

POLITICAL IDEOLOGIES IN ACTION ...



MORALES AND COCALERO MOVEMENT

EVENTS: Like many nations, Bolivia underwent a series of neoliberal reforms in the 1980s. Part of its reforms included a partnership with the United States in the War on Drugs, with the Bolivian government agreeing to eradicate the cultivation of coca, the plant from which cocaine is produced. Coca has been cultivated in Bolivia for 8,000 years and is of great spiritual and cultural significance to the indigenous peoples of the nation, who make up 20% of Bolivia. Evo Morales, an indigenous activist, soon gained prominence by organizing a campaign of resistance amongst coca growers, known as the *cocaleros*. Morales upheld the coca leaf as a symbol of Andean culture that was being threatened by a new American global imperialism and the Bolivian elite. However, Morales' movement soon expanded to a broad anti-neoliberal agenda, including campaigns against water privatization and natural gas exploitation. Soon Morales' movement became a major force in Bolivian politics, and Morales was elected Bolivia's first indigenous president in 2006, holding office for the next 14 years.

SIGNIFICANCE: Morales' movement can be considered part of the *marela rosa* (pink tide) which swept across Latin America in the 1990s and 2000s. As nations democratized after decades of military rule, left-wing governments promising greater equality were elected in many countries, often in the wake of neoliberal reforms that had left many of the poor worse

off. Central to the uniqueness of Morales' movement however is *indigenismo*, which challenges traditional nationalist ideology and sees indigenous culture, rather than Hispanic, as central to the identity of the nation. Morales rejected the modern Bolivian state as a racist colonial construct and sought to reinvent the country as 'plurinational' – a pluralist state made up of many nations and peoples, each with their own culture and sovereignty.

Morales' movement adopted socialist ideas to guide its economic and social platform, looking primarily to tackle widespread inequality in Bolivia through the redistribution of its income from resource extraction. Yet significantly, these ideas too were fused with indigenous and traditional concepts, taking the communitarian style of organization in indigenous Bolivian communities as a blueprint for a 'socialism from below.' Moreover, Morales has invoked the colonialism of the past when campaigning for the *cocaleros* and argued that their movement against globalization and neoliberalism is merely an extension of their people's long-running struggle against foreign domination.

Socialism, indigenous nationalism, and a hint of populism promised much for many disaffected groups in Bolivia, from the working poor to rural farmers, and Morales has attracted a broad range of ideologies united in their fight against oppression and neoliberal policies, including anarchist, Marxist, and social democratic activists.