the governing party is presented. Next the events of the Gas War conflict and its aftermath are introduced followed by the application of the ideal analysis. Finally the thesis is summed up in the last chapter.

2 Theory

2.1 Rosa Luxemburg

Rosa Luxemburg was one of the greatest socialist thinkers in Europe during the beginning of the 20th century (Frölich, 1972 p.XX). She began her carrier in her birth town in Poland in the Polish Labour Party. Because of her activism she was eventually forced to flee the country and ended up in Switzerland where she started studying economics and finally obtained her doctor's degree. She began to spend time with other exile socialists and finally moved to Germany where she joined the Social Democratic Party (SPD) (Ibid, p.38). She started teaching in the Party school in Berlin and it was mainly here she grew to become a prominent Socialist theorist with the foundation of the so called Luxemburgism. As a result of her sharp criticism of the German state, she was twice imprisoned.

Soon she realized that her party did not work towards the same aim as her and she was left appalled over the many double standards of morality within the SPD. The Party had shown itself to be much to petty bourgeois, it only concentrated on the work of reform and with the outbreak of the First World War the decisive turnover in her political standpoint came about as the SPD chose to support the war. After the war she founded the so called Spartacus League together with Karl Liebknecht among others (NE- Rosa Luxemburg 2010). Later the association passed on to become the Communist Party of Germany (KPD). At the age of 48 Rosa Luxemburg was brutally murdered by the Free Corps under the conduct of the Social Democratic Party.

In the attempt to construct an ideal type of some of Rosa Luxemburg's theories I have chosen two elements that make up for this category, namely:

The idea of mass strike and the idea of the works of reform and revolution. It is important to stress that these are ideas that come from Luxemburg's works and are not to be taken for general assumptions.

2.1.1 The Mass strike

"The masses are the decisive factor; they are the rock upon which the final victory of the revolution is erected." (Geras, 1976 p.111)

Rosa Luxemburg firmly believed in the spontaneity of the masses and emphasized the changing nature of the mass strike from time to time and place to place and

hence stated that an abstract and schematic model was impossible to portray. She accentuated that the mass strike cannot come true in an artificial approach, cannot be decreed upon or be spread by propaganda, but is a historical phenomenon which occurs from the social circumstances of a certain time (Luxemburg, 1983 [1] p.13). Mass strike and revolution are conceptions that only mediate the outer form of the class struggle and merely get a meaning in specific political situations. It is therefore impossible to propagate for a mass strike the same way it is impossible to analyze its probability. The mass strike occurs because of some certain strong political reasons.

There is a huge difference between the demonstration strike and the mass strike since the first one always is a planned action. The mass strike is the culmination of several smaller strikes with an effect of paralyzing the social production. It is in this stage that the proletariat can put pressure on the state or the corporate machinery (Frölich, 1972 p.135).

It is totally wrongful to think of the mass strike as a onetime act. The mass strike is rather a description of a yearlong maybe decade long period of class struggle (Luxemburg, 1983 [1] p.44). Each great political strike gradually moves on after reaching a political culmination in turmoil of economic strikes. And this applies not only to each mass strike but also to the revolution as a whole (Ibid p.48). The economic strike is the struggle between the proletariat and the capital, whereas the political strike is the planned and political manifested struggle where political ideals stand as the ultimatum. It is important not to differentiate these two but rather to acknowledge the political strike and the economic strike as two sides of the same coin (Ibid p.49). There is a reciprocal action between the political and economic struggle and just as the political struggle expands, an increase in the economic struggle can be observed. It is wrong to differentiate these two factors from each other and search for the one that begins or ends the struggle since it is the exact unity between these two that make up for the mass strike as a whole (Ibid p.49).

It can further on be said that the mass strike is inseparable from the revolution. It's not the mass strike in the first hand that creates the revolution but the other way around, it is the revolution that creates the mass strike (Ibid p.51). The revolution first creates the social conditions that are necessary for the economic fight to pass on to a political fight, and the political in an economic fight. This together is the mode that is manifested in the mass strike (Ibid). The mass strike leads though inevitably to the revolution. This can seem confusing since the revolution first creates the conditions that are necessary for the mass strike and later is created by its own foundation. The bottom-line is that the revolution is not one development only in a fix time but rather an agile phenomenon; it's an ongoing struggle (Ibid p.53).

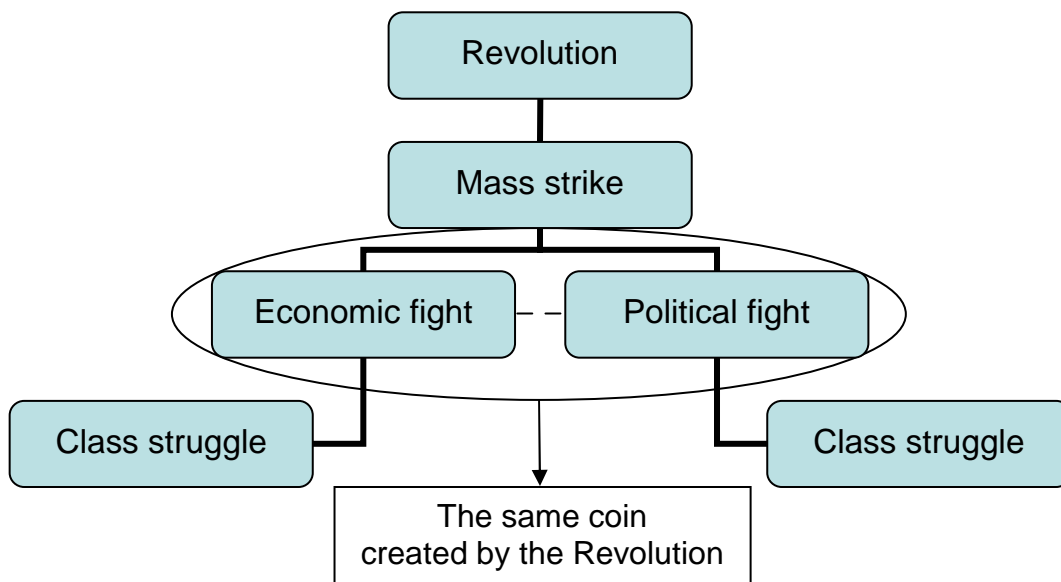


Figure 1

2.1.2 The works of Reform and Revolution

The question whether it is possible to reach a socialist stage in society as a product of works of reform or revolution has long been discussed between different Marxist scholars. Rosa Luxemburg makes it very clear in her foremost work in this topic, *Social Reform or Revolution*, that the Social Democratic Party has an inseparable bond between social reforms and social revolution (Luxemburg, 1983 [2] p.5). “The struggle for reforms is its means; the social revolution, its aim.” (Waters, 1991 p.36)

To make this clear she uses several examples to clarify the necessity for these two elements in the Socialist movement. But she makes it very clear that the main Socialist goal which also makes up for the key difference from the Bourgeois democracy is the bring down of the existing conditions of society which essentially is the government, the constitution and societal institutes. To achieve this main goal, which is the social revolution, she accentuates over and over how the social reforms function as a helping tool to get there (Frölich, 1972 p.52). There is therefore no contradiction between these two elements but rather an inevitable tie which functions in the benefit of the movement. Moreover she stresses the importance of not rushing into decisions and pushing the movement to a revolution since everything has its time and place.

The very foundation for this discussion lies in the presumption that there will be a future collapse of the capitalist system because of some underlying mechanism in itself which inevitably result in its own fall down. These mechanisms can be summoned up in three results of the capitalist development: the growing anarchy of the capitalist economy, the nationalization advance of the production process and the growing organization and class consciousness among the proletariat (Luxemburg, 1983 [2] p.10-11). The capitalist organization is therefore self destructive and in this lays the very necessity for a socialist state which grows out of the exact flaws of the capitalist scheme.

Unlike the police viewpoint, which exclusively contemplates upon the revolution in a way of street disturbance and disorder, the scientific socialism sees the

revolution foremost as a profound inner overturn of the social class relations (Luxemburg, 1983 [1] p.49). The centre of gravity lays consequently in the ongoing struggle while the social foundation unceasingly is shaken and dislocated (Ibid p.53).

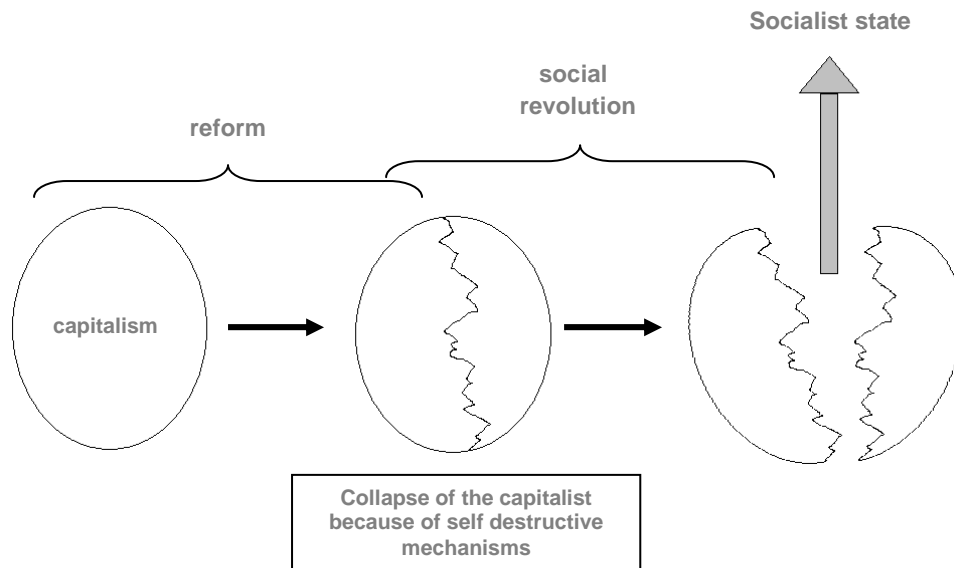


Figure 2

The Plurinacional State of Bolivia has gone through a typical post colonial process as most of the other countries of South America with exploitation, uneven distribution of the land and the resources and discrimination on the basis of class and ethnicity, just to mention some typical outcomes. One result to this has been that the country has the world record in coup d'état. Since the independence in 1825 there have been 188 coups which have resulted in a very low public confidence towards the politicians and the traditional parties (Latinamerikagrupperna December 2009).

Bolivia is the most poverty-stricken country in South America with a deep grown racial and economic segregation. The country consists of 9 million inhabitants on an area three times the size of Sweden. The population consists of different Indigenous people and other ethnicities. There are different numbers on exactly how many of the populace that is of Indigenous origin, but somewhat more than half the population is of Indigenous origin. The two biggest Indigenous groups are Aymara and Quechua. The constitutional capital of Bolivia is Sucre whereas La Paz is seen as the factual capital since it is the seat of government and the economic centre of the country (CIA – The World Factbook –Bolivia 2009).

The feature that differs Bolivia from its neighbouring countries is the struggle that has been driven against the “500 year old oppression” (Albó, 2008 p.42) which has resulted to the current politics of today: Evo Morales was elected the first Indigenous president in the year 2005.

For further understanding of the contemporary political system of Bolivia it is important to make a short historical retrospect. I will start off in the mid 20th century when the social movements of Bolivia had a substantial upswing with the revolution of 1952 as one of its most important fuels. Thereafter I will give a more profound acquaintance to the peasant labour union and the leading political party.

3.1 Bolivian National Revolution 1952

One of the most important steps towards democratization in Bolivia has been the events of 1952. It was namely the year of a successful revolution that was carried out with the conduct of the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement, MNR (Reinaga, 2001 p.301). Similar to other Latin American countries Bolivia was deeply scarred by the Spanish colonization and the economic division of the country was, and is still today, very distorted. The revolution brought about a sweeping land-reform that promoted rural education, introduced collective adult suffrage and nationalization of the tin mines of the country. The revolution also gave birth to the Bolivian Workers' Centre, COB, which is the head labour union federation in Bolivia (Klein, 1982 p.239).¹ The COB became soon the uniting voice for all workers in the mines and later also on the country side. Today it

¹ The COB can somewhat be compared to the Swedish Trade Union Confederation – LO.

represents almost all workers from different branches such as the industry, the public service and the peasants, but also students and women's union have their affiliation in the COB.

It calls for clarification when it comes to the term *peasant* (campesino in Spanish) in the Bolivian context. The word was officially implemented with the revolution in a well outlined political program by the MNR of defining the Indigenous populace as rural workers. The term *Indian* would no longer be used in any sphere of society whether in the news, in school books or in public mouth (Cusicanqui, 1987 p.1-2). The term peasant would form the uniting term for the Indian, the rural worker, the farmer and all other persons living in the country side. There was an idea in the MNR-party that the revolution could not be carried out by the Indians. The ethnical character would be replaced by the labourer who was thought to actually understand what was necessary for a revolutionary process. The complexity of the term is expressed above by a former sub-leader of the peasant union:

“They didn't believe in the Indian and their capacity of leading the revolution, so with the change of terminology there was an attempt of creating a working class. [...] But none of the terminologies *Indian*, *indigenous*, *peasant* or *original people* come from us, this doesn't exist between us. This is something that comes from above, from different political ideologies.” (Interview Pedro Quispe).

The most significant aspect of the revolution was that for the first time in the history of Republic of Bolivia the state tried to incorporate the Aymara and Quechuas in public life. In some aspects the country smelled a wind of change but the very foundation of the Bolivian society remained just as before: the Indigenous populace was still discriminated, left outside of the policy makings and they were still exploited in the mine-, industry- and agricultural jobs (Cusicanqui, 2003 passim).

3.2 Military rule and transition to democracy

MNR ruled the country for twelve years until it was overthrown by the military junta in 1964. From there and almost twenty years on the country faced tremendous political turbulence and military coups. During the 1980s MNR which is the same party that had fought for the revolution in 1952 started to disadvantage the population by a wave of neoliberal politics that repressed the labour unions, privatized natural resources and reduced the size of the state (Vásquez, 2006 p.174). In the year 1997 Hugo Banzer Suárez was elected president and with the guidance of the United States he started the program of eradicating the coca²

² Here it is crucial to stress the importance of coca not only for the Bolivian economy but particularly for the Indigenous community. Coca has a long history of traditional use in Bolivia, but also in other Latin American countries. For the Indigenous people coca is a holy plant with much importance in the religious rituals. The

which was a very controversial policy. The neoliberal politics that continued during his presidency lead an aggressive economic and political agenda which resulted in several confrontations with the social movements. The conflicts in the Water War in 2000 and later the Gas War in 2003 were both expressions of discontent towards the ruling sphere and their privatization policies. The last conflict opened the way for a completely new participant in the political scope, namely the president Evo Morales and his party Movement Towards Socialism, MAS.

3.3 The Confederated Union of Peasant Workers of Bolivia – CSUTCB

It is almost impossible to set an exact date or say how the labour union movement in Bolivia took its foundation because there are so many different analysis trying to set a record on this phenomenon (Vásquez 2006:15). The first labour unions had a strong affinity to the Marxist dissertation and it was namely the mine workers that during the 30s brought the union movement to the political arena in the country.

In the year 1979 the Confederated Union of Peasant Workers of Bolivia (CSUTCB) was born in a conference that was brought together by the COB. This congress put three confederations of peasant organizations together and from there on the rural labourers and peasants got a firm political platform that has grown to the biggest most influential movement in Bolivia today (Linera et al, 2004 p.115). In the year 1980 a female affiliation to the CSUTCB was founded to what is known today as the National Confederation of Indigenous Peasant Women of Bolivia “Bartolina Sisa” (CNMCIOB “BS”). The work of CNMCIOB is more or less identical to the work of CSUTCB. Therefore I will not make any difference from these two in the following and I will refer to the CSUTCB as the uniting term.

The labour movement works foremost in improving the rights of the peasants which include the right to territory, land and the coca leave. A crucial component in their program is the philosophy of “Living Good” (CSUTCB, 2008 p.22).

“The philosophy of Living Good comes from the original people of Bolivia. To *live well* is not synonymous to live better, to live better only reaches to some, it only refers to put an upper limit to things, whereas to *live well* is a concept for all. [...] It’s a wide concept that includes all from education, health, work, dignity, respect to mother earth...”
(Interview Lucio Colque)

medicine men use it to see into the future and cure diseases, but it is also used to reduce hunger, fatigue and cold. It is an essential part of the social interaction within this group (UBV, 1992 p.68). This needs to be said since there are a lot of misunderstandings and prejudice in the western countries where coca is thought to be synonymous with cocaine. But this is as misleading as it would be to think that grapes are the same as wine.

The CSUTCB has the capacity of blocking several roads in most of the departments of the country, isolating the governmental town hall, mobilizing thousands of members and also non-members for that fact in a very short time and for a long period of time, obligate governments of modifying decrees and laws. The union also has a long history of demonstrations and protest marches.

In many cases the union functions in a vertical manner, parallel to traditional authority systems and in other cases it has maintained the communal representational form. In many ways CSUTCB is a typical grass roots movement with ideas coming from the bases. The leaders are responsible of informing the bases, but in the end it is the base of the organization that makes the decisions and chooses which actions will be taken (interview Luisiano Sanchez).

3.4 Movement Towards Socialism – Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of Peoples – MAS-IPSP

As mentioned before, the dissatisfaction of the Bolivian people concerning the politics got more and more intense over the twentieth century. Out of the discontent that grew stronger due to the neoliberal politics a decision came from the social movements, namely of forming a political party that could represent the people in the parliament (csutcb.org 2005). The discussions were all directed towards one matter, namely creating a new type of party different from the traditional structures and policy-makings. This organization would function as a political instrument combining the social movements of Bolivia and as one united voice bring forth the demands and ideas of the social factions (Harnecker et al, 2008 p.13 ff). One feature that distinguished the instrument from traditional parties was the idea of not having one homogeneous ideology as its spine but rather letting social protests shaping the instrument. The leading pressure group pushing the demand for a new party was the peasants and their respective organizations (Ibid p.106). The ideas of land and territory were therefore a natural part in the program of the coming party.

The work of constructing the new party began in the year 1995 but with a different name. For several years there was an underlying conflict from the election committee trying to prevent the party from entering the political arena but in the year 1997 the political instrument finally got a seat in the parliament. The difficulty was essentially that the instrument didn't have the typical features of a political party since it had the character of a megaphone for the social movements of the country. The name of the instrument Movement towards Socialism (MAS) was actually borrowed from an almost 50 year old party that was no longer practicing in the political arena (Ibid p.98). In the year 2007 it was finally completed with the full name, Movement towards Socialism - Political Instrument for the Sovereignty of the Peoples (MAS - IPSP) (Ibid p.101). In the following I

will use the name MAS when referring to the party and the instrument since this is the popular name among the people.

4 The Gas War and its aftermath

4.1 The Gas War

Even though the conflict is named *The Gas War* the reason for its outbreak was more than just a grievance over the economic policy concerning the natural gas. A lot of other dissatisfactions among the population were of crucial importance e.g. the coca eradication politics, the police and military brutality, the exploitation of natural resources and the corruption among the authorities (Hylton et al, 2007 p.107). The conflict came to its culmination in October 2003 when the president Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada had to resign from the presidential post.

On the 8th of September of the year 2003 a march was started in coordination with the CSUTCB with the course to El Alto, which is a suburb of La Paz.³ Around 3000 peasants from 20 different provinces of La Paz got together in a requirement that the government would accept 72 demands presented by the CSUTCB (Albó, 2008 p.77). Also the liberation of one of the imprisoned leaders who was one of the leading voices saying: “The gas is not for sale and will not be industrialized” (Linares et al, 2004 p.128) was the driving force for the blockade. After several failures of negotiations with the government about 1000 Aymara community representatives led by the former head executive of the CSUTCB, Felipe Quispe, together with students and transport workers entered a hunger strike (Hylton et al, 2007 p.111). Different road blockades were set up in whole of the country by different unions and communities. A mass mobilization led by the “*Coordinadora* for the Defence and Recuperation of Gas” (Ibid p.112) and the MAS was led out on the 19th of September, where more than 70.000 people were set in motion to protest in La Paz and Cochabamba (the fourth biggest town in Bolivia) against the export of gas to Chile. A week after the first uprising one main road to La Paz was blocked. The police and military force became involved by the conduct of the government with a violent turn out. One village was completely destroyed leaving several civilians killed (Linares et al, 2004 p.128-129). In response to the killings COB called a general strike on September 30. By this stage most sectors of the labour force was involved such as coca-farmers, peasants, butchers, transport workers and so on.

³ El Alto is the fastest growing city in the country and is one of the centres of the Aymara populace.

The protest kept on growing and the blockades got more and more large-scaled. One of the demands of the masses was the resignation of the ruling president, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada. Other claims that arose out of the social movements were those that were later known as the so-called *October Agenda* with demands such as “nationalization”, “agrarian revolution” and convocation of the assembly (Hylton et al, 2007 p.144).

At the end of the month 25.000 workers from the service industry had been organized in a strike and three days later two other strikes were given notice in different sectors. In mid October all the zones in and leading to La Paz were blocked. The hunger strike had turned into a road blockade with very clear political watchwords and the road blockade had gradually turned into a general strike in the cities of El Alto, La Paz, Cochabamba, Oruro, Potosi and some parts of Chuquisaca (Linera et al, 2004 p.129). It is worth mentioning that these cities are all of very great importance to the economic infrastructure of the country. The government kept on setting the military and police forces on the protesters injuring even more people. Uncounted demonstrators had entered El Alto from different cities.

On the 16th of October train cars were pushed down the bridge on the highway that unifies La Paz and El Alto (Hylton et al, 2007 p.115). The political and economic blockade was in this stage fundamentally absolute. The middle class in La Paz had adopted the wave of protests and there was very little support left for Sánchez de Lozada.

On the 17th of October the president was forced to resign and fled the country to the United States of America where he is until this day living legally and the power was assumed by his Vice-President, Carlos Mesa.

4.2 The interregnum stage

The Vice-president had several tasks to fulfil most importantly the October agenda. The government refused to make a nationalization of hydrocarbons since it would “shut the door on future foreign investment” (Hylton et al, 2007 p.119). The pressure on Mesa and his government was tense and brought considerable pressure to bear on the government which finally led to a debate on the Hydrocarbons Law in congress. The right wing block did not support this new course of events and started pressuring Mesa from the other side to adjust his politics to their interests. The “Pact for Unity”⁴ (Harnecker, 2008 p.69), which is a pact that had been created for coordination and information of the Indigenous organizations, organized similar to the Gas War several strikes shutting down almost all departments and most cities of the country. Mesa announced his intention to call elections before his term ended since he didn’t know how to solve

⁴ The Pact for Unity has its main principle in solidarity that means that they work in the defence of the Indigenous people whether it is the peasant movement, the women’s movement etc. (Harnecker, 2008 p.69).

the political situation. In May and June of 2005 similar sectors as the ones in the strikes in 2003 started protesting and blocking in La Paz. Within few days the city had been blocked and the movement was once again spread to other parts of the country. Half a million protesters poured down from El Alto into La Paz on June 6th where they were accompanied by different groups. Many of the protesters wanted to see a change in the handling of the hydrocarbons since the profits were unevenly distributed. Unlike the Gas War there was hardly any police brutality towards the protesters and no one was killed. La Paz was shut down for two weeks, seven gas fields were occupied, almost 100 hunger strikes took place and Mesa offered his resignation (Hylton et al, 2007 p.125).

4.3 Presidency of Evo Morales

Evo Morales and MAS won the presidential elections with by far the best results on 18 December 2005, 53,7% of the votes in a total participation of 84,5 % (National Electoral Court 2009). This was epoch-making for the history of Bolivia, the political participation had never been this high. A new terminology for the work of the party was introduced, namely under the name “process of change” (CSUTCB, 2008 p.14).

His first assignment during the process of change was to implement the October Agenda. On May 1, 2006, the government announced a nationalization of the hydrocarbons sector and also of the “state” (Svampa, 2007 p.262), renewing the contracts with hydrocarbons companies. It is important to stress that the idea of what exactly is meant by nationalization is a varying question depending on ideology. The precise measures that were taken under this nationalization were an obligation for the foreign companies to pay 82 percent of their revenues to the state (YPFB – Decreto Supremo 28701).

A new constitution was approved in a referendum with high outcome of support in January 2009 (NE - 2009), a constitution that for a long time had been postponed by the opposition. Among the most distinct elements in the constitution are the promises to increase the rights of the women and the Indigenous population, making the work to implement the reforms the main work for the party and the social movements today (Constitution 2009).

Morales has faced many obstacles since he became the president of Bolivia. He has had to cope with the opposition foremost in the constitutional assembly where they have put ultimatums and hurdles to prevent the shaping of a new constitution (Hylton et al, 2007 p.139). But not only his period as president has been full of conflicts, also in the years before the winning election have been characterized by difficulties. In the year 2002 Evo Morales, who during this time was a member of congress, was expelled from the parliament for his comments on a conflict in a coca-region (Albó, 2008 p.59). There were many conjectures saying that this had been a work of the United States pushing their work on eradication of coca further. The U.S. ambassador put an ultimatum later that year that the coca

production of Bolivia would be abolished or the United States would end all their collaborations (Ibid).

Morales has a past in the coca farming union and he has from the very beginning of his leadership in the coca growers union put a lot of emphasis on his Indigenous identity which can be traced in many of his speeches where he refers to Indigenous ancestors and their struggles (Hylton et al, 2007 p.133). One important aspect in the Andean cosmovision is the events of “Pachakuti”⁵ which is an interval of more or less 500 years. Another is the phrase Pacha Mama which refers to mother earth. These are examples of terms used by Evo Morales. (Interview Pedro Quispe).

Evo Morales was reelected in December 6 2009 with 64% of the votes (CNE - 2009).

⁵ Around the year 1500 the forth Pachakuti took place in a time of conflict and around the year 2000 the time of the fifth Pachakuti had entered, characterized by peace and partnership. The Pachakuti-cycle is a key element in the Andean cosmovision and is described as a movement without a beginning or an end which brings about a drastic change every 500 years. There have been comments saying that the presidency of Evo Morales is a Pachakuti itself, but this is dismissed by Quispe who adds that one single person doesn't make up for a Pachakuti (Interview Pedro Quispe).

5 Analysis according to the ideal type

In the Gas War conflicts the mass strike was composed among other things by road blockades. It would be wrong not to give these road blockades any substantial importance and only search for cases of factory strikes (which usually is the prototype of a mass strike)⁶. The very essence of the mass strike is, as mentioned above in the chapter 3.1.2, its effect on the social production when “the proletariat can put pressure on the state or the corporate machinery” (Frölich, 1972 p.135). These were the exact terms of the road blockades. Its purpose was to get a hold of the city of La Paz and bring the economy to a shortage, where merchandise neither could pour in nor out of the city. Of all the inhabitants in the country it was mainly the inhabitants of La Paz who were affected economically e.g. from high prices on staple food. In the case of a factory strike it is principally the employer who is disadvantage economically. In the events of the Gas War most of the protesters did not come from factories and it was not their employers whom they wished to punish financially in the first place but the whole political Establishment. This could make up for a political and an economic strike since the message of the common discontent together with the economic damage was the purpose of the opposition. By closing roads between La Paz and other cities of economic importance, the protesters could put pressure on the owners of capital, who were going through tremendous losses, and also on the government. Not only did the blockades prevent goods and services from moving unhindered in the country, the traffic route by air was also affected since the second main airport of the country is situated in El Alto. Also the fact that there were several hunger strikes going on at the same time is of importance since that meant that no one could go to their respective jobs and the production was consequently stopped (Harnecker, 2008 p.71).

In the ideal type of Rosa Luxemburg there are some main variables describing the mass strike. One of those is the idea of spontaneity. The blockades and mass strikes during the Gas War were in some degree a result of the general strike that was announced by the COB and also the hunger strike instructed by the CSUTCB. According to Hylton et al neither Evo Morales nor Felipe Quispe were in the lead of the actions in La Paz, El Alto or on a national level for that case. In the days of October “heterogeneous popular forces organized themselves [...] and took action in their own spheres without waiting for orders from political party, trade-union, or other established leaders” (Hylton et al, 2007 p.114-115). The strikes had partly taken the shape of a spontaneous movement. From one day to the other new forms

⁶ In classic Marxist theory Socialism grows out of the industrialization and it is therefore an ideology that emerges out of the industrial modernization of a country (Svampa, 2007 p.150).

of blockades had been arranged like the blockade of the road between El Alto and La Paz blocked by train cars. It is however wrongful to only call the strikes spontaneous since many of the protesters came from different organizations that had an experience of organizing in these types of events. “Popular power” and “individual consciousness” was something that had been brought to this sphere of the masses (Ibid p.154). Further on it can be said that the different forms of strikes during the Gas War also were adapted after each severe attack from the police and the military. Therefore it is problematic to call the strikes spontaneous or planned for that fact since they were a mixture of them both. The last aspect should be put into context with another variable in the ideal type, namely the changing nature of the mass strike.

The discontent towards the ruling sphere of Bolivia was something that had lived for years and decades among the majority of the population. The Indigenous populace had gone through revolts with the same type of measures in the 18th century with freedom fighters such as Túpac Katari and Bartolina Sisa. These two led the Indigenous uprisings against the colonial authorities and laid siege on La Paz with an army said to be tens of thousands (Klein, 1982 p.94). The Bolivian history shows many other cases of similar types of strikes and blockades, even though they didn’t call them de facto a strike. In this sense the mass strike had a “decade long period of class struggle” which now occurred out of “some certain strong political reasons” according to the causes of the mass strike mentioned by Luxemburg (see chapter 4.1.1). And these strong reasons were also among other things the breeding ground for the October Agenda.

But also the conflict that was later named the Water War in the year 2000 in Cochabamba was of essential importance to the Gas War. In the first conflict the masses mobilized under one watchword, something that had not been the case for a very long time. It hardly mattered which social movement one came from, almost all Indigenous and many others were against the privatization of the water and together they were able to revoke the contract on water with the multinational corporation and change the law which resembled a monopoly on the works on water. The conducts of these events were similar to the tactics used in the Gas War three years later. So the mass strike did not only have its origin in a decade long class struggle but in a conflict just a couple years in the past.

Just as Luxemburg brings out the mass strike is the peak of smaller strikes. This can without a doubt be agreed upon in the case of Bolivia. There were different hunger strikes as well as blockades and strikes in different job sectors that started the whole strike situation. Later as the COB declared for a general strike this came naturally as the smaller strikes had already put the protests in motion.

The last aspect that remains unsolved is the idea that the revolution creates political and economic struggles that lead to the mass strike. This part can really be debated upon since it assumes that the revolution comes before the mass strike. The interesting part in Luxemburg’s illustration is that she never mentions how many revolutions that can occur after each other in a row. She talks about a *revolutionary process* and *social revolution* but there are never any indications on a time line.

However the question of defining the process in Bolivia as a revolution or not is a complex matter which will be analysed more thorough in the next following.

When Sánchez de Lozada resigned there was a golden opportunity for MAS to take the power. In the beginning they used Mesa to see if he would benefit the movement, but also to gain more time themselves (Hylton et al, 2007 p.118). The elections of 2005 hence didn't come as a surprise to the MAS since they had strategically waited to be elected constitutionally to the government seat. According to Luxemburg one important aspect concerning the revolution is that one cannot rush into decisions and the movement can't be pushed forward if it isn't ready (see chapter 4.1.2). This has been the very attitude in the MAS-lead and many radicals have therefore criticized the party for not working more persistent.

Numerous scholars have tried to define MAS and its content. Often it has been called a "Socialist party" but also this needs to be looked into. When MAS won the elections in 2005 they lead a completely different politics than the former liberal ones. MAS introduced a new constitution that had been brought up by the original people of Bolivia. New institutions were established for example subsidy authorities working to implement "Juana Azurduy de Padilla" (Interview Leonida Zurita) which is a subsidy to reduce maternal-child mortality. The subsidies are being implemented not only by state institutions but also by the different social movements such as the CSUTCB.

Also the works of nationalization is a matter open to discussion. According to the director of the stately owned gas company YPFB the nationalization of gas in 2006 is nothing different from the case in Norway where foreign companies pay taxes on their revenues making the oil part of Norway (Latinamerika.nu 2009-09-30). There has never been as much of debate in that case whereas in Bolivia where the foreign companies had "benefited from the lowest production and exploration costs in the world" (Hylton et al, 2007 p.102). The nationalization had become a peculiar procedure to many synonymous to a revolution when it easily could be defined as a work of reform.

Some would call the presidency of the first Indigenous leader Evo Morales a revolution since it transposes values and structures within the population and society. By seeing an Indigenous leader giving orders and speeches a new vision of the width of capacity within each individual is born, particularly amongst the Indigenous communities.

"With Evo came an *I can* which didn't exist before. This element is very important since many Indigenous had walked with their head down for years and now all of a sudden felt dignity, that they were able, confident. This is reform or call it revolution... In a typical Marxist ideology the presidency of Evo is not a revolution since the dominant force hasn't been broken." (Interview Pablo Mamani)

Evo Morales proclaimed himself that the elections in 2005 had shown to be a "democratic revolution, a cultural revolution" (Hylton et al, 2007 p.127). One of the senators of MAS, Santos Ramírez, explains this further saying that they call it a revolution because they've come to change the political, economic, cultural and

social structures of the Bolivian state and that it is a democratic revolution since they have accepted the rules of democracy and it is also a cultural revolution because this process is an Indigenous peasant movement (Harnecker, 2008 p.179-180).

But in some ways the MAS has followed old structures and can also be seen as “the only legitimate son of the neoliberal system” (Interview Adolfo Mendoza). According to Mendoza there is a tension within the MAS which partly can be explained by the fact that it was born in the liberal arrangement and therein has its trace. When talking about breaking loose from the past there is a dilemma since the very form of getting elected was a “product of the liberal structures, so in this process of change the fruit of the liberal thoughts is borne into the present” (Ibid).

Recalling the ideal type of Rosa Luxemburg she says that “the scientific socialism sees the revolution foremost as a profound inner overturn of the social class relations” (Luxemburg, 1983 [1] p.49). It is crucial to mention that there have been different types of criticism concerning the western view on Socialism among other things since it only refers to class and hardly ever to ethnicity. Álvaro García Linera who is the Vice-president of Bolivia, but who also is an eminent sociologist in the country, puts a light on this matter when talking about *Indianism* (Svampa, 2007 p.153) in the case of Bolivia rather than only on a standard Marxism. He places MAS as a moderate type in the current strategy of power within the Indianism, which is the stream that finally has brought the peasants from the grass roots unions to the government (Ibid p.166-167). According to Linera it is the exact combination of Indianism and Marxism that function as an emancipating conception in the Bolivian society (Ibid p.169).

Hylton and Thomson speak of Pachakuti that has brought the neoliberal model to a collapse in the case of Bolivia (Hylton et al, 2007 p.145). They also speak of a revolution mentioning how Sánchez de Lozada first was forced to resign, then the presidency of Evo Morales followed by nationalization and a new constitution. Further they indicate that the “refusal to open the constitutional assembly to the full spectrum of voices [...] began the effective closure of the revolutionary process” (Ibid p.141).

When looking at the presented facts one is struck by how much the Bolivian context differs from the ideal type of Rosa Luxemburg. It’s impossible to define the Bolivian history with mere Western tools to the extent that one can’t even say if MAS should be classified as a Socialist or a Social Democratic party. In fact MAS isn’t even a party in the traditional meaning since it is a political instrument for the sovereignty of people. Therefore there is no homogenous discourse within the MAS since it is a movement itself and at the same time an instrument for the movement (Harnecker et al, 2008 p.216).

It is further difficult to trace a visible interaction between governmental actions and the social movements’ actions in the MAS since the actors all come from the same social group (Monasterios et al, 2007 p.109). Evo Morales is on one hand the president of the country and on the other hand leader of the federation of coca unions (Albó, 2008 p.87). But he is not the only one with “double positions”, Isaac Avalos and Leonida Zurita who both are executive

secretaries for the CSUTCB (CNMCIQB “BS”) are also the senators for MAS in different departments, Julio Salazar who is a leader for the 6 Federations of coca growers of the Cochabambino tropical is also senator and Julia Ramos leader for the CSUTCB is also minister for Rural and Land development (Interview Vladimir Arancibia). The list can obviously be made long; this shows again the very density of the Bolivian political system.

“Today’s Bolivia resembles one day a revolution, the other day a reform and then back and forth again. This is the dynamics that makes Bolivia so varying. If this movement has been able to reverse a 500 year old oppression in only 5 years, then how can we keep talking about revolution in all its traditional meanings?” (Interview Pablo Mamani).

Just as Mamani emphasizes the case of Bolivia is too complex to put in one model only. And maybe so is the case in every country, in every social context. Hylton and Thomson make a very interesting point saying that revolution itself and the “*meaning* of revolution changes over time as part of a dynamic” (Hylton et al, 2007 p.30). What truly is meant by revolution in the ideas of Rosa Luxemburg and what the case of Bolivia should be called is thus a question that difficultly is put into words.

6 Summarising conclusions

One of the main aspects in the ideal type of Luxemburg regarding the mass strike is the idea of spontaneity. In the previous chapter I've tried to show that the strikes and blockades weren't completely spontaneous since a huge number of the protesters came from different organizations where they had been taught how to act in cases of conflicts. The feature of economic and political struggle is better suitable in this case since the country was economically affected by the blockades and hunger, industry and market strikes. Further talking about a discontent over a longer period of time resulting in a long phase of class struggle seems also to fit in the Bolivian case with examples from only a couple of years back and also examples going back for almost 200 years. It is however the idea of revolution that seems to be the hard nut to crack.

The above analysis has shown that it is problematic when one wishes to apply different occurrences in an already fix idea. To call the Gas War a mass strike one must assume that the revolution was already started and that it thus was the revolution that created the mass strike. The difficulty in analysing the Gas War as a revolution lies in the conception when one wishes to look at it as an isolated event with one outcome only, namely the overthrow of the president. But this would be a very unjust description of the happenings since the conflict didn't end with the resignation of Sánchez de Lozada, just the same way the French revolution isn't associated with the fall of the monarchy only. The French revolution was an almost ten year period of struggle and its final result that is to say the political overthrow and the social changes that occurred as its result is what is known today as the French revolution (NE - 2009). The same should hence be applied to Bolivia and the events of the Gas War should be analyzed in a wider perspective. There are studies that attach great importance to the Water War in Cochabamba as the starting shot for the revolutionary struggle e.g. Hylton and Thomson. Regardless of where one sets the start of the revolutionary movement it is yet important not to necessarily put an end for it since the work of putting a reform into effect still is in progress in Bolivia.

The aim of the ideal analysis is not to match the chosen case to the ideal but rather to say something about the character of the ideal type. And in this it is important to say something about the historic context (Beckman, 2005 p.15).

As mentioned in the introduction Rosa Luxemburg lived during the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Her work is marked by the political events of her time such as the Russian revolution and the First World War. It was in this context that she drafted her political writings that have been used in the ideal type in this thesis. It is therefore very important to take this under consideration when evaluating the Bolivian case from this dimension. The conclusion above has

shown that the Bolivian case has some similarities to the ideal type at a first glance but in a deeper outlook one can tell that it is distant from the ideal. It is however important not to reject the ideas of Luxemburg due to the difference in the case study since her ideas function as a very fruitful tool in the discussion on what makes up for the revolution and especially the character of a mass strike.

Adolfo Mendoza, who is a docent in Political science in Cochabamba, told me that one would fail if one would try to analyze Bolivia with Western spectacles only. This is a very wise advice that I've taken in and sought to heed in this thesis.

It is said that history is always written by the winners and at a later time. It will be interesting to see how "history" will describe the events of the Gas War and its repercussions. Hylton and Thomson have already written their view on this topic. They drive a very consequent line in their book with the purpose of describing the events that brought Evo Morales to the power as a revolution and rejecting the outlook saying that the victory of MAS was the actual revolutionary event.

"In our own historical view, the election of Evo Morales did not bring about a revolution. It was a revolution that brought about the government of Evo Morales." (Hylton et al, 2007 p.17)

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Lucio Colque, program engineer of CSUTCB, 2009-05-15 Bolivia, La Paz

Luisiano Sanchez, press secretary of CSUTCB in Cochabamba, 2009-06-10 Bolivia, Cochabamba

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Pedro Quispe, former sub-leader of CSUTCB, today positioned in FEDECOR (Federación Departamental Cochabambina de Regantes), 2009-06-17 Bolivia, Cochabamba

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