

# **BOLIVIA - A Country that Stopped Being a Syndrome and Became a Phenomenon**

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*A decade ago, Bolivia was the most impoverished and despised South American country in the region. Its neighbors from near and far looked at it with disdain and contempt. As if dealing with a “sick people”, they studied the measures necessary so that “the bolivian syndrome” didn’t spread like a pandemic across the continent.*

This impoverished and pillaged country of around eight million inhabitants was considered one of “savage, restless Indians”, spread out over a territory of more than a million square kilometers. In 2005, the Bolivian Gross Domestic Product (GDP) didn’t reach 10 billion dollars (coming mostly from private businesses). Its Net International Reserves (NIR) barely passed 150 million dollars. More than half of its population scraped by on one dollar a day. Child malnutrition consumed more than 60% of kids under five years old.

It is an illiterate country, where about 40% of the population look at books as millions of nonsensical ants. It is a champion and runner up in political corruption, on an international level. Its rulers, loyal to foreign interests, each October, shamelessly made their luxurious international tours to beg handouts, with hat in hand, in order to pay off their own salaries and bonuses as public employees. Bolivia, until then, was an impossible country, where the mythical curse of Sisyphus had been brought to a permanent reality.

Of that neoliberal Bolivia, almost all natives were ashamed. Those who couldn’t find meaning in a senseless country, opted for the Bolivian stampede towards the foreigner. But, along with foreigners, the curse of “being Bolivian” followed some to exile. In Argentina, the Europeanized racists called them “pieces of shit”. In Spain, in 2008, in the setting of an investigation made of Bolivian immigrants, many of them were ashamed to call themselves Bolivians. Not without reasonable cause.

The individual and collective psychology of that people has been buried in such contempt and humiliation. Unrest, misery, hunger, homelessness, illiteracy, debt, corruption, and backwardness were the adjectives used by corporate board members in business information to define this Andean country.

But in just eight years, this decrepit syndromic country completely transformed to a regional and world phenomenon. Not only because its economy grew 6.8% (while the world remained in a recession), but rather because this defeated people rose from the ashes and revitalized in record time.

Its national GDP has practically tripled (In actuality, 31 billion dollars, a good part of that under government control). Its NIR passed 14.5 billion dollars. Foreign debt, in 2005, represented 52% of GDP, now the same debt is 17% of GDP. More than one million of people rose out of poverty (extreme poverty was reduced from 38% to 21%). Illiteracy has been vanquished. School age kids, instead of going to work, go to class (a tax on books was removed). The government accounts always close with surplus (2013 ended with a surplus of 4.5% of GDP), because of this the government included the luxury of increasing minimum wage by more than 300%, while also of establishing payment of a double bonus to all workers.

These changes weren’t done by angels, or devils. They were made by the collective organized and mobilized presences of the natives, peasants and workers. Bolivians did it. They never lost faith in themselves, nor did they renounce their honor. To them, it was necessary to count on the very political process to build local/national power, and undertake the foundation of the Multinational State. The latter

mentioned is a constituent dominated process.

In order to make Bolivia a country of hope, it wasn't enough to choose an indigenous native as president, but rather make management, transparency, work ethic, and austerity fundamental virtues of the current ruler. *Evo is the president that works hardest, but asks for the lowest salary in the region!* In Guatemala and Honduras, Siamese twins of Bolivia in its recent misery, the rulers gain between 12 to 13 thousand dollars in monthly salary. Evo Morales opts for a salary of little more than two thousand dollars per month.

The Bolivian government returned honor to the Bolivian people, not only nationalizing hydrocarbon fuel and recovering the public privatized companies (more than twenty), rather, above all, redistributing among the population the economic surplus generated and collected by the government, amplifying and empowering the internal economy. Like never before in its history, not only does Bolivia enjoy an exemplary economic capacity, but also has moved toward a healthy participating democracy.

None of this would have been possible if Evo Morales hadn't been the sitting leader who kicked out the United States embassy and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) from Bolivia. He imposed his authority on the country's economic, political and ecclesiastical elite. If Evo hadn't taken on these and other "insolent" determinations, in actuality, Bolivia would be the Guatemala or the Honduras of South America, countries where the states practically implode and its impoverished survivors wipe themselves out, without laws, or authorities.

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Translated by **Riley Pentico**.