

Corrupt mayor killed in Aymara uprising

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On Monday 26 April, news arrived in Lima of a popular uprising in the Peruvian town of Ilave, in the province of Collao as a result of the refusal of the electoral authorities to sack the local mayor for corruption, as demanded by the local population.

The local people had already paralysed the city for 25 days. But last Monday the mayor and his officials were taken prisoner by about 15.000 demonstrators who lynched the mayor and paraded his body by through the streets of the town as a lesson to the corrupt authorities, before throwing it underneath the bridge that separates Ilave from Bolivia.

Later, the demonstrators marched on the police headquarters, another symbol of corruption and injustice, and tried to lynch to the police inside who spent all their ammunition trying to repel the onslaught and killing four of the attackers in the process. Immediately from Lima 200 special police were sent into Ilave to regain control of the town with the purpose of quashing the rebellion.

The symbol of the state (in this case the municipal administration and its mayor) was attacked by the masses that no longer have any faith in a local government that ever since the inauguration of the first semi colonial republican, government has oppressed the indigenous populations.

The Aymara town, from which the Inca empire originates, occupies part of the plateau that spans between Bolivia, Peru and a small part of Chile. The Aymara language is spoken by almost 1.3 million people, and they share many things in common, including a common history and culture. Separated by capricious borders drawn up by the leaders of the Hispano-American republics in the Andes, today there is a growing sentiment among the demonstrators that their future best in being annexed by Bolivia ? such is the indifference and worse of the Peruvian state to their condition.

The mass media, especially the television, have tried to portray the rebels as disoriented wild animals when showing the images of the beating up of the mayor. Some even made the racist slur that Aymara possess a special gene that predisposes them to violence. In any event all believe that nothing justifies the violence and that all Aymara grievances and demands can me met through non-violent, Ghandi-style protests.

But the truth is that towns like Ilave that fight against oppression and the injustice have the right to refuse to acknowledge the legitimacy of local authorities when they betray their promises, and seek to get them out. Not only that, but the local people must be in constant control of the local budget and democratically decide on their actions.

We must always support their just demands. The Toledo central government in Lima is scared that their vicious neoliberal policies ? backed by the United States ? will cause more and more uprisings such as we have witnessed in the last month in Ilave. In early May a great march of coca farmers arrives in Lima which demands the government drop plans ? insisted upon by the USA ? to eradicate it way of making a living and its culture.

Today opinion polls give Toledo and his government an approval rating of 7 per cent. Meanwhile, workers in the public health sector are entering their second week of a strike amid a background of mounting serious accusations of corruption in public sector organisations. Ilave has given us an example of how to deal with Toledo!

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