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**The (Im) Possible Revolution:
Ideology, Framing and Historical Events in the Making of the Bolivian
Popular Assembly of 1971**

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Popular Assembly of 1971**

by

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Dedication

A mis padres

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Abstract

The (Im) Possible Revolution: Ideology, Framing and Historical Events in the Making of the Bolivian Popular Assembly of 1971

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During June and July of 1971, representatives of Bolivian union and left-wing political organizations from across the nation gathered in the Legislative Palace in La Paz with the objective of installing the Popular Assembly. In the absence of a democratically elected Congress the newly formed power organ of the proletariat attempted to formulate a strategy that would lead the country towards socialism. President Gen. Juan José Torres, a member of progressive sectors of the army that followed a national-popular agenda, supported the Assembly in a moment of high political instability amidst permanent threats from conservative factions of the army to seize power. With a majority of representatives from labor organizations and a prominent role of mining workers, the Assembly followed the example of the Russian Revolution of 1917. The 'first soviet of Latin America', as it was called both by supporters and detractors, was the outcome of the particular twenty-five year political trajectory of the labor movement that combined a set of ideological principles and core framing tasks. The Popular Assembly came to a sudden

end in 1971 when Gen. Torres' presidency was cut short by a coup that brought a conservative faction of the military to power. Though it was never able to achieve its main political objectives, the case of an abortive social revolution allows a better understanding of the roles of ideology, collective action frames and historical events in explaining the outcomes of social revolutions and the actions of social movements.

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INTRODUCTION

On May 1, 1971, more than 50,000 Bolivian workers gathered for a demonstration in the center of La Paz, the seat of the national government, in order to pay homage to the victims of the Chicago Haymarket massacre of 1886, as part of the annual Labor Day commemorations. Considered to be one of the most important popular demonstrations by Bolivia workers during the Republican era (Dunkerley, 1984), the honoring of the “Chicago martyrs” served as the setting for the installation of the Popular Assembly – the power organ of the proletariat that would lead the country towards Socialism. In the first and preliminary session, workers decided that since June 22, 1971 two hundred and eighteen delegates from proletarian, middle class, and peasantry organizations would debate the Assembly’s potential characteristics, objectives, and definite actions. In a similar fashion to the Russian Revolution of 1917 and following the principles of the *Thesis of Pulacayo* (1946) and the *Socialist Thesis* of the Bolivian Workers Central (*Central Obrera Boliviana – COB*) (1970), the labor movement framed the political context as one of *duality of powers* which represented a transitional moment towards the objective of becoming the second socialist state in Latin America after Cuba.

From a short-term perspective, the Popular Assembly was the capstone of a two-year period known as *democratic opening* wherein the reformist government of President Juan José Torres sought to restore the civil liberties of left-wing political parties and labor unions suppressed by the succession of military governments that had ruled the country since 1964 (Cajías, 2001; Dunkerley, 1984 ; Escóbar, 1984; Lora, 1972; Thomas, 2001; Zavaleta M., 1987). From a long-term perspective, the factors that shaped it can be traced back over a twenty-five year trajectory of worker mobilizations in the country. The

creation of the Mining Workers National Federation in 1944, and its *Thesis of Pulacayo*, from 1946, defined much of the actions of the strongest faction of the Bolivian proletariat. In the years to follow, historical events such as the National Revolution of 1952, the end of the workers' alliance with the Nationalist Revolutionary Movement (*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* - MNR) in 1962, and the repressive regime of Gen. René Barrientos Ortuño against the proletariat and leftwing forces beginning in 1964, all played important roles in determining the workers' decision to lead the country towards Socialism. Especially after the defeat of the Che Guevara armed guerrillas in 1967, an increasing *anti-imperialist* sentiment against the United States coalesced with an international context prone to socialism in neighboring countries and both served as justifications for *imposing* the labor movement's objectives. However, the final armed defeat of the Popular Assembly in hands of conservative factions of the army fueled by support from the United States and Brazil, marked the end of the set of ideological principles that delineated an unfinished revolutionary process *in the making* (Cajías, 2001).

Most of the literature on the Popular Assembly has focused on the factors that determined the defeat of both Torres' government and the proletarian project, focusing on the lack of armament for the proletariat, a wrong definition of the *fundamental contradiction* by social forces from the left, and whether the proletarian power organ raised *duality of powers* or not (Escóbar, 1984; Gallardo L., 1972; Knudson, 1974; Lora, 1972; Strengers, 1991; Zavaleta M., 1987). At the end, and only with few exceptions (Cajías, 2001; Thomas, 2001), the Popular Assembly has remained as a given and no further analysis about the structural, ideological and historical causes that brought it to life were examined. The lack of analysis of this matter has determined the absence of a response to why and how workers decided to lead the country towards socialism through

establishing the “first *soviet* of Latin America” (El Diario, June 19, 1971 p.1) and not through the means of an armed guerrilla foci as in Cuba, or through democratic elections, when both possibilities guided the repertoire of action of social mobilization in the country and in the region at that moment in time. Instead, workers decided to base their actions on the model of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the ideological principles of the *Thesis of Pulacayo*, at the same time rejecting ideology of *Revolutionary Nationalism* which marked the steps taken by the Bolivian government after the National Revolution of 1952.

By focusing on the structural, historical and ideological factors that explain the power position that the labor movement achieved in the Bolivian winter of 1971 and the way in which the main actors of the process framed their actions and objectives, this work seeks to respond to two sets of questions. On one hand, it aims to understand how workers formulated the idea of the Popular Assembly, what ideological and historical factors determined their decisions, and what was at stake within and outside the debates of the Popular Assembly. Secondly, this work addresses theoretical debate on the relationship between ideologies, framing processes and frames, and historical events, and their effect on the outcomes of social revolutions and social mobilization.

A point of departure is to define the main organization of the Bolivian proletariat, the Bolivian Workers' Center (*Central Obrera Boliviana* - COB), the main workers' organization since 1952, as a *social movement* whose actions and objectives aimed to achieve wide scale social and political transformation of the country ending in a socialist regime. For more than twenty years the labor movement in Bolivia was immersed in a class struggle that placed the COB first as an ally of the middle classes during the ten years that followed the National Revolution of 1952, and later as a political leadership that through resistance and opposition to the army and the *bourgeoisie* would at some

point lead the country towards socialism. Throughout this process and due to disagreements with state policies that affected workers, the labor movement shifted its support from the ideology of *Revolutionary Nationalism* towards a recovery of the *Socialist* principles established in the *Thesis of Pulacayo*, which outlined the strategy of the Bolivian working class struggle during the following decades. The distinguishing feature of the Popular Assembly of 1971 was that for the first time in history, and taking advantage of the *democratic opening* period of 1969-71, the Bolivian labor movement assumed both ideologically and in practice a role aimed to manage the nation. Whether they had the capacity to undertake these tasks or not is part of a separate debate, but the process definitely implied an attempt to shift the course of the nation towards a socialist regime by the direct action of the proletariat from a power position.

This process resembled the Russian Revolution of 1917 not only in terms of the creation of a power institution separate from the state, but also in the attempt to generate *social-revolutionary outcomes*. (Skocpol, 1979) However, the process of the Popular Assembly was not a *successful* case. *Complete* revolutions are only visible when new state organizations, political leaderships and regimes emerge to reestablish national order, consolidate socioeconomic transformations and enhance the country's power and autonomy against international competitors (Skocpol, 1979). How then is the Popular Assembly key to understanding the relationship between ideologies and social revolutions?

The Popular Assembly was never able to achieve the objectives of social and political transformations because of the armed defeat of August of 1971. But the idea of a power organ run primarily representatives from the labor movement, the subsequent plans to create a parallel army to the military, the joint management of the state mining company (*Corporación Minera de Bolivia - COMIBOL*), and the installation of popular

tribunals to judge crimes committed against the state and workers, was certainly present. In fact, Bolivian workers established the project following a ‘blueprint’ which combined both the experience of the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the *Thesis of Pulacayo* and reached a basic stage wherein they began debating the shape of the state and the institutions they desired. Thus, contrary to the argument that ideologies do not define the outcomes of social revolutions (Skocpol, 1979), and despite the final defeat of workers, this thesis demonstrates that the question of the role of ideologies in the outcomes of social revolutions should remain open because of the impossibility of completely discarding its influence (Sewell, 1985; Skocpol, 1985).

From this point of view, this study seeks to analyze the short-lived Bolivian Popular Assembly of 1971 in terms of the relationship among the concepts of *ideology* and *framing* and the effects of long and short-term *historical events* and social and political structural transformations of social revolutions and social mobilization. It argues that the emergence and development of the Popular Assembly can only be explained via an analytical framework that combines these concepts and pays attention to their impact on the attempts by the labor movement to produce social and political *structural transformations*, despite the outcome of an *abortive social revolution*. In order to understand *ideologies* and *framing* and their role in *social revolutions* and *social movements* it is also necessary to historicize them (Skocpol, 1985) linking them with the way in which political actors *framed* their strategies, tactics and actions (Benford & Snow, 2000; Oliver & Johnston, 2000) depending on specific contexts and *historical events* (Sewell, 1996). The contours of the process, then, make a contribution to the sociological debates around the relationships between *ideology* and *social revolutions* (Sewell, 1985; Skocpol, 1979, 1985); *framing* and *ideology* in social movements

(Benford & Snow, 2000; Oliver & Johnston, 2000; Snow & Benford, 2000); and *historical events* and *structural transformations*. (Sewell, 1996)

A first relevant distinction involves *collective action frames* and *framing processes* (Benford & Snow, 2000; Oliver & Johnston, 2000). Within social movements literature, Benford and Snow, refer to *framing* as an “active, processual phenomenon that incorporates agency and contention at the level of reality construction in the struggle over the production of mobilizing and countermobilizing ideas and meanings.” (Benford & Snow, 2000) *Collective action frames*, the product of this process, involve a dimension of negotiation of shared meaning which inspires and legitimizes the activities and campaigns of a *social movement organization*. In this interactive process three *core framing tasks* determine the characteristics of the negotiation and the actions the social movement organization will undertake. They are: diagnosis framing, prognosis framing and motivational framing (Benford & Snow, 2000). In short, these tasks involve the identification of grievances and – in most cases – the recognition of victims and unjust authorities, the articulation of a proposed solution for those grievances, and the actions of the movement while also appropriating vocabularies of motifs. (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 614).

A second distinction refers to *ideologies* and *master frames* in their relation to *collective action frames* (Benford & Snow, 2000; Oliver & Johnston, 2000). For Benford and Snow, some collective action frames can become *master frames* depending on their scope; meaning that some frames are overarching enough to include many other movements, while others are specific only to one social movement organization (Benford & Snow, 2000, p. 619). Debate emerges in the distinction between *master frames* and *ideologies*. Oliver and Johnston (2000) argue that sometimes when authors think they are referring to master frames they are actually referring to ideologies, as only the latter

includes social theory and normative and value systems. In this sense, frames, and among them master frames, only represent a “snapshot” of a specific moment in time, while ideologies are fairly broad, coherent and durable sets of beliefs that affect everyday life (Benford & Snow, 2000). For this reasons, ideologies operate as both constraint and resource for frames to develop or sometimes even contest those same ideologies (Benford & Snow, 2000).

By looking at secondary sources that cover the actions and strategies of the labor movement from 1946 to 1971, and by focusing on 4,000 news reports and articles from two of the most important newspapers of the period (*Presencia* and *El Diario*) covering the months of May through August of 1971, an ideologies and framing approach which is useful to understanding the process through which the Popular Assembly developed. Drawing on the literature about the labor movement for the period 1946-1971 this work demonstrates the relevance that the *Thesis of Pulacayo* and historical events had to the actions and framing processes of the labor movement. The news and articles of the four month-period from the installation of the Assembly until Torres was overthrown and the labor movement defeated, serve to de-gloss the internal and external debates that surrounded the installation of the Popular Assembly. They follow the day-to-day debates of different sectors of Bolivian society in general, and the labor movement and political parties from the left in particular, in relation to the political moment that the country was living. Emphasis was placed on those articles and news that specifically addressed the debates around the Popular Assembly and the role that the political actors played in shaping the actions of the labor movement. The analysis mainly surrounds the debates of workers and political parties and organizations that supported the installation of the Popular Assembly, while also keeping track of social mobilizations in general, how

Torres' government sought to establish greater leverage in the process, and how opposing forces raised their concerns.

This work is organized in five chapters, the first of which deals with the historical, political and social factors that prompted the emergence of the Popular Assembly in the twenty five-year period that followed the elaboration of the Thesis of Pulacayo. The second chapter explains four master frames: *Sexenio*, *Revolutionary Nationalism*, *Restoration and Democratic Opening*, that workers developed over the course of those years as an outcome of specific circumstances. It places particular emphasis on the Socialist Thesis of 1970 as it synthesized the way in which workers – and the Left – understood their trajectory and applied it to the context of the Popular Assembly. Chapter 3 deals specifically with the Popular Assembly, its composition, objectives and development through the analysis of debates informed by the frames of armed defense and social mobilization, justice, participation of workers in the state apparatus, class independence and anti-imperialism. In Chapter 4, discussion touches on why workers rejected the alternatives of joint management of the government (*co-gobierno*) with Torres and democratic elections, as well as an explanation of why the alternative of a guerrilla foci was not considered. At the end, it presents a discussion of the debates around the *fundamental contradiction* and *duality of powers* that helped workers legitimize the Popular Assembly on ideological grounds. Chapter five offers the final conclusions on the relevance of the case of the Popular Assembly, an abortive social revolution, to understand the relationship between ideology and historical events and the way in which frames are constructed to shape the outcomes of both social mobilization and social revolutions.

CHAPTER I: Historical, political and ideological reasons for the Popular Assembly

The emergence of the Popular Assembly, the political power organ of the Bolivian proletariat installed in mid-1971 during the government of progressive Gen. Juan José Torres, was a response to a complex fabric of ideological, structural and temporal factors on the local and international level. Central to this process were the particular trajectory of the labor movement, mainly the miners, since the creation of the Mining Workers Union Federation of Bolivia (*Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia - FSTMB*) in 1944 and the elaboration of *Thesis of Pulacayo* in 1946. Several processes shaped the actions, alliances and ruptures established by the COB with different governments that raised into power after the revolution of 1952 and other political forces. Their actions were also informed by the failure of the *armed guerrillas* of Che Guevara in 1967 and Teoponte in 1970 and the moment of *democratic opening* within a succession of progressive regimes from the military, all within a context marked by the Cold War which set the opposition between capitalism and socialism.

THE *THESIS OF PULACAYO* AND THE OUTCOMES OF THE NATIONAL REVOLUTION

Signed in the mining town of the same name in the department of Potosí, the *Thesis of Pulacayo* was developed in November 1946 and henceforth defined the actions of the Bolivian working class in the years to come. According to specific contexts it became one of the axes of the *class positions* that the labor movement would assume in front of the successive governments that ruled the country from 1946 to 1971. The document came to light a few months after the overthrow and assassination of then President Major Gualberto Villarroel, in July. It represented the most coherent response of the proletariat to the political context of the period. Villarroel and the group of

reformist officers that belonged to *Razón de Patria* (RADEPA) initiated major political and social reforms during his administration and established a political alliance with the MNR and the trotskyte leaning Revolutionary Worker Party (*Partido Obrero Revolucionario* - POR), with a strong presence in the mines. With the support of railway workers and a close relationship with Juan Lechin, one of the most important mining union leaders, Villarroel's government supported the creation of the FSTMB in 1944 and encouraged more than 60,000 workers to unionize (Klein, 1982). Also, during his government, the Indigenal Congress of 1945 took place with the presence of over a thousand *kurakas*¹. Among other resolutions the congress promoted the enactment of a decree to end *pongueaje*² on the *haciendas* (Klein, 1982). The *traditional parties* saw this process as a threat to the interests of the mining and agricultural oligarchy, and did not tolerate the changes proposed. Through an alliance with the Revolutionary Left Party (*Partido de Izquierda Revolucionaria* - PIR) and other national parties from the left, like the POR which shifted its initial support, who overthrew Villarroel and brought Enrique Herzog to power, who ruled the country until 1951.

In this context, and through the *Thesis of Pulacayo*, a radical document that embodied the political strategy of the proletariat, workers launched a class struggle against fascism, imperialism and international capitalism, but mainly against the big mining companies (FSTMB, 1946). They proposed the creation of a *Central Obrera* as a workers' organization that would unite and represent all workers in the country thereby avoiding the influence that political parties had on the federations of the Workers Union Confederation of Bolivia (*Confederación Sindical de Trabajadores de Bolivia* - CSTB). The dominance of the Democratic Alliance (*Alianza Democrática*) coalition in the six-

¹ Indigenous leaders

² Unpaid work and existing easement on Bolivian estates prior to the National Revolution of 1952

year period (*sexenio*) between Villarroel's fall and the National Revolution of 1952 meant the proletariat could not win a majority of votes through democratic elections. In response to this context, workers strategized a block that aimed to establish alliances with the peasantry, artisans and other sectors of the petty bourgeoisie, in order to gain a higher level of representation in the parliament, something they would not otherwise achieve. These steps were considered a step towards the proletarian revolution, within the framework of the theory of *permanent revolution*³ raised by Trotsky in 1930 (FSTMB, 1946). Along with a path towards bourgeois democracy, workers proposed a strategy that promoted strikes, the direct occupation of the mines, "the expropriation of expropriators (the oppressive classes)" and cuts in private property. Finally, they called for arming all workers and made demands related to the organization of work in the mines (FSTMB, 1946). However, given the inability of workers to impose themselves politically and because of the shifting power balance of the *sexenio*, the *Thesis of Pulacayo* remained just a document that outlined a strategy of struggle, and workers were unable to put their strategy into action.

During the years of the *sexenio* the *Rosca*⁴ government tried to systematically annihilate the FSTMB and the labor movement in general. In 1947, a second massacre of miners took place in Catavi reviving the memory of the massacre in the same mining town five years earlier, causing workers to increasingly reject the new government (Klein, 1982). As a result of the government's violent actions, both the proletariat and the MNR increased their power through the consolidation of unionized organizations on one

³ The thesis of the permanent revolution suggests that in colonial and semi-colonial countries the dictatorship of the proletariat is the only path to achieve national liberation and the democratic goals of the proletariat and the peasantry. The alliance of these two forces is essential in fighting against what Trotsky termed as national liberal bourgeoisie, the class enemy of workers and peasants. The transformation of bourgeois property rights (private property) consolidates the transition from a bourgeois democratic revolution towards a socialist one, granting it the status of permanent (Trotsky, 1930).

⁴ State and politic representatives that had links with the mining oligarchy and responded to their interests

side, and by receiving support from middle classes sectors that rejected the violence on the other. In 1950 La Paz industry workers rose against Herzog's government while demonstrating the consolidation of a powerful labor movement that at this point in time had already started to gain presence in urban areas. In May 1951 the MNR won democratic elections called by Mamerto Urriolagoitia, president after Herzog. However, in a last attempt to stop the new party's promotion into power, Urriolagoitia resigned and handed over power to General Hugo Ballivián from the army's *Estado Mayor* of the army, successfully preventing the MNR from gaining power by democratic means at a point when it had already gained support from virtually the entire organized labor movement. The party started an urban *armed uprising* in April 1952 which led to a successful power seizure, installing Víctor Paz Estenssoro as new president of the country. The army and the police were completely dismantled by the action of armed militias of workers, peasants and the middle class, which constituted the coercive force of the new government.

The MNR began the period of the National Revolution with support from these actors and with no opposition of any kind. The traditional political parties and the state's repressive apparatus were completely destroyed and the government took on the task of meeting worker and peasant demands. In principle, the government nationalized the mines of the *tin barons* (Hoschild, Aramayo and Patino) and in October of 1952 created the Mining Corporation of Bolivia (*Corporación Minera de Bolivia* - COMIBOL). Later on, it supported the creation of the COB, nominated Juan Lechín, then General Secretary of the FSTMB, as Minister of Mines and Petroleum, and gave the workers organization the Ministry of Rural Affairs. In 1953 the MNR applied a massive land reform process in the west of the country abolishing landlordism and all forms of servitude, giving titles to agricultural unions, and prohibiting the individual sale of land.

Outside Bolivia, the role of workers in the government raised concerns, primarily in the United States. In addition to the creation of COMIBOL and the government's support to the COB, workers won two out of seven positions in the state mining company which by then controlled two thirds of the mining production in the country. Additionally, workers gained veto right in the company's decisions that affected them in all mines. This determined the beginning of what came to be known as workers' joint management (*co-gobierno*) in the mines. In the context of the Cold War, these measures added to U.S. government concerns about a possible shift in Bolivia towards communism, leading the government to offer increased financial support if the MNR moved to reduce the COB's power in government.

The MNR faced the dilemma of accepting U.S. demands or keeping the COB participation in power and navigating through a chaotic economic situation. The nationalization of tin mines and the agrarian reform both led to unseen levels of inflation due to problems in mining production, and the government was forced to import food from neighboring countries as national supplies to urban areas declined. Economy was strangling the revolution. In this context, the most conservative wing of the party moved towards the option of accepting U.S. demands and subtly began a process to reduce concessions granted to workers. The sequence of events and measures to curb workers' power (Cajías, 2001) represented the beginning of a breakdown in the relationship between the proletariat and the MNR, defining the political actions of workers in the years to come.

Through the approval of the PL-480 food project, the U.S. provided the country with more than 100 million dollars in financial support for development projects over ten years. Meanwhile, in 1956, the government accepted a program to stabilize the economy that aimed to suspend food subsidies to miners, reduce wage increases, limit public

initiatives and expenditures, and establish a single exchange rate for currencies. It also approved a new oil code which, among other measures, allowed the Gulf Oil Co. to enter the country in 1955. These measures had a high political cost for the MNR as support from workers declined.

Despite the potential that it held for workers, the Revolution became increasingly conservative in the years to come. After an overwhelming victory in the national elections of 1956, MNR's Hernán Siles Zuazo introduced the monetary stabilization program to reduce inflation and decided to strengthen the armed forces, thus countering workers' militias that were permanently threatening the government. The trend against labor movements' interests continued in the following years with the attempt by the MNR to restructure the COB and the FSTMB to gain some control over the organizations. In 1956, the party started the *Triangular Plan* and signed the *Davenport Code*, which negatively affected the working class. The *Triangular Plan* aimed to end workers' participation in COMIBOL, fire them and to reduce their salaries and benefits, while the *Davenport Code* allowed U.S. companies to manage oil and gas reserves in the country. (Dunkerley, 1984) The labor movement disagreed with these measures and translated its frustration into disavowal of the principles of the National Revolution of 1952. After more than five years of struggle to obtain more power in the state apparatus, the COB finally decided to break with the MNR when Juan Lechín – Executive Secretary of the COB – resigned his position as Secretary of Labor in 1962 (Cajías, 2001; Dunkerley, 1984 ; Thomas, 2001). Within a decade, the revolution had become more conservative and workers found themselves increasingly alienated. They renewed their interest on the *Thesis of Pulacayo* and shifted its discourse towards their own project, a socialist revolution that rejected the *revolutionary nationalist* project (Cajías, 2001; Escóbar, 1984; Lora, 1972).

RESTORATION

The political conjuncture of the following years prevented workers from immediately putting their plan into action. In 1964 Paz Estenssoro tried to run for a second continuous term as president, provoking the ire of the now re-consolidated army. In November 1964, General René Barrientos overthrew Paz, named himself president, and designated General Alfredo Ovando as vice-president starting a period known as *Restoration*. Barrientos imposed a hegemony that lasted five years with the objective of annihilating both the potent COB and opposition from left-wing parties, while continuing with the most aggressive economic plans started by the MNR. Civic liberties were removed and a fierce repression against every attempt by workers to restructure the movement was in place. In order to keep the concessions from the agrarian reform stable, the military power promoted and established the Military-Peasant Pact (*Pacto Militar Campesino*) by which it gained support from peasant majorities, who had been an important part of the electoral basis of the MNR, and who now supported Barrientos' Christian Popular Movement (*Movimiento Popular Cristiano – MPC*) favor. After two years in power, Barrientos called general elections, but restricted the participation of the most important left-wing parties. In 1966, Barrientos was democratically elected for a four-year term and chose Luis Eduardo Siles Salinas, a civilian from the Christian Democratic Party (*Partido Demócrata Cristiano - PDC*), as vice-president. On June 1967, prior to the defeat of Che Guevara's guerrilla army, the regime massacred miners who were gathering for a national congress at the massive Catavi and Siglo XX mines. Miners were deciding actions of protest against the government, and some versions argue they were also about to express their support for Che's revolutionary guerrillas since its presence in the country at the beginning of June of that year was made evident (Soria G., Pimentel C., & García C., 2008). The massive killing, soon denominated the *Massacre of*

San Juan because of the date it took place, played a major role in the memory and objectives of workers in the following years.

DEMOCRATIC OPENING

A brief break from military hegemony emerged after Barrientos' sudden death in a helicopter crash in April 1969. Vice president Siles Salinas, a civilian from the Christian Democrat Party (*Partido Demócrata Cristiano* - PDC) took office, but only a few months later General Alfredo Ovando, at that point Commander of the Armed Forces, overthrew him and dissolved the parliament. Paradoxically, this period was known as a *democratic opening*. Ovando started a two-year process that restored civil liberties, nationalized gas reserves, and allowed free unionization and left-wing political parties to participate in the political scene again. In this context, the COB was able to gather for the IV Congress in May 1970, from which the *Socialist Thesis*, another basis for the Popular Assembly, was the main outcome⁵. However, soon enough Ovando shifted the government towards more conservative measures and repressed the university-student guerrilla of Teoponte in July of 1971 and ousted the more progressive civilian wing of the government. As a result, both the left and the right weakened their support to the government.

On October 7, 1970, Juan Jose Torres, former Commander of the Armed Forces during the Ovando regime, became president of the Republic with support from Bolivian workers. A three-day strike by workers and the joint action of progressive sectors of the army managed to turn in their favor the coup started two days ago against Ovando. Within hours, first a triumvirate that responded to the interests of conservative sectors of

⁵ The *Socialist Thesis* was drafted in Congress IV of the Bolivian Workers Union held in May 1970. The prevailing philosophies of both the Bolivian Communist Party (PCB) – influenced by the theory of revolution by stages – and the Revolutionary Working Party (POR) – influenced by the theory of the permanent revolution – were combined in final text of the *Socialist Thesis*. (Dunkerley, 1987)

the army, and then Torres who overthrew it, took office. Like Ovando before him, Torres began his presidency attempting to build up Revolutionary Nationalism and win workers over by granting them some of their demands⁶. His government, however, was marked by permanent instability. It developed in the context of increasing social mobilization by leftist groups - with its highest point in the Popular Assembly – and permanent coup threats from conservatives who finally managed to elevate Colonel Hugo Banzer to power in August of 1971.

In sum, due to political changes in the decades that followed the *Thesis of Pulacayo*, workers' demands suffered major changes and shifted according to specific contexts. Thus, during the first years of the 1952 Revolution, workers created the COB, established a partnership with the MNR to participate of the revolutionary government through presence in some ministries, and were able to introduce *workers' control* in the mines. However, U.S. economic assistance contingent on establishing measures that directly affected the power and benefits of workers caused the Bolivian government to limit its policies on their favor. As early as the sixties workers decided to break their support of the government and ended up fracturing their alliance with the MNR. Over the upcoming years, the Barrientos government's aggressive push to annihilate the labor movement and leftist parties served to further radicalize the proletariat. By 1971, and despite the *democratic opening* of progressive governments by some sectors of the army, workers had already turned away from the path of *bourgeois democracy*, retrieving the

⁶ Torres nationalized the Matilde mine, ousted the Peace Corps from the country on charges of sterilization of women, gave the CBA building for public schools, initiated negotiations with countries from the socialist bloc mainly for mining investment, and allowed the installation of the Popular Assembly in the Legislative Palace. However, the willingness of workers to participate in his government remained unchanged until the end of his term preserving their class independence. Along with the weak support from progressive sectors of the army, these facts granted Torres government the condition of (semi) Bonapartist (Zavaleta M., 1987)

essence and some of the principles established in the *Thesis of Pulacayo* which aimed to lead the country towards Socialism.

CHAPTER II: Frames, ideologies and historical events through the political trajectory of the labor movement 1944-1971

Frames and framing processes own an interaction dimension and are dynamic (Benford & Snow, 2000). Whether they encompass the interests of one or several groups, they imply negotiation within the movement and represent *snapshots* of their ideas in specific moments in time. (Oliver & Johnston, 2000) They are different from ideologies in that the latter are fairly broad, coherent, and relatively durable sets of beliefs that affect one's orientation to everyday life and politics (Benford & Snow, 2000). Based on these definitions and the description of the political shifts produced in Bolivia from 1944 through 1971, this section explains the predominant master frames and ideologies that defined the actions of the labor movement throughout the period. Relying on secondary sources, it distinguishes four frames defined by specific historical markers that crystallized ruptures and shifts that were already developing. By taking into consideration the *core framing tasks* of *diagnosis* and *prognosis*, Table 1 and the explanation that follows show the trajectory of the labor movement in terms of its relationship with the State and the political actors that participated in the different processes, whether as allies, or as enemies. Understanding this trajectory and the subsequent shifts of the labor movement will later be useful to understanding the role of memory and historical events in shaping the frames of the Popular Assembly.

REVOLUTIONARY NATIONALISM AND SOCIALISM

Throughout a twenty-five year period four master frames and framing processes led to shifts in the orientation of the labor movement and the left towards the different governments in power, but mainly towards the ideologies of *Revolutionary Nationalism* and *Socialism*. In the Bolivian context, *Revolutionary Nationalism* speaks to the ruling

ideology of the country beginning with the National Revolution of 1952 through the introduction of neo-liberal reforms in 1985. Its origins can be traced back to the end of the Chaco War in 1935 (Antezana, 1983), when the progressive government of Gen. German Busch started a series of measures oriented to increase internal industrialization. The government of Gen. Gualberto Villarroel during the mid-forties was also linked to this tendency prior to the Revolution. In general terms, *Revolutionary Nationalism* is seen as an oscillating ideological axis that served the purposes of both the left and the right depending on the political operator, as it conjugated ideological principles from socialism, fascism, nationalism, indigenism and anti-imperialism (Antezana, 1983). During the MNR period that started in 1952, *Revolutionary Nationalism* represented a political, economic and cultural project that framed the government's objectives. The party based its economic policies on Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) and aimed to incorporate workers and peasants both politically and culturally under the homogenizing principle of mestizaje (Antezana, 1983).

Not always in opposition to the principles of *Revolutionary Nationalism*, the ideology of Socialism in the Bolivian context also referred to internal industrialization of the country but it raised a strong opposition to *Imperialism* and the *bourgeoisie*. For workers it emphasized the expropriation of companies that were in the hands of foreign capitals or "that served to their interests" (FSTMB, 1946). It pointed to *workers* as the political and economic force that would lead the destinies of the country through the implementation of a *proletarian dictatorship*, and it also identified the 'people' (*el pueblo*) as the main sector of society that would benefit from this type of regime (FSTMB, 1946). It is important to mention here that class categories defined by workers throughout all this period come from Marxist literature and that their application to the Bolivian context sometimes lacked specificity. Thus, notions such as the *people* or the

bourgeoisie, or even the *oligarchy*, should be taken carefully and always be understood in terms of political alliances and disputes. For instance, the notion of *the people* during the first 12 years of the revolution included peasants in general, but later shifted in 1971 towards the acceptance of only some sectors of the peasantry in the Popular Assembly⁷. The majority of peasants and their national organization were dismissed and not considered as part of the *people* because of their alliance with the military through the Peasant-Military Pact introduced by Barrientos after 1964. Similarly, the alliances of the MNR, some sectors of the middle-classes, and the petit bourgeoisie with the United States and conservative factions of the Bolivian army was questioned in 1971 by workers who rejected those collaborations.

THE TRAJECTORY OF THE LABOR MOVEMENT, A FRAMING PERSPECTIVE

A first identifiable frame, defined here as the *Sexenio frame*, relates to the consolidation of the FSTMB in 1944 and the elaboration of the *Thesis of Pulacayo* in 1946, when the labor movement followed their own ideological version of Socialism. From a subaltern position that placed workers against the political and social oligarchy that ruled the country during that period, the labor movement sought to establish class alliances with peasants, artisans and the middle classes (FSTMB, 1946). These alliances would crystallize in greater power in the parliament, but at the same time served as mechanisms for grassroots organization (FSTMB, 1946). Throughout this process, workers believed they could achieve a democratic transition to socialism.

⁷ As Chapter 3 will explain a permanent struggle from the ‘official’ national peasant organization, the CNTCB to participate in the Popular Assembly was present throughout the process. Workers denied their participation on the basis of their alliance with the military.

Frame (Period)	Ideology	Diagnosis (Identification of grievances)		Prognosis	Motivations
		Principles	Opponents		
<i>Sexenio Frame</i> (1944-1952)	Socialism	Political inferiority of labor movement in decisions that affected them.	Rosca Mining Oligarchy Empire (United States)	Greater participation in liberal Parliament Organization of strikes Class alliance with peasants, artisans and middle classes	Democratic transition towards Socialism
National Revolution (1952-1962)	Revolutionary Nationalism	Political inferiority of labor movement in decisions that affected them	Mining Oligarchy United States	Import Substitutions Industrialization Participation in MNR's government Strategic alliance with the bourgeoisie Workers achieve better working conditions and slowly take control of the state apparatus	Revolutionary and Democratic transition towards Socialism
<i>Restoration</i> (1962-1969)	Socialism	Repression by state apparatus Workers in political and armed inferiority Absence of political representation in elections	MNR Military government United States	Resistance to repression from clandestine movements Support to Guerrilla foci	Restoration of democratic order and of union and civil liberties Restoration of political and economical achievements of the national revolution of 1952

Table 1. Political trajectory of frames of Labor Movement 1944-1971

Frame (Period)	Ideology	Diagnosis (Identification of grievances)		Prognosis	Motivations
		Principles	Opponents	Proposed Solution	Desired outcome
<i>Democratic Opening</i> (1969-1971)	Socialism	Harassment by fascist wings of the army who threatened to seize power Absence of workers' representation in State apparatus Inefficient justice system Political inferiority in liberal Parliament	MNR Military government United States	Workers' Political Command Popular Assembly - Popular Tribunals - Armed militias - Joint management of COMIBOL Temporary alliance with Torres' government	Socialist Regime

Table 2. Political trajectory of frames of Labor Movement 1944-1971 (Cont.)

The victory of the MNR allied with workers and peasants in April of 1952 led to the National Revolution *frame*, shifting the orientation of a by then more consolidated labor movement which embraced the ideology of *Revolutionary Nationalism*, this time from a relative power position. As explained in Chapter 1, the government's acceptance of *worker's control* over mining matters and the presence of major proletarian leaders in the government established what seemed a long-term alliance of workers and the middle classes against the mining oligarchy. This period presented two challenges for workers in terms of their proposed methods to increase their power position. One of them was to establish an alliance with the *bourgeoisie* through the MNR. This was not totally contradictory to the principles of the *Thesis of Pulacayo*, as some sort of alliance with other sectors of society was seen as normal during democratic transitions towards

Socialism (FSTMB, 1946). The second challenge, the relationship of the government with the United States, was not a powerful factor until the MNR decided to follow demands from the Northern countries restricting and reducing the workers' position of power. (Dunkerley, 1984)

The crisis in the relationship between workers and the MNR reached its highest point after the introduction of economic adjustment measures in the mid-fifties, and a final collapse of the alliance occurred in 1962. The *Restoration frame* implied the rejection of the ideology of *Revolutionary Nationalism*, leaving the labor movement with no alternative but to confront and resist state measures. This political position was exacerbated after Barrientos took power and started a repressive process against the labor movement, which also included the dismantling of armed guerrillas and any sort of left-wing democratic opposition. Clandestinely, labor movement leaders looked first to support the *guerrilla foci* initiated by Che Guevara in rural areas (Soria G. et al., 2008), but their rapid defeat left workers with no other choice than to attempt to recover by forming clandestine organizations. Indeed, the unions that were prohibited by Barrientos kept organizing in secrecy and attempted to recover democratic liberties and all that was gained during the first years of the Revolution. (Klein, 2003).

After Barrientos' accident in April 1969 and Ovando's rise to power later in September of that same year, workers aligned with the rest of the political parties from the left and developed the *Democratic Opening – Popular Assembly frame* and consolidated it in June 1971 during Torres'. During this period, the labor movement re-embraced the ideology of Socialism, but this time attempted to assume the leading role in guiding the country. Through the creation of a power organ of the proletariat that would both oversee state actions, and also assume some of its tasks, specifically military and judicial, workers aimed for a higher level of participation in decisions that affected them.

In general, these factors responded to how the memory of historical events and workers' particular experience in power, the end of the guerrilla foci as an option for revolution, the consciousness of the impossibility of achieving power through liberal democratic means, and an ostensibly international scenario favorable to socialist regimes played in workers' decisions.

The *Socialist Thesis* that emerged from the 4th Congress of the COB in May 1971 synthesized workers' experiences and frustrations since the National Revolution of 1952. By specifically addressing the period that continued until 1964 when Barrientos rose to power, and by making references to “the oppressive and dictatorial governments that repressed peasants and workers”, the document challenged the Bolivian proletariat to become an “independent, powerful social and political force that acts within the nationalist and democratic opening that struggles to conquer power”, rejecting the *negative experience* of joint management in the government (*co-gobierno*) (COB, 1970) . From an *anti-imperialist* and *anti-capitalist* standpoint, the final objective of the workers' struggle was achieving *socialism* emphasizing that when faced with democratic processes led by the bourgeoisie, the proletariat will defend their *class independence*. These principles, added to the shifting political context and the memory of workers' massacres in the last years, would define the final shape of the Popular Assembly. The following chapter examines the origins of the power organ, its debates and its final outcomes, from a perspective that breaks down all of these frames.

CHAPTER III: The Popular Assembly. Debates and Outcomes

After the traditional Workers' Day march and commemoration held on May 1, 1971, a massive crowd of workers congregated at Plaza Murillo, the political center of the city of La Paz, where the main government institutions of the country are located. From the Legislature's balconies right across from the Government Palace, Juan Lechín, Executive Secretary of the COB, called on workers "to follow the example of the [anti]imperialist struggle of Vietnam" and "to preserve their independence from the government". Under a political climate of permanent instability, the left inaugurated the Popular Assembly (Presencia, May 2, 1971 p.1) and placed its upcoming first round of sessions at the center of the political agenda. Both, workers' *Socialist Thesis*, elaborated in their IV Congress, and the *Thesis of Pulacayo* set the ideological and political agenda of an event marked by the permanent fear of new attempts from the *Right* to overthrow Torres. In this context, the Assembly became the stage of *core framing tasks* of *diagnosis* and *prognosis* carried on by the *Left* upon the basis of the frames of *armed defense and social mobilization, justice, participation of workers in the state apparatus, class independence and anti-imperialism*. Following this framework, this chapter aims to provide an in-depth description of the problems, actions and outcomes discussed during the Assembly.

FROM THE STREETS TO THE PALACE

The absence of a democratically elected Parliament allowed workers, small sectors from the peasantry and political parties from the *Left* to gather in the Legislative Palace starting on June 22. Torres and his government reluctantly accepted the situation with no other option than to let the Popular Assembly gather out of fear of losing support from the *Left*. Throughout the period from May to August 1971, the most important

newspapers of the country, *Presencia* and *El Diario*, extensively covered the debate over the country's possible turn towards Socialism. COB representatives, old and new political parties, members of the government, intellectuals, private businessmen and those soon to be recognized as conservative military officers like Col. Reque Terán, Commander of the Armed Forces, referred to the installation of the power organ of the proletariat.

Depending on their political orientation, actors of the moment either feared or celebrated the Assembly, and with it, the arrival of socialism in the country. Because they feared precipitating another attempt of coup d'état by the army, representatives from the *Left* and the government sometimes tried to frame the Assembly as a slow and step-by-step transition towards socialism. Careful to not generate more controversy, the Minister of the Interior, civilian Jorge Gallardo, denied any possibility of "anarchy and chaos." (*El Diario*, June, 16, 1971, p.1) The Communist Party (PCB) defined the Popular Assembly as a *school of power*, where future cadres could learn how to manage politics and the government (*El Diario*, June, 20, 1971, p.6), distancing itself from the more radical faction of Guillermo Lora, that considered the Assembly already as already a *power* opposed to the government and the military (*El Diario*, July 1, 1971, p.1).

The installation of the Assembly generated expectation outside of the country. The Mexican newspaper *Excelsior* called it the first workers' *Soviet* of the Americas (*Excelsior*, Mexico, D.F. cited in *Presencia*, June 28), in reference to the basic organization of the Russian Revolution. While the Chilean Socialist Party (*El Diario*, June, 28, 1971, p.1) and Juan Domingo Perón, president of Argentina (*El Diario*, July, 9 p.1), expressed their support to the Assembly, the idea of the first *Soviet* in Latin America generated extreme preoccupation in other sites. Former Ambassador of Brazil, Hugo Bethlem, offered for Brazil to become Bolivia's political tutor, because of the threat of an "illegal government" that with workers' support, was aiming to take the country towards

socialism. (El Diario, June 21, 1971 p.1) It was clear that even though the Assembly generated support among cadres from the *Left*, both locally and internationally, it generated fear among the *Right*. That fear of a turn towards socialism made the Assembly, along with Torres, as targets of a new *insurgence*.

At moments of high tension workers' organizations and left-wing political parties felt forced to take measures to prevent the always *imminent fascist attack*. (Press release from the COB, El Diario, June 19, 1971, p.3)⁸ One of these moments took place on June 18, four days before the beginning of the *official* sessions, when the Private Businessmen Confederation of Bolivia (*Confederación de Empresarios Privados de Bolivia*) published a press release claiming the *imminent arrival* of communism, the break of relationships with non-socialist countries and the elimination of private property were at hand (Presencia, June 18, 1971, p.11). The government responded by trying to calm public opinion. The Ministry of Economy, Flavio Machicado, qualified the release as "inaccurate and biased," and assured that the government was preserving private property and its relationships with "all countries of the world." (El Diario, June, 19, 1971, p.5) On their side, workers and political organizations from the *Left* published press releases calling on their cadres to organize and prepare for resistance in case of any attempt to overthrow Torres (El Diario, June, 19-22, 1971). The COB, even though it lacked weapons, decided to *reorganize* the armed militias to defend the *democratic process* and proposed the creation of an institutionalized Popular Military Command that would take control of armed defense actions. Over the following days, Adalberto Violand, president of the businessmen confederation, denied any political intention behind the press release (El Diario, June 19, 1971 p.4), and Gen. Reque Terán, who in previous days had

⁸ The fear of coup led workers to ban any sort of social mobilization in the moments prior to the Assembly. The most important where health and banking workers decided a strike claiming The COB asked them to postpone their measures until after the Popular Assembly sessions

welcomed the Assembly as an institution created for the wellbeing of the country (El Diario, June 17, 1971, p.1), rejected any possibility of conspiring against Torres (El Diario, June 18, 1971 p.2). Through editorials, El Diario celebrated these statements (El Diario, June 18-19, 1971 p.2) and called for calm, but fear and distrust continued. That tension would remain throughout and even following the Assembly. As later events would show, reasons for these feelings were well founded. When Banzer seized power in late August of 1971, his actions relied on the support of private business owners and Reque Terán formed part of his government (Dunkerley, 1984).

BYLAWS AND REPRESENTATIVES

According to its bylaws, the Popular Assembly included a majority of proletarian members with 132 seats (60 percent) while the rest of representatives were distributed among the middle class (53 seats), peasants (24) and political parties (13). (Dunkerley, 1984 ; Thomas, 2001) The number and selection of representatives depended on each sector's own procedures and their national presence. Thus, *proletarian organizations* chose up to four delegates by national entity – those with presence in the whole country, such as the miners and industry workers– while rank-and-file “bases,” chose their representatives in proportion to their number of affiliates. *Middle class* organizations elected two representatives by national entity with the rest in rank-and-file assemblies. *Political parties* had their own rules of selection, and peasant representatives were picked from the *Bloque Independiente* (Independent Block), a minority faction of the peasantry that dropped their membership in the National Peasant Workers Confederation (*Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores Campesinos de Bolivia - CNTCB*) because of its alliance with Torres and the military through the *Pacto Militar Campesino*.

Two important points regarding the definition of the *left* and who was part of it are necessary. First, the links and overlays between members of political parties, worker's unions, and other national and political organizations that supported and participated in the Popular Assembly formed a sometimes confusing picture. For instance, besides representing university students, some representatives were also members of political parties. Oscar Eid, elected as one of the Secretaries of the Presidium of the Popular Assembly (El Diario, June 27, 1971, p.1), was both a representative of the National Universities Confederation (*Confederación de Universidades Bolivianas - CUB*) and a member of the newly formed Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (MIR). These mixed or separate political identities played important roles when one identity was not useful to gain participation in the power organ. Guillermo Lora, for example, was a leader of one of the three factions of the POR which had already elected its two representatives, but he gained his seat thanks to the Writers and Artists Union (Gallardo L., 1972, p. 334). Overall, these identities did not conflict with each other, allowing political parties not necessarily considered left, like the MNR, to gain undercover representation in the Popular Assembly. The second point comes to light because even though the MNR was banned from participating, their Labor Command (*Comando Laboral*), a left-leaning faction which broke with the party, had at least 65 union worker representatives in the Assembly. Still, unionized representation was in most cases the primary political identity, defining the outcomes and organization of the gathering. (Zavaleta M., 1987)

DEBATES

Once installed, the Assembly members debated on a variety of topics that ranged from the option of joint management of the State mining company COMIBOL to the problem of finding scholarships for the children of a former guerrilla fighter (El Diario,

July 3, 1971 p.1). Discussions were sometimes chaotic and sessions irregular. Long debates on the election of Presidium and commission representatives (See Appendix 2) took almost five out of the eleven days of sessions, and some of them were suspended because there was not enough quorum, like when petroleum workers left the Assembly protesting the participation of ex-private petroleum workers in the sessions. (Day 4, June 25) Moreover, some other sessions didn't even take place because they were short on participants. (Day 6, June 27)

Position	Name	Union / Organization
<i>President</i>	Juan Lechín	Miners
<i>1st Vice-President</i>	Humberto Pabón	Industry workers
<i>2nd Vice-President</i>	Casiano Amurrio	Independent peasants
<i>Secretaries</i>	Miguel Verástegui	Construction
	Alfredo Llanos	Petroleum
	Oscar Eid	University students
	Abraham Monasterio	Rail workers
<i>Members with right to vote (Vocales)</i>	Félix Challpa	Flour workers
	Guido Quezada	Teachers

Table 2. Presidium (Governing Body) of the Popular Assembly

ARMED DEFENSE AND SOCIAL MOBILIZATION

The Popular Assembly ultimately launched a series of *official* resolutions that addressed each of the *frames*. In terms of *armed defense and social mobilization* - one of the first issues to be discussed after its installation, members declared that “In the event of coup d’état [...] the Popular Assembly will assume the political and military direction of the masses [...] The first response of working masses will be a general strike and the immediate occupation of work places” (*Popular Assembly*, Resolution N°1. El Diario,

June 23:1). The institutional *armed response* of the Popular Assembly was outlined in a resolution by the COB of June 19, and stipulated the creation of a Supreme Command and the creation of Regional [Local] Commands throughout the country. Their function would be to “guarantee the free movement of the proletariat and to become the armed executor of the resolutions of the Popular Assembly”. (Presencia, July 3, p.1) The commanding institution would have a General Commander, a Chief of Major State, and a Political Coordinator that in turn depended on a Supreme Command formed by the Presidium of the Popular Assembly and the COB. (El Diario, June 20, 1971, p.1) The Assembly left the debate open and resumed it only during the last session, with no other outcomes than asking the *Security and Defense Commission* to review the report for the next round of sessions, after the university representative in the commission suggested organizing the militias in *secrecy*. (Presencia, July 3, 1971 p.1)

The question of the actors responsible for distributing armament was never analyzed during sessions, despite the attempts of the National Left Movement (*Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario* – MIR) to discuss it (El Diario, June 23, 1971 p.1). In the years that followed the Assembly, this topic would become a source of regret for the Left, whose intellectuals and representatives argued it was the main reason for the defeat of August 1971. (Escóbar, 1984; Zavaleta M., 1987)

JUSTICE

The symbolic significance of the *Massacre of San Juan* in the mining centers of Catavi and Siglo XX on June 22, 1967, not only served to justify the installation of the Popular Assembly on the date of its fourth anniversary, but also raised among workers a general sense of the *ineffectiveness* of judicial institutions to pursue and provide *justice*. Workers realized they needed to look for alternatives to solve these crimes. After a

dramatic second session, which included a homage to the victims of the *Massacre of San Juan* and the guerrillas of Ñancahuazú and Teoponte, workers first rejected Col. Reque Terán's call for workers "to *excuse*, although not to *forgive*" the massacre (El Diario, June 17, 1971 p.1) and then resolved to demand that the Torres' government "prosecute those members of the military implicated in these monstrous massive crimes" (*Popular Assembly*, Resolution N°2, El Diario, June 24 p.1). The resolution also included workers' attempt to create *Popular Tribunals* responsible for solving these crimes and under workers' direction.

Five days after the first session, on June 28, the debate continued. The *Security and Defense* commission presented a report that provided an assessment of the judicial investigations on the *Massacre of San Juan*, and the unclear causes of the death of mining leader Isaac Camacho on July 30 of the same year (El Diario, June 29, 1971 p.1). Overall, the report suggested that most of those responsible for these crimes were still part of the Armed Forces and working in Torres' government. It also demanded the extradition of Antonio Arguedas, former President Barrientos' Minister of Government, from Cuba, under accusations of being the intellectual author of these acts. Without providing any further evidence beyond what was already known through the press, the report concluded that "the "*Barrientista*' machinery" was still in place" (El Diario, June 29, 1971 p.4) and that the installation of *Popular Tribunals* was necessary "[...] due to the ineffectiveness and complicity of the *bourgeois justice* that 'represents a mechanism of the oligarchic system of domination.'" (El Diario, June 29, 1971 p.3)

The report's main focus of attention outlined the future tasks of the tribunals which were set to oversee matters related to a) Criminal and economic damages against the state, universities and trade union properties; b) Surrender of natural resources and subjugation of national sovereignty; c) Workers' massacres, students and anti-popular

repressions, torture and murder of workers and union leaders and revolutionaries; d) Malfeasance of public officials that misled investigations in judicial processes; and e) Organization of counterrevolutionary plots (Presencia, June 29, 1971, p.1; El Diario, June 29, 1971, p.4). Through the tribunals, the Assembly would keep its role as defender of the interests of the left and the workers' class independence, without disregarding matters of national interest. The report was considered insufficient on the grounds that more data was necessary to make a decision about the murders, and the Assembly decided to return it to the commission for further review (El Diario, June 29, 1971, p.4) without making any comments about the feasibility of installing the tribunals. During the final discussions, representatives agreed with Simón Reyes, mining leader, that "there are no conditions for their [the tribunals] organization yet [...] The Popular Assembly should become a popular tribunal and judge the massacres and crimes, morally condemning those responsible for criminal acts" (Presencia, July 3, 1971, p.1). After deciding to elaborate a list of *murderers* during the recess, the Assembly concluded that "because of the importance of the Popular Tribunals they deserve deeper analysis by the [*Security and Defense*] commission for further consideration." (El Diario, July 3, 1971, p.1)

PARTICIPATION IN THE STATE APPARATUS AND CLASS INDEPENDENCE

The question of workers' *participation in the state apparatus* and their *class independence* from the state was raised during debates on joint management of the State's mining company (*co-participación*), COMIBOL. Chapter 4 deals specifically with workers' motivations for rejecting Torres' initial offer for joint management of the government (*co-gobierno*) and its links to the memory of the outcomes of the National Revolution from 1952. Because of the turns of the revolution, workers decided not to

participate in power positions that forced them to deal with matters of national interest, but instead to focus on institutions like COMIBOL which directly affected them.

In practical terms *co-participación* translated into a proposal that established a structure of mining, surface and foundry delegates, subordinated to a local directorate in every mining center. Each of these directorates would depend on the *superior organ of command* of COMIBOL formed by a six-member directorate and a general manager. Directors would be split equally between representatives from workers and the government, while the general manager would be elected from a shortlist of three candidates proposed by the national miners' federation (FSTMB). (El Diario, June 30, 1971 p.1)

On Day 8, June 29, miners presented a report on the economic situation of the company addressing Bolivia's economic dependence on the United States, and the need to return to the principles established in the *Thesis of Pulacayo*. Mining representative Noel Vásquez painted a dark picture of COMIBOL's position due to "many years of petit bourgeois administration." (*El Diario*, June 30, 1971, p.1) The company was 32 million dollars in debt after the application of the *Plan Triangular*, its situation was becoming unbearable because of deficit and lack of materials for normal functioning. It had increased its bureaucracy budget from 40 thousand to 400 thousand dollars since Barrientos, and only two companies, Huacaya and Quechisla, were profitable (El Diario, June 30, 1971, p.1). Moreover, workers saw the technological and market dependence on the United States and foreign capital as preventing the company from finding better paths for exports and higher levels of development. Alberto Jara, mining leader, argued

[...] Imperialism, [...], *misguided* the working class and the Bolivian people, making them believe that commercialization of our minerals can only be effective through markets assigned by foreign capital and that the only technology capable of helping Bolivian mining was from the United States. However, now it's been

demonstrated that the Socialist Block⁹ is a convenient market and that their technology is more appropriate to our reality. (El Diario, June 30, 1971, p.1)

In a proposal that directly referenced some of the principles of the *Thesis of Pulacayo*. Vásquez called for “*statization* with collective workers participation” as the objective and expressed workers’ interest in transforming COMIBOL from a political instrument at the service of governments into a technological and economically solvent entity at the service of the *people*. (El Diario, June 30, 1971, p.3) There was general agreement on these principles, even though not everyone in the Assembly agreed with discussing the issue of *co-participación* at that political conjuncture. The issue of *class independence* seemed for some to be in danger, and there was consciousness about the tasks to undertake *co-participación* to be bigger than what they seemed.

Indeed, university students expressed their concern about the dangers of returning to the situation of *co-gobierno* with the MNR, while the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (*Partido Comunista Marzista Leninista - PCML*) claimed that the very discussion of this matter meant to lose track of workers’ fundamental objective of achieving political power. From an economic perspective, Pablo Ramos, Dean of the Economics Faculty at the national university in La Paz, insisted on the integral modification of the economic policy to justify *co-participación* given COMIBOL’s dependence on the international markets. (El Diario, July 1, 1971, p.1)

Those in favor of discussing the topic responded both in political and economic terms. Mining leader Filemón Escóbar argued that the objective of *co-participación* meant both to be one step closer to political power, and to raise the duality of powers at the company level. Guillermo Lora, on his side, pointed to COMIBOL as the *economic*

⁹ For the Bolivian context, it implied establishing relationships with Cuba, the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Poland, which major sources of financing and countries with which Torres’ government, under workers’ pressures, had already established alliances (see El Diario and Presencia, June-August, 1971).

lever of the country, reason enough to attempt to take control over it, at the same time that *co-participación* represented a bridge towards Socialism. (El Diario, June 29 and July 1, 1971, p.1)

Debates lasted three days, and *co-participación* regarding COMIBOL was finally accepted by the Assembly on Day 10, July 1. Members launched a resolution calling for mobilization until *full co-participación* was achieved and granted by the government. For some authors this was the most fully developed proposal and outcome of the first round of sessions (Dunkerley, 1984), but at the same time it emphasized the Assembly's projects dependence on the existence of Torres' government. (Zavaleta M., 1987)

ANTI-IMPERIALISM

The theme of anti-imperialism was present throughout the Assembly, particularly during debates on justice and worker participation in the state apparatus. However, it wasn't until the eleventh and final day that delegates signed a resolution on the topic of *anti-imperialism*. After some members accused the Minister of the Interior of still keeping "elements of the CIA" at the heart of his office, and that "martial and political repression organisms are controlled and directed by North American imperialism" (Presencia, July 3, 1971, p.1), the Assembly agreed to call for the "permanent struggle for the ejection of the North American Military Mission, the CIA and the FBI from the country" (Presencia, July 3, 1971, p.1). This decision placed emphasis on the nuance of *permanent struggle* rather than *directly ejecting* or *forcing the government* to eject these institutions from the country, due to consciousness of the lack of power of the Assembly to impose its decisions. (Presencia, July 3, 1971, p.1) It is possible to conjecture that when discussing the Assembly's power capacity, most of the members realized that the moment of coercive power had not yet arrived.

OTHER DEBATES AND RESOLUTIONS

Throughout its sessions, the Assembly heard a variety of claims on issues related to the *working class* and the *Left* in general, addressing administrative issues of the Assembly but also particular demands from some members. Because they were secondary and only addressed briefly they emerge as a parallel sequence of discussions. However, their relevance lies in that they touched on the structure and principles of the Assembly as well as demands from other sectors besides the miners.

On Day 4, June 25, members felt the unity of the Assembly was in jeopardy when the Workers Departmental Union (COD) of Tarija proposed a resolution to protest government's *harassment* of Oscar Zamora Medinaceli, leader of the Poor Peasants Union (*Unión de Campesinos Pobres* – UCAPO), which operated clandestinely in the country. In October of 1970, 400 families seized the private estate *Chané-Bedoya* in the Eastern region of Santa Cruz, under leadership of UCAPO and Zamora. The leader was arrested and exiled to Argentina, but returned to the country in secrecy, right before the installation of the Popular Assembly and resuming his leadership in UCAPO. The Communist Party (PCB), miners and industry workers rejected the resolution in favor of Zamora because of danger the Assembly might become a stage for sectorial – or in this case, personal – matters. Instead, after discussing the problem again on Day 5, The Assembly decided to stand “against any sort of repression or persecution against *any person or organization* involved in the struggle for national liberation and Socialism.” (El Diario, June 27, 1971, p.1) When the topic was touched on again during the last session, the Assembly resolved to support the occupation of *Chané-Bedoya*, demanding that the government fulfill its promises to allow peasants to turn the estate into a *co-operative*. (El Diario, July 3, 1971, p.1)

On Day 10, after the government announced its decision to allow *El Diario* to become a co-operative in the *near future* (El Diario, June, 30, 1971, p.3), the Assembly created an Ideological Orientation Committee, made up of seven members, with the task of securing El Diario's workers participation and the newspaper support of *proletarian principles* (El Diario, July 2, 1971, p.1). El Diario had been at the center of debates surrounding the process ever since its workers grabbed it from the original owner, the Carrasco family, right after Torres came into power in 1970. From then on, the political orientation of the newspaper took a 180 degree-turn, and shifted from a very conservative position to one that supported the cause of the Bolivian proletariat (Dunkerley, 1984).

In the last session, Assembly members attempted to close all the wide variety of topics touched on but still unresolved. The Socialist Party, POR (Amadeo Vargas) and the Postal Workers National Federation were finally accepted as full members, while the Liga Socialista Revolucionaria's application was rejected because it lacked papers (El Diario, July 2, 1971, p.1). The Director of the state health insurance company (*Caja Nacional de Seguridad Social*, CNSS), Hernán Quiroga Pereira, presented a report and a series of Supreme Decree projects destined to solve the economic problems of the institution. At that point the CNSS was in a very fragile economic condition, and the government was investigating it on charges of inefficiency and corruption. The Assembly forwarded the report to the *Social Issues Commission*, and while urging Quiroga to rationalize services and restructure the institution, asked the Presidium to push the government to approve the Supreme Decrees (El Diario, July 3, 1971, p.1). Later, the *Education and Culture Commission* presented a report on the creation of a *Bolivian Unique University* with hegemonic participation of the working class, a demand that came out from the COB IV Congress. After a long debate, the Assembly agreed to the creation of the university calling on it to follow the example of the 'Tomás Frías'

University in Potosí, where a student and worker committee had been in charge since the end of May (El Diario, May 30, 1971, p.3). The report was finally returned to the commission for further review (El Diario, July 3, 1971, p.1). But it would not be the only one. All reports, especially those on the *Popular Tribunals* and the *Armed Militias* (El Diario, July 3, 1971, p.1), were sent back for review to each particular commission. Besides the resolutions on Chané-Bedoya, and the Military Mission of the US, and the report on the CNSS, the Assembly received news of the death of the widow of Moisés Guevara, former guerrilla fighter during Che Guevara's campaign in Ñancahuazú. Finally, the Assembly resolved the national university in La Paz (UMSA) and the COB to provide scholarships either at the national university in La Paz or to look for socialist countries to provide them for all four orphans (Presencia, July 3, 1971, p.1).

After eleven days marked by mixed sensations of chaos (El Diario, June 28, 1971, p.1), and success (Presencia, July 4, 1971, p.1), the Assembly decided to resume sessions on September 7, 1971. In the meantime, local and regional Assemblies would gather throughout the country. The assembly in Santa Cruz met in June, and the assembly in Sucre met in August, but the remaining assemblies failed to meet when conservative forces of the army overthrew Torres on August 21, 1971 under leadership of Colonel Hugo Banzer. The new military government, conservative and anticommunist, ruled for seven years in the name of national security and immersed itself in the trend of repressive regimes of the region that persecuted and tortured political dissidence. New laws forbade political organizations within Bolivian territory and the government revoked all measures that suggested a shift towards socialism or establishing alliances with countries from the *Socialist Block* (Dunkerley, 1984 ; Klein, 2003). Workers, and the left, were never able to reinstate the Popular Assembly.

CHAPTER IV: Structure, historical events and ideology. Socialism at a Crossroads

The Popular Assembly and the topics debated in it were in large part an outcome of the twenty-five year trajectory of the labor movement and the effects of political processes that preceded and followed the National Revolution of 1952. In the political context of 1971, these effects translated – for the left – into a definition of objectives based on five frames: *justice*, *anti-imperialism*, *participation in the state apparatus*, *class independence* and *armed defense and social mobilization*. Under the ideology of Socialism, the Assembly became the stage where the *leading forces* of the moment, under *proletarian leadership*, carried out collective *framing tasks* of *diagnosis* and *prognosis* that helped them design the outcomes and realize the limitations of their transitional project towards socialism.

An *ideology* and *framing* perspective centered on *historical events*, allows us to understand the topics discussed and the number of representatives each force of the Left had throughout sessions, as well as why workers' rejected, and decided not-to-struggle for the alternatives of *liberal democratic elections*, a *guerrilla foci* or the *joint management of the government* with Torres. Instead, workers clearly attempted to distance themselves from these options and build their own project. Focusing on the short term events of the *democratic opening* period, this perspective also allows us to explain why did the left discussed the problem of armament only superficially, assuming they had the upper-hand in case of a confrontation with conservative factions of the army. Finally, they become useful in explaining the relevance and impact of debates on *duality of powers* and the *fundamental contradiction*, both an outcome of the specific conditions of the moment of *democratic opening*. By discussing the literature on the Popular Assembly, this section combines both long and short-term perspectives with an

ideologies and *framing* approach, to explain how memory, ideology and the sequence of events of the *democratic opening* period played a role in workers' actions and decisions on these regards, as well as on their labor to legitimize the Popular Assembly. It argues that a combination of ideological principles, the memory of workers' frustrated *co-gobierno* experience after the National Revolution of 1952 and a view of the army as a representative of the 'bourgeois ideology' informed this decision,.

FAILED REVOLUTION

The literature on the Popular Assembly has placed little emphasis on the way in which the power organ of the proletariat came to be. Indeed, and only with few exceptions (Cajías, 2001; Thomas, 2001), interpretations of the political context that led to the installation of the Popular Assembly remain incomplete. On one side, they present the Assembly as a *teleological* outcome of the specific trajectory of the labor movement (Escóbar, 1984; Lora, 1972; Strengers, 1991) or as a *mature response* of the Bolivian proletariat in a political moment where the left in general responded to the progressive turn of Ovando and Torres' regimes with inertia (Zavaleta M., 1987). On the other side, authors have tried to explain the emergence of the Popular Assembly by emphasizing factors of the national and international political context, such as an attempt to unite the *Left* of the MNR (Klein, 2003), a solution to the failed alliance between Torres' government and workers (Jette, 1989; Klein, 2003; Lora, 1972), and an outcome of the weakness of Torres' government along with an increasing anti-imperialist sentiment. (Dunkerley, 1984)

From a wider perspective, Cajías (2001) combines structural factors with workers' trajectory and argues that the Popular Assembly represented the synthesis of historical accumulation of the Bolivian labor movement and was an outcome of workers'

disenchantment with the National Revolution of 1952. Because of the failure of the revolutionary project, the Bolivian proletariat returned to its own ideological guidelines and principles of action under what Cajías denominates "revolutionary syndicalism." (Cajías, 2001) According to the author, these principles entailed *independence* from the state apparatus and led the *Left* to project the Popular Assembly as an overseeing power organ, with the mission of solving *national, popular* and *workers'* problems. Thomas (2001), on his side, makes an effort to fill the gap in the literature by explaining how university students and workers' clandestine resistance tactics during Barrientos' regime allowed the construction of articulated response that crystallized after Ovando and during Torres' regimes into the idea of the Popular Assembly.

Evidence from political debates in the press and specific documents such as the *Thesis of Pulacayo* and the *Socialist Thesis* support these analyses, however, they remain incomplete. From a long-term perspective, the installation of the power organ of the proletariat was in fact an outcome of the combination of the negative experiences of the National Revolution of 1952, exacerbated by a crisis in the system of representative democracy, the repressive Barrientos regime and the military defeat of the *guerrilla foci* strategy. In the short term of the *democratic opening*, factors that explain its emergence relate to the COB's 4th Congress of May 1970 - with the outcome of the *Socialist Thesis* - , Torres' rise to power, the creation of the Working Class Political Command (*Comando Político de la Clase Trabajadora*), and the successive political victories on the streets against the attempts of conservative factions of the army to reach power.

CO-GOBIERNO, NATIONALIST ARMY AND THE FUNDAMENTAL CONTRADICTION

Some authors attribute the emergence of the Popular Assembly to the failure of Torres' proposal of *co-gobierno* (Jette, 1989; Klein, 2003; Lora, 1972). Only hours after

rising to power on October 7 of 1970, and while in the middle of making up his cabinet, Torres offered worker representatives from the COB first a third, and then half of the ministries of the new government. (Gallardo L., 1972) To avoid compromising their leadership and their *class independence*, proletarian leaders proposed a list of names of people they considered second order leaders. Torres, unconvinced of the weight of these representatives and their decision-making power, asked the newly formed Working Class Political Command¹⁰ to revise it on grounds of a possible revolt of military garrisons (Escóbar, 1984; Gallardo L., 1972; Sandóval R., 1979; 2005). The Political Command, a short-lived political organ with representatives of seven left-wing organizations, assumed political leadership and became the bridge that channeled demands from the left to the government. Once the government and workers successfully suffocated the first coup attempt led by army Colonels Hugo Banzer Suarez and Edmundo Valencia, on January 11, 1971, a *natural transition* took place, and months later the Political Command became the Popular Assembly (Lora, 1972).

In the background, but key to rejecting the *co-gobierno* offer, was workers' decision to preserve and protect their *class independence*, a guiding principle established in the *Thesis of Pulacayo* of 1946 and revived in the *Socialist Thesis* of 1970. The latter document explicitly demanded the *working class* avoid participating in democratic processes guided by the 'petit bourgeoisie', and also made references to the context of *democratic opening* and the *nationalist army*. (COB, 1970)

Due to Barrientos' repressive regime and Ovando's shifting policies, workers looked at the army with suspicion. By the time of the *democratic opening* there was

¹⁰ Formed by representatives of seven political organizations of the left: The Revolutionary Working Party (POR), the Communist Party of Bolivia (PCB), the National Left Revolutionary Party (PRIN), the Revolutionary Democratic-Christian Party (PDCR), the Spartacus Group –a scission from the Revolutionary Nationalist Movement (MNR) and the Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (PCML)

already a general feeling of discomfort with the army, labeled as “representative of the ideologies of the petit bourgeoisie” and as defender of the established order (Pablo Ramos, *El Diario*, June, 27, 1971, p.5). Torres suffered the consequences of this sentiment. Even though he tried to convince workers of his progressive stance, his soft hand when it came to ejecting conservative factions of the army from the institution and his origins in the Armed Forces (*Socialist Party*, *El Diario*, June 15, 1971 p.5), increased workers’ distrust preventing them from accepting the government in good faith. (Filemón Escóbar, *El Diario*, June 27, 1971, p.6) The antagonism, based on the ideological principle of *class independence*, and the specific experiences with the army in previous years, was clearly expressed in the debate around the *fundamental contradiction*, the process of defining the “us” and “them” of the struggle.

Criticizing Guillermo Lora’s position, those who supported Torres and his government argued that in *semi-colonial* countries like Bolivia, the *fundamental contradiction* placed the *oppressed nation* in opposition to *imperialism* rather than the *working class* against the *state* and *the army*. If this latter opposition was correct, then the working class would remain isolated, just as during Barrientos’ regime. (*Grupo Revolucionario Octubre*, in *El Diario*, June 8, 1971, p.4) From this position, an alliance between workers and the government was indispensable, but the rest of the left didn’t see things the same way. In a position supported by many other sectors (see *El Diario*, June 26, 1971 p.5; June 27, 1971 p.1; June 30, 1971 p.3), the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (MIR) argued that the *fundamental contradiction* was that of *workers* against *imperialism* and its *internal allies*, with the army amongst them. (*El Diario*, June 3, 1971 p.3) Then, Torres’ government played only the role of an intermediary (Filemón Escóbar in *El Diario*, June 27, 1971 p.1). In light of Banzer’s rise to power, later debates within the left coincided to accept that an alliance with Torres was indeed necessary

(Lora, 1972) and that the *fundamental contradiction* was one that opposed *workers* against *fascism*. (Escóbar, 1984)

Overall, then, the reasons that explain the rejection of the option of *co-gobierno* are intrinsically linked to the notion of *class independence*, as presented both in the *Thesis of Pulacayo* of 1946 and the *Socialist Thesis* of 1970. But, additionally, the negative experience of the National Revolution, when workers slowly handed over control of the state apparatus, and the later repressive regime of Barrientos, set up the army and Torres' government as enemies, or at least as allies not worthy of trust. In the view of the *left*, the proletariat was the leading force during the *democratic opening* period and its power should not be shared with other forces, but especially not with those that represented the interests of the *bourgeoisie*. (El Diario, 1971, June 6 p.7; June 20 pp.3,5)

DEFEATED GUERRILLA, CO-OPTED ELECTIONS

The memory of the Cuban Revolution was still present, and sectors from the left joined the political project of the Popular Assembly because of the armed defeats suffered in Ñancahuazú and Teoponte. Due to the strong impact of *guerrilla foci* doctrines of the revolution, leftist youths in Bolivia suffered two severe blows to their aspirations to achieve power through armed revolution with the defeat of Che Guevara in 1967 and of college students in Teoponte in 1970. In both cases, guerrilla movements had been broken down with relative ease before they achieved any of their objectives, except that of shaking up the national political scene and indirectly becoming a tool that allowed workers to overcome their political isolation. (Zavaleta M., 1987) Although the rhetoric of political parties such as the National Liberation Army (*Ejército de Liberación Nacional* – ELN) and the PCML remained close to and encouraged the guerrilla foci

ideals, workers emphatically rejected the possibility of an undercover armed insurrection. They did it because of their military inferiority, but also because of a skeptical attitude towards the way in which the guerrilla movements had affected workers' struggle. In June of 1967 mining workers gathered to define their support to Guevara (Soria G. et al., 2008), but by 1971 the view it was commonly accepted among workers that previous guerrilla movements compromised "the revolutionary course and facilitated the actions of the enemies in disorganizing the revolutionary forces". (El Diario, June 20, 1971, p.4)

Based on the experience of the period that followed to the National Revolution of 1952, workers and the *Left* rejected the party system and liberal-representative democracy. The MNR monopolized electoral contests from 1952 to 1964, when Barrientos' party, the Christian People's Movement (*Movimiento Popular Cristiano - MPC*) became predominant. (Klein, 2003) Workers observed *bourgeois democratic processes* that functioned by allowing the victory of *national populist* parties through patronage relations with the peasantry - a majority portion of the electorate in the country - and through fraudulent practices, more in the case of Barrientos. (Dunkerley, 1984)

To define the character of the Popular Assembly as distinct from a 'bourgeois parliament', workers pulled on the ideological principles of the *Socialist Thesis* of 1970, which emphatically rejected the *democratic processes and events* lead by the *bourgeoisie* (COB, 1970; El Diario, June 23, 1971 p.1) *Presencia*, the Catholic Church's newspaper, and the government, called on the Assembly to become recognized in a new Constitution (Hugo Torres, in El Diario, June 20, 1971 p.3) not only to legitimize it in the Bolivian political system, but also as a way for the government to gain access and control over it (Gallardo L., 1972). Torres' government aimed to turn the Popular Assembly into a *National Assembly*, and with that goal in mind created the popular political front, the Popular Revolutionary Alliance (*Alianza Popular Revolucionaria - APR*). (Gallardo L.,

1972) Left-wing and progressive intellectuals created the party in the Bolivian lowlands in mid-June of 1971 with the objective to gain representation within the Popular Assembly, and represent the majority of peasants in case of democratic elections. (El Diario, June 15, 1971 p.3) But, because of its little representation among political forces of the Left and the peasantry, the party ended up subsumed in isolation and with no impact on the political scenario at all (Gallardo L., 1972).

Dissent was also present within the left. Some authors point to the absence of a workers' political party to explain the failure of the Popular Assembly (Escóbar, 1984; Zavaleta M., 1987). It is not easy to accept or reject this argument, especially when considering the mobilization power of the COB. However, dissidence within the left was indeed evident and emerged in the sessions of the Popular Assembly when discussing the issue of *co-participación* in COMIBOL, or the problem of armament. (El Diario, June 23, 1971, p.1) In this context, the desire of new parties, such as the MIR and Socialist Party (PS), to become *the political party* of the proletariat (Socialist Party, El Diario, June 27, 1971, p.3), generated harsh responses from workers. Filemón Escóbar protested these parties' attempts to become the vanguard of the proletariat, saying "The petit bourgeois always declare themselves as saviors of the working class when they were never interested in creating cadres among the working class" (El Diario, June 27, 1971, p.1), thus demonstrating class and political differences with the new parties.

The problem of political representation was at the center of the framing tasks of the Popular Assembly. While avoiding the options of *democratic elections* and *guerrilla warfare* tactics, workers' attempted to keep their legitimacy within the left as the leading political force of the moment. The debate that helped to channel these objectives was that of *duality of powers*, useful to workers for many reasons, but especially because it gave them a narrative that predicted the outcomes of the political moment, placing them as the

most advanced political force, and allowing them to avoid any sort of discussion about democratic elections.

THE QUESTION OF RAISING DUALITY OF POWERS

Based on Trotsky's (1930, 2009) and Lenin's (1964) debate on the Russian Revolution, the Bolivian *Left* started debating if the existence of the Popular Assembly raised a moment of *duality of powers* or not. Although both Trotsky and Lenin considered that this moment emerged in revolutionary situations where achieving state power was the main objective between a ruling class and a class which challenges that rule, they differed on the scope and objects of analysis. While Trotsky attempted to provide a general model for revolutions, Lenin refers to the specific case of the Russian Revolution of 1917. Lenin argues that a *dual power* was a revolutionary dictatorship – a power based directly on a revolutionary seizure of state power by direct initiative of the people from below. It implies *replacing* the repressive apparatus and the official bureaucracy of the state with armies of workers and peasants and by the *direct rule of the people* through the *Soviets* of workers and peasants (Lenin, 1964). However the workers and peasants' is still an incipient power, because of their inability to impose their will and because of their lack of majority which in turn forces them to ask for concessions and to establish agreements with the Provisional Government. The triumph of the revolutionaries is achieved through the creation of a Communist Labor Party that helps them to gather more support from workers and peasants ranks (Lenin, 1964). Trotsky, on his side, understands *duality of powers* as a byproduct of a revolutionary moment where contradictions and conflicts between two classes that contend for absolute power emerge. It represents a situation of *double sovereignty* in which a subordinate class has concentrated a significant share of state power and challenges the power of a dominant class. If the state is the

representation and organization of a class rule, a revolution is the overthrow of that ruling class. (Trotsky, 1930, 2009)

Throughout and following the installation of the Popular Assembly, a part of the academic and political debate revolved around the question of whether the power organ represented or not a form of *duality of powers*. Its relevance had direct effects on the legitimacy of the proposal of *co-gobierno* in the state's mining company, COMIBOL, and in the way workers saw themselves vis-à-vis Torres' government. Despite critiques in the sense that the *co-participación* debate pulled the Assembly away from the objective of seizing power and that it only responded to miners' interests (El Diario, July 1, 2, 1971), mining leaders such as Filemón Escóbar replied that the *co-participación* in COMIBOL actually raised *duality of powers*, at the level of the state's mining company. (El Diario, July 1, 1971 p.1)

The question played both a mobilizing and ideological role that gave workers a narrative that projected the final outcome of the Popular Assembly on the basis of what happened in the Russian Revolution of 1917, *i.e. a proletarian dictatorship*. Only days before the Assembly started sessions an article in *El Diario* drew parallels with the process in the Eastern-European country in terms of the existence of two antagonistic powers, the *bourgeoisie* and the *proletariat*. (El Diario, June 19, 1971 p.2)

Hugo Torres, from the governmental Political Coordination Office, denied the existence of *duality of powers* at a conference on the Popular Assembly held at the Catholic University. Because of “the absence of two governments, one of the bourgeoisie that owns all the effective organs of power and an overseeing supplementary government incarnated in the *Soviet* of workers, deputies and soldiers of Petrograd”. (El Diario, June 21, 1971 p.2) Torres ended his remarks calling for the creation of a new Constitution that

regulated the Assembly and allowed the creation of a joint program between the government and the Popular Assembly.

Later debates on the Popular Assembly addressed the *duality of powers*' problem, trying to determine whether it was present or not during the process. Some argue that *duality* was present due to the very existence of the Bolivian proletariat (Lora, 1972), and because Bolivia, in 1971, was living a revolutionary conjuncture that opposed two real powers, workers on one side and the military on the other. (Strengers, 1991) On the contrary, some authors argue that in spite of a favorable moment for workers to successfully raise such *duality*, the Assembly only represented a *germ of power* (Escóbar, 1984) and because it depended on the government for its own existence (Zavaleta M., 1987), thus preventing a revolutionary situation from emerging.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

The Popular Assembly was the result of more than 25 years of workers' organization and politics that began with the creation of the National Miners Federation (FSTMB) in 1944. This work has shown how throughout the period from 1944 to 1971 the labor movement shifted its strategies, actions and support between two different ideologies: *Revolutionary Nationalism* and Socialism, framing each specific period into four master frames, *Sexenio*, *National Revolution*, *Restoration*, and *Democratic Opening*. Workers' objectives surrounding the idea of a socialist future sometimes included alliances with parties from the *bourgeoisie*, underground resistance tactics and, at times, blunt calls for the installation of a *Socialist* regime.

Through the application of an *ideology* and *framing* perspective it is possible to see the grievances workers expressed throughout their struggle, which otherwise would remained to be explained only as an outcome of structural factors. More importantly, the actions and strategies workers used when they held political and mobilization power and, conversely, when the state banned collective action, become clear. All of these experiences served as memory tags that, combined with ideological principles and the particular sequence of events of the period of *democratic opening*, translated later into Popular Assembly and defined its debates and outcomes.

Throughout this process workers synthesized their twenty-five years of experience, their ideological principles and the effect of the successive political victories of the period of *democratic opening* into five frames that also informed the installation of the Popular Assembly and provided meaning for rejecting other alternatives. Workers rejected joint management of the government (*co-gobierno*) with Torres, *democratic elections*, and didn't discuss the possibility of forming a *guerrilla foci*. They based their

actions and discourses on five frames specific to the moment of *democratic opening*: *justice, participation in the state apparatus, class independence, armed defense and social mobilization* and *anti-imperialism*. These frames were at the core of the *Socialist Thesis* of the COB which synthesized workers' trajectory and the political events of the period. In June 1971, all of these frames were placed under the ideology of Socialism, thus rejecting that of *Revolutionary Nationalism*, which was considered out-dated and an instrument of *delusion* (*Socialist Party* in *El Diario*, June 15, 1971:5) for the working class.

At the same time, workers and the left framed the Assembly under debates that addressed the problem of the *fundamental contradiction*, the definition of the enemies, and the possibility of raising *duality of powers* in an attempt to legitimize the Popular Assembly. Internally, this process had the effect of legitimizing the proletarian leadership in the eyes of political forces that aligned with the Assembly. Externally, it allowed workers and the left to attempt to convince the Bolivian society and the government of the Assembly's legitimacy.

In opposition to the MNR, a former ally, the conservative military, private businessmen, and the United States' presence in the country, workers attempted to make alliances with countries from the Socialist block and pushed the Torres government to do the same. An apparently favorable international scenario for socialism in neighboring countries also informed this process.

The Popular Assembly is understood in this work as an *abortive social revolution*. The attempts to create *social* and *power* institutions that supplanted the state's coercive and political apparatus, while controlling the main institution of its economic engine, COMIBOL, are an expression not only of the left's revolutionary intentions, but also of their transformative/revolutionary project. Because of the project's ultimate defeat at the

hands of conservative factions of the military, the Assembly was never able to achieve, or impose, social-revolutionary outcomes and objectives. However, the process still sheds light on the relationship between *ideologies, frames* and *historical events*, thus rejecting Skocpol's call for discarding ideologies in the study of social revolutions (Skocpol, 1979) or Sewell's argument for considering them as an independent structures (Sewell, 1985). The Popular Assembly provides a model in which *ideologies, framing tasks* and *historical events* define *collective action frames* that in the case of social mobilization affect specific actions, and in the case of social revolutions translate into the design of specific institutions, and political and social transformations. This work argues that it is not possible to understand the institutional designs and political shifts present in social revolutionary situations without analyzing the combination of *ideologies, frames* and *historical events*

The coup led by Banzer in August 1971 prevented the Popular Assembly from uniting for its second session in September of that year, marking the end of a process whose themes remain alive in Bolivia today. The demise of the Popular Assembly remains a sour memory for the Bolivian proletariat, which has never again organized to install Socialism as it did in 1971.

Appendix 1. Timeline of Historical Events. Bolivia, 1944-1971

	National Revolution		Presidency of Víctor Paz		Presidency of Luis Adolfo Siles		IV Congress of the COB Socialist Thesis
Creation of FSTMB		Presidency of Hernán Siles		Presidency of Gen. René Barrientos		Presidency of Gen. Alfredo Ovando	Presidency of Col. Hugo Banzer
1946			1962	1967		1970	
1944	1952	1956	1960	1964	1969	1971	
Thesis of Pulacayo		Break up of Labor Movement with MNR	workers cases	San Juan Massacre	Che Guevara Guerrilla	representatives elected themselves. Drivers representatives questioned because of the presence of owners – Only wage drivers should participate	Popular Assembly Presidency of Gen. J. J. Torres
						Teoponte Guerrilla	Petroleum workers contest the presence of ex-private petroleum workers
							Peasants ask for more representatives

	Political, social and military tasks	Popular Assembly will assume political and military direction of the masses in case of a coup. Response from the masses will be general strike and immediate occupation of work places	
	Bylaws and constituent bases	Debating bylaws approved	
	Commissions	Seven commissions set up	
Day 2 Wednesday, June 23	Homage to victims of <i>San Juan Massacre</i>	Popular Assembly demands Torres' government to clarify these killings and prosecute those responsible	Workers didn't get to approve the PA statutes
	Social mobilization		Banking workers should not continue mobilization
	Power commission reports on teachers, drivers and petroleum-workers cases		Petroleum workers leave because ex-private petroleum workers were allowed to stay in the Popular Assembly
Day 3 Thursday, June 24	Election of <i>Presidium</i> (governing body) representatives	President and 1 st Vice-President elected	Many representatives leave the session. Popular Assembly ends with no quorum. Sessions suspended until next day Independent peasants claim second vice-presidency
	Bylaws and constituent bases	Statutes approved	

Day 4 Friday, June 25	Election of <i>Presidium</i> (governing body) representatives.	2 nd Vice-president, secretaries and <i>vocales</i> elected	
	Resolution in support of activities of Oscar Zamora and UCAPO		Sessions suspended after debate around resolution in favor of Oscar Zamora and UCAPO. Mining and Industry Workers representatives censor attempt of Departmental Workers Central (COD) from Tarija and Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (PCML) to generate resolution in favor of UCAPO
	Analysis of Col. Reque Terán's comments about San Juan Massacre (June 22, 1967)	Rejection of Col. Reque Terán, Armed Forces Commander call for workers to forgive San Juan Massacre	
	Visit by delegates of metallurgic industry commission from the USSR		
Day 5 Saturday, June 26	Departmental Workers Central (COD) and Marxist-Leninist Communist Party (PCML) from Tarija asks for a resolution in favor of the activities of Oscar Zamora and UCAPO	Resolution against any sort of repression or persecution against any person or organization involved in the struggle for national liberation and Socialism	PCB, miners and industry workers rejected resolution in favor of Oscar Zamora and UCAPO
	Commissions' representatives	Election of representatives of each of the seven commissions	

Day 6 Sunday, June 27	No sessions		Sessions suspended – No quorum
Day 7 Monday, June 28	Debate on <i>El Diario</i> officially being recognized by the government as a co-operative owned by its workers	Resolution celebrating government's decision to recognize <i>El Diario</i> as a co-operative	
	Presidium and commissions representatives	Presidium and commissions representatives sworn in to their positions.	
	San Juan Massacre (June 22, 1967), death of Isaac Camacho (July 30, 1967)		Security and Defense commission reports on San Juan Massacre and death of mining leader Isaac Camacho and Popular Tribunals. Security and Defense commission's reports sent back to for review after considering them insufficient.

	Popular Tribunals	Popular Assembly will oversee problems related to: a) Criminal and economic damages against the state, universities and trade union property b) Delivery of natural resources and subjugation of national sovereignty c) Workers' massacres, students and anti-popular repressions, torture and murder of workers and union leaders and revolutionaries d) Malfeasance of public officials in the judicial processes to mislead investigations e) Organization of counterrevolutionary plots	
	Representatives participation		Socialist Party (PS-1) asks for incorporation to PA POR (Amadeo Vargas) asks for incorporation to PA
Day 8 Tuesday, June 29	Joint management (<i>co-participación</i>) of the state mining company COMIBOL.	Report from miners about economic situation of COMIBOL	
Day 9 Wednesday, June 30	Joint management (<i>co-participación</i>) of the state mining company COMIBOL.		PCML, PCB and university students against joint management

Day 10 Thursday, July 1	Joint management (<i>co-participación</i>) of the state mining company COMIBOL.	Popular Assembly decides to mobilize workers until government accepts joint management of state mining company COMIBOL	
	Government's offer to El Diario newspaper becomes a co-operative	Creation of Ideological Orientation Committee for El Diario	
	Representatives participation	Socialist Party, POR (Amadeo Vargas) and Postal Workers National Federation, accepted	Rejection of Liga Socialista Revolucionara because of lacking enough documents
	Demand for creation of Institute of Agronomy in rural town of Pocoata (Potosí)		
Day 11 Friday, July 2	Closing session	Popular Assembly will resume sessions beginning on September 7, 1971	Juan Lechín absent almost the entire session. Didn't participate of closing event.
	Anti-imperialist measures	Resolution to fight for ejection of CIA and FBI from the country.	
	Reports on Armed Militias, Popular Tribunals, and Unique University		All reports from commissions postponed until second round of sessions
	Occupation of Chané-Bedoya farm	Support to peasants' occupation of Chané-Bedoya farm in Santa Cruz	

	Death of widow of former Che Guevara guerrilla fighter	Scholarships for all four of their children to study in socialist countries. University students and COB in charge.	
	Report from President of CNSS (State's health insurance company)	Resolution calling for rationalization and restructuration of the institution	Report from CNSS director sent to Social Issues Commission

Appendix 3. List of Worker Unions and Political Organizations in the Popular Assembly. Bolivia, 1971

Worker Unions

Colonizer peasants
Construction
Cooperative peasants
Drivers
Flour
Independent Block
Industry
Mining
Mining co-operatives
Peasants
Petroleum
Railway

Middle-Class unions and Organizations

Banking workers
Broadcasting
Graphics (Newspapers)
Journalists
Professionals
Teachers (urban and rural)
University students

Political Parties

APR – Alianza Popular Revolucionaria
MIR – Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria
MNR – Comando Laboral
MNR – Espartaco
MNR – Movimiento Nacionalista Revolucionario
MNR – Siles Zuazo
PCB – Partido Comunista de Bolivia (Mosú)
PCML – Partido Comunista Marxista-Leninista (Pekín)
PDCR – Partido Demócrata Cristiano Revolucionario
POR (Lora) – Partido Obrero Revolucionario
POR (Moscoso)
POR (Vargas)
PRIN – Partido Revolucionario de Izquierda Nacional
PS – Partido Socialista

Appendix 4. List of commissions and number of representatives in the Popular Assembly. Bolivia, 1971

Commissions of the Popular Assembly

Commissions	Union / Organization	Number of Rep.
Political Issues	Miners	2
	Industry	1
	Graphic (Newspapers)	1
	Railway	1
	University students	1
	Peasants	1
	Teachers	1
	Drivers	1
	Political Parties (Each)	1
	Total	
Economic	Mining	2
	Industry	1
	Railway	1
	Construction	1
	Petroleum	1
	Flour	1
	Banking	1
	University students	1
	Mining co-operatives	1
	Total	
Social Issues	Mining	2
	Industry	1
	Railway	1
	Construction	1
	Petroleum	1
	Graphic (Newspapers)	1
	Teachers	1
	Journalists	1
	Peasants	1
	Banking	1
	Total	

Education and culture	Mining	1
	Industry	1
	Construction	1
	Flour	1
	Graphic (Newspapers)	1
	Teachers	1
	University students	1
	Professionals	1
	Broadcasting	1
Total		9
Peasant-Agrarian	Miners	2
	Industry	2
	Peasants	2
	COB	1
	Construction	1
	Cooperative peasants	1
	Colonizer peasants	1
Total		10
Security and Defense	Industry	2
	Mining	1
	Construction	1
	Petroleum	1
	Railway	1
	COB	1
	Street vendors	1
	University students	1
	Peasants	1
	Drivers	1
Total		11
Power	Miners	2
	Industry	1
	Construction	1
	Railway	1
	Peasants	1
	University students	1
Total		7
Ideological Orientation Council for El Diario	COB – National Executive Committee	1
	El Diario Cooperative	1
	Graphic (Newspapers)	1
	Industry	1
	Miners	1
	Press	1
University students	1	
Total		7

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