

Resistance and the Arts of Domination

Miners and the Bolivian State

by

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The ever-growing scholarly literature on resistance—closely associated with the now-classic works by James Scott (1976; 1985; 1990)—has consistently focused on the historical conjunctures explaining the emergence and consolidation of dominant social orders and their ideological, economic, political, and cultural underpinnings, the mix of coercion and “consent” in varying historical contexts that accounts for more or less effective state rule and hegemony, and, especially, the contexts and processes within and through which social groups creatively contest the dominating and seemingly totalizing power of states, elites, and other power holders. There is a growing realization that seemingly dominant ideologies¹ are rarely if ever as pervasive as they seem to be, that behind the apparent acquiescence to state and elite rule and domination are alternative visions, hopes, and expectations and a deep questioning of existing politico-economic arrangements and their ideological underpinnings, and that the power of the state and dominant classes, while very real, is rarely all-encompassing and hegemonic projects are often quite fragile and fragmentary. Subordinate groups are constantly questioning and challenging “the terms of their subordination,” do not engage in “willing, even enthusiastic complicity” in that subordination (Scott, 1990: 4, 86), and have available to them the opportunities and repertoire—cultural, political, economic, social, and ideological—to challenge it. The resistance literature has amply documented the manifold ways that subordinate, marginalized, or otherwise disposed but not entirely powerless social groups have (more or less) successfully confronted, maneuvered around, checked, challenged, skirted, or otherwise undermined closely overlapping forms of domination (Scott, 1976; 1985; 1990; Nash, 1988; Colburn, 1989; Leong, 1992; Gutmann, 1993; Reed-Danahay, 1993; Guha, 1994; Roseberry, 1994; Ortner, 1995).

My purpose in this article is not to tread over familiar terrain—either to dwell on the goals and achievements of resistance scholarship or to reiterate the many critiques that have been leveled at it (see especially Abu-Lughod,

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1990; Gutmann, 1993; Ortner, 1995). Nor do I intend to provide yet another example of successful resistance. Rather, my purpose is to suggest that we center more of our efforts on *ineffective* and *unsuccessful* resistance in order to understand better the contexts in which successful resistance can be achieved. More specifically, I focus on the limits of resistance by Bolivian miners to the neoliberal hegemonic project currently being pursued in Bolivia as part and parcel of what the Harvard economist Jeffrey Sachs (1995) has called the contemporary global thrust of “consolidating” capitalism. I focus particularly on how, why, and in what politico-economic and ideological conjunctures the vast majority of Bolivian miners employed by the state mining company Corporación Minera de Bolivia (Bolivian Mining Corporation—COMIBOL) were largely unable to defend their livelihood, communities, and work sites—the material underpinnings of their culture—against a powerful onslaught by the Bolivian state during the latter part of the 1980s and early 1990s. I try to explain how and why the best-organized and most militant, ideologically cohesive, and class-conscious segment of Bolivia’s working class—one with a deeply entrenched oppositional culture, in many ways a truly counterhegemonic movement—was so quickly overwhelmed by the state and allied economic elites. By focusing on the *limits to resistance* I hope to shed light on the intertwined national and international configurations of power that affect the relationships between resistance, ideology, hegemony, and state formation in Bolivia and elsewhere. Although a great deal has been written on successful resistance, Gutmann (1993: 80) has perceptively asked, “Where are the historical successes?” The increasing dominance of neoliberalism in Latin America—the localized politico-economic and ideological embodiment of the reconstitution of global capitalism—and the remaking of state apparatuses that such a reconstruction entails suggest that Gutmann’s question should not be taken lightly. Indeed, the tragic fate of Bolivian miners, as well as that of their counterparts in England in the aftermath of their (in)famous 1984-1985 uprising, suggests that it is perhaps time to redirect our attention from “Domination and the Arts of Resistance” to “Resistance and the Arts of Domination.”

MINERS, CULTURE, AND HEGEMONY

The historical and ethnographic record clearly reveals, again and again, evidence of miners organized into tightly knit and highly organized social groupings and communities. It also points to the fact that miners have classically displayed a deeply entrenched and passionate sense of solidarity, masculinity, and historical consciousness, an equally pervasive awareness of

class identity and exploitation, and “moral” claims to work, their work sites, and the product of their labor. For example, Crowley (1997: 133), talking about the Russian and Ukrainian mining uprisings in the late 1980s, stresses miners’ “strong sense of exploitation—a sense that they were not justly paid for the product of their labor.” Richards, in his study of the great English miners’ strike of 1984-1985, tells us of the “powerful sense of history [which] underpinned the fierce resistance put up by miners when their livelihoods and communities were threatened,” a resistance bolstered by a “shared history of living and working in one place” (1996: 32-33). And Klubock claims that Chilean copper miners’ “ties of solidarity were reinforced by tight links between the mining community and the mine” (1997: 6). But the awareness of class identity and exploitation and historical consciousness is perhaps most clearly conveyed by the statement by a British miner just before the also unsuccessful 1984-1985 strike (Corrigan and Sayer, 1985: 181):

You know about our country and how all the grandest young lads go to Eton and Harrow and get it banged into their heads that they are the leading class and they must keep it that way. Well our young lads are getting good lessons on the [picket] line too. They’re learning what free enterprise is all about, and who makes the laws and why they are made and what the police are for. They learn this on their own from experience and they don’t need any undisciplined smart ass from London to tell them how things are.

These particular features of miners’ culture—although by no means unique to them—have emerged from distinct productive and material contexts, such as physical isolation and dependence on a single employer, the social insularity arising from occupational homogeneity, the rigid division of labor, the communal character of social relationships, constant conflict between managers and miners, and dangerous work (Richards, 1996: 17-18). These have also constituted the bedrock of enduring oppositional cultural and social practices. Klubock, for example, notes that Chilean copper miners historically expressed “their sense of dignity in a rebellious culture of insubordination,” displaying a “combative” and “unruly and rebellious” work culture (1996: 440, 445) and a “culture of opposition to company authority” (1997: 5). Similar examples can be drawn from other historical and ethnographic studies. In Bolivia, for instance, June Nash reminds us (1979: 2), miners “have the reputation of being the most revolutionary segment of the working class.” In some of Bolivia’s major mining centers it is not uncommon to see, prominently displayed, a statue of a miner with a rifle in his left hand and a drill in his right (Crabtree, Duffy, and Pearce, 1987: 58-59). Indeed, the social history of miners, in Bolivia and elsewhere, belies hegemony as acceptance—an identification with or of their subordination.² It is,

however, quite correct, I think, to suggest that they have been *disciplined* and made to conform in a variety of ways and that both the nature of this domination and their strategies of resistance have been incomplete.

BOLIVIAN MINING AND THE EMERGENCE OF AN OPPOSITIONAL CULTURE

Shortly after the Spanish conquest of the Andes in the early 1500s, silver and later tin mining—concentrated in the highland Departments of Oruro and Potosí—quickly emerged as the bedrock of Bolivia’s economy, and they remained so throughout its history. The consolidation of state mining during the colonial and early republican periods rested primarily on access to a continuous stream of labor, and the forced labor draft (*mita*)—modeled on pre-Hispanic patterns of labor tribute within and between indigenous peasant communities and the Incan state—became the major mechanism for securing this labor (Murra, 1978; Stern, 1982; Cole, 1985; Larson, 1988; Tandeter, 1993). The *mita* was consistently resisted and challenged by peasant communities forced to surrender a substantial part of their male adult population (many of whom never returned to their communities): those eligible to be drafted were concealed from census takers, and community leaders often challenged the *mita* in court. Moreover, those peasant miners who eventually did reach the Oruro and Potosí mines were hardly model disciplined workers, and tardiness, absenteeism, ore thefts, and other forms of labor indiscipline plagued the mining camps (Tandeter, 1981). These concerted efforts against labor drafts slowly but surely hampered state mining operations.

In fact, many of the “rituals of resistance” (cf. Gutmann, 1993) that Nash (1979) has so eloquently described for contemporary Bolivian miners were probably well entrenched in the everyday work culture of Bolivian mining districts by the eighteenth century. Colonial and postcolonial records are full of laments about the difficulties of securing adequate amounts of labor (the so-called labor shortage), theft of ores, violence against mine managers, heavy drinking (particularly during religious celebrations or fiestas), absenteeism, and widespread “indiscipline”—clear signs of a deep historical tradition of resistance. Moreover, large-scale labor disturbances (*motines*) begin to surface in the early nineteenth century, often sparked by attempts by private mine owners to reduce wages in response to declining mineral prices (Tandeter, 1981; Rodríguez Ostría, 1991: 32-52). These apprehensions of an unruly workforce—which parallel those expressed by Chilean mine owners attempting to control their workers in the early 1900s (Klubock, 1996)—continued well into the twentieth century. However, they were now heightened

by alarms over labor agitation and sabotage in response to violations of “customary rights”—especially the moral right to work (Mitre, 1981: 155; 1993: 231-248, 84; Rodríguez Ostría, 1991: 106-116). The founding of company stores (*pulperías*)—also opposed by miners—was one attempt to discipline unruly miners (Mitre, 1993: 239). (We shall see that in the 1980s Bolivian miners would also insist on a moral right to work and that cutting off provisions to *pulperías* was one way the state undermined their resistance.)

The first miners’ unions were organized in the early 1900s, and by the 1930s union organizing and labor agitation was in full swing (see Mitre, 1993; Rodríguez Ostría, 1991). In 1944 the Federación Sindical de Trabajadores Mineros de Bolivia (Federation of Mine Workers of Bolivia—FSTMB) was organized. After the historic 1952 revolution—when the mining and landowning oligarchy was swept away by a populist coalition of middle-class sectors, mine and urban workers, and peasants and major mining concerns were converted into the state mining company COMIBOL (Malloy, 1970; Dunkerley, 1984)—the FSTMB, whose phalanxes of armed miners were crucial for the revolution’s success, came to wield enormous influence on the labor and political scene. It became “the most powerful single group in the immediate configuration of power and interest” (Malloy, 1970: 187).

Furthermore, through the FSTMB Bolivian miners have consistently and openly employed a radical, counterhegemonic discourse and deeply questioned the existing social order through various “theses” that, not unexpectedly, have been viewed by elites and the state as a direct and potent political threat. For example, in 1946, just two years after its founding, the FSTMB in its classic Thesis of Pulacayo declared Bolivia “a backward capitalist country . . . only a link in the world capitalist chain” that had to be freed of the “imperialist yoke,” called the state a “docile instrument in the hands of the exploiting class,” and asserted the “right to work” (FSTMB, 1992: 5, 13, 20). Likewise, in the 1963 Thesis of Colquiri it denounced the government “as anti-worker, as a servant of imperialism, and as a traitor to the ideals and interests of the . . . people” and claimed the right to “use violence to satisfy the just demands of the proletariat” (1992: 78, 85). This powerful discourse has been paralleled and nurtured by their fierce and almost legendary resistance—symbolic, economic, and political and bolstered by indigenous, pre-Hispanic rituals and belief systems—to attempts to close mines, slash salaries, or reduce their ranks. It is no exaggeration to claim that for well over three-quarters of a century the Bolivian mining and state elites have been locked in a continuous and often fierce struggle with miners, the most vociferous and oppositional segment of Bolivian labor, who again and again have endured massive retaliation (Nash, 1979; 1988; Taussig, 1980; Mitre, 1981; 1993;

Platt, 1981; Rodríguez Ostría, 1991). It is therefore “no accident,” as Crabtree, Duffy, and Pearce (1987: 61-62) note, that “there are military barracks close to all the major mining centres in Bolivia.” It is partly in this context, marked by ongoing, deeply rooted antagonism between miners and the state, that the latter moved decisively against the FSTMB in late 1985 and 1986.

The moves against the miners had been preceded by a 30-year-long assault that had slowly weakened the union. This offensive was paralleled by a remarkably consistent discourse by state managers and international consultants since the late 1950s stressing its lack of profitability and drain on the national treasury—a discourse clearly intended to legitimate the undermining of COMIBOL and FSTMB’s power. Labor “anarchy” has consistently been “singled out by the various official studies of Bolivian mining as the one factor most responsible for COMIBOL’s poor economic performance” (Burke, 1987: 11). As Burke has stressed, COMIBOL’s profits and losses were understated and overstated “at will,” it “produced far more minerals than the private mines with about the same amount of labor” (1987: 11, 18), and mine closures failed to restore its profitability. Between the 1950s and the 1980s military and civilian governments grappled with COMIBOL’s (particularly labor) “problem” by closing mines and cutting salaries and the workforce—all of which were met with fierce opposition. In addition, these attempts were paralleled by systematic policies—such as securing a consistent flow of (primarily international) capital and leasing out rich mineral deposits and mines—that bolstered the economic and political prominence of private mining concerns. As a result, by the late 1970s private mining “became the dominant sector in Bolivian mining” (Burke, 1987: 30-31), eclipsing COMIBOL in production (Gillis and Peterson, 1978). Furthermore, COMIBOL’s contribution to state coffers systematically declined, and private mining came to employ a large percentage of all mining labor (Gillis and Peterson, 1978: 33).

THE RECONSTITUTION OF THE STATE AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF CAPITAL

The 1985-1986 attack on the state mining company and miners’ union cannot be fully understood in terms of this long history of struggle. It also must be considered in the context of a far-reaching parallel endeavor to restructure and consolidate the state and capitalism in Bolivia in the early 1980s, an expression of the trend toward a “global” capitalist economy (Dirlik, 1994; Diskin and Koehlin, 1994; Hojman, 1994; Marini, 1994), a “globali-

zation of world capitalism” (S. R. Gill, 1993: 278), or a “global factory” (Rothstein and Blim, 1992). This undertaking is most strikingly represented by the so-called neoliberal reforms that have become the dominant politico-economic enterprise in Latin America and elsewhere. In Latin America at least, “so completely do the free market ideas of neo-liberalism dominate the current . . . debate that opposing ideas are increasingly treated with the bemused condescension usually reserved for astrological charts and flat-earth manifestos” (Green, 1995: 15). Despite the rhetorical emphasis placed on the all-important role of the market, the reconstitution of global capitalism appears to demand, as Mauceri (1995) has argued for Peru, a far more organizationally and ideologically powerful and repressive though less economically interventionist state. Neoliberalism in Latin America (and elsewhere) is predicated on the assumption that a strong state is needed for the “invisible hand” to do its job adequately. The surge of academic interest during the mid-to-late 1980s, precisely when neoliberal reforms were gaining a foothold in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, in the power and autonomy of the state and the acrimonious debates between proponents of the state-centered, instrumentalist, and structuralist viewpoints are no mere coincidence.³

In Bolivia, neoliberalism as a politico-economic undertaking intended to reconstitute the state and capitalism emerged in the early 1980s in the context of a deep social, political, and economic crisis marked by runaway inflation and food shortages and heightened social and political conflict. By mid-1985 chaos had engulfed Bolivia as workers, peasants, and capitalists squared off against each other in a hostile “class stalemate” (Pastor, 1992: 7), and all faced an increasingly paralyzed state unable to control inflation, appease conflicting social demands, or ensure social order (Malloy and Gamarra, 1988: 157-200; Morales and Sachs, 1990: 186-187; Malloy, 1991). It is within this “crisis of social domination”—“a situation in which disruptions in the capital accumulation process are accompanied by lower class behavior that undermines the social relations upon which the capitalist order is built” (Conaghan and Malloy, 1994: 124)—that the new government in late 1985 imposed its now famous neoliberal program, the New Economic Policy (NEP).

Viewing the NEP as simply a program for stabilizing the economy would not only prevent us from capturing the fundamentally *political* dimension of this historic undertaking but also limit our ability to understand its role in consolidating capitalism in Bolivia, a project to which miners were an obstacle. The NEP was above all a last-ditch effort by the elites to avert politico-economic anarchy and state collapse. Former President (and Minister of Planning in 1985) Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada was quite clear what the NEP

stood for when he stated that “rather than a strictly economic program the NEP is a political plan that aims at reestablishing principles that are fundamental to the functioning of the Republic and without which we run a grave risk of following a path of national state disintegration” (quoted in Morales, 1994: 134).

In an even more dramatic statement illustrating the dread of impending state collapse and ensuing anarchy (quoted in Conaghan and Malloy, 1994: 144), he said,

One comes to the conclusion that the state is practically destroyed. The fundamental institutions of the state’s productive apparatus have been feudalized, corruption has been generalized and is being institutionalized, and the mechanisms of oversight have stopped operating. In this context, the state is unarmed and lacks the capacity to execute and implement any economic policy that the government proposes to put into practice. Therefore, the first political goal consists of reestablishing the authority of the state over society.

Furthermore, Bolivia’s Ministry of Planning has also recently stated how important it was to get rid of “an obsolete State . . . in charge of a dynamic reality, of a country that aspire[d] to be modern, vigorous, and strong” (Ministerio de Planeamiento y Coordinación, 1993: 101). Thus, facing a serious social threat from “below,” a key political objective of the NEP has been to “arm” an “obsolete state” and reestablish its control over a (supposedly) weak, lethargic, fragmented, and disintegrating society that nevertheless wanted to be “modern, vigorous, and strong.” (The use of these masculine metaphors is neither coincidental nor inconsequential; Corrigan and Sayer [1985: 4-5] have stressed their importance in state consolidation.)

An increasingly powerful state attempts to achieve a high degree of vertical and horizontal ideological cohesion—a unity of purpose and goals and a clearly demarcated chain of command throughout its different components, many far removed from direct elite supervision and control (see Migdal, 1988: 209-210). For such ideological cohesion to develop would require the achievement by segments of the state apparatus of some degree of relative autonomy from competing class or intraclass interests attempting to “capture” local and regional foci of state decision making for their own ends. A strong, autonomous state “must be under the control of a cohesive political-administrative elite that is capable of defending its interests in terms that do not coincide with any single class interest” (Conaghan, 1988: 74). Other writers (e.g., Nelson, 1990; Hojman, 1994; Mauceri, 1995) have also suggested that a cohesive cadre of well-trained and disciplined technocrats is critical for successfully implementing neoliberal market reforms in Latin America. In

fact, crucial for the remarkable success and continuity of NEP policies and the equally striking political stability and cohesiveness of the Bolivian state since mid-1985 has been the emergence of a corps of well-trained (often in the United States) and ideologically cohesive bureaucrats at the middle-to-upper echelons of the state hierarchy (such as members of the Unidad de Análisis de Políticas Económicas [UDAPE] in the Ministry of Planning) committed to free-market reforms regardless of their individual party affiliations—“true believers” and “convinced neoliberals” who have “approached their jobs with near missionary zeal” (Conaghan and Malloy, 1994: 160). These technocrats are closely aligned with the dominant class factions that have captured important posts within key state agencies such as the Central Bank, the Ministries of Planning and Finance, and the new Ministry of Exports and Competitiveness (Quiroga and Campero, 1992: 15; Asheshov, 1993).

A strong and autonomous state must also enjoy the fiscal resources required to sustain a working bureaucracy, carry out policies that favor different segments of (“civil”) society, and maintain its independence of specific class or sectoral interests. Policies that increase the state’s financial capability, such as new means of harnessing more taxes or securing international credits or aid, make for a stronger state (Wood, 1980; Hamilton, 1981; Skocpol, 1985; Stallings, 1985; Levi, 1988). As a result of an overhaul of Bolivia’s tax system, revenue flowing into state coffers dramatically increased between 1985 and 1991 (Bird, 1992; Quiroga and Campero, 1992: 27, 41; Montaña and Villegas, 1993: 132-133; Müller and Asociados, 1993: 107). Public spending declined to about 27.6 percent of the gross national product (GNP) in 1990 from about 45 percent in 1980-1981 (Morales, 1994: 137), and the fiscal deficit decreased from 28 percent of gross domestic product (GDP) in 1984 to a mere 3.8 percent in 1986.

The reconstitution and consolidation of the state⁴ have above all been predicated on ongoing support from important segments of Bolivia’s dominant class—a “coalition of business leaders, conservative technocrats, and center-right politicians” (Conaghan, 1994: 258). While not all dominant class factions gained or lost equally in the short or long run as a result of the NEP, it did enhance the viability of the capitalist system. It continues to generate the conditions for systematic capital accumulation bolstered by a stream of international capital (see, e.g., Mayorga, 1978; Drake 1989; Quiroga and Campero, 1992; Van Niekerk, 1992: 46; Gamarra, n.d.; 1994: 114; Durán, 1990).⁵ For example, production, exports, investment, and profits rose dramatically, particularly in the private mining sector, where state and private incentives are at all-time highs (Quiroga and Campero, 1992; Ministerio de Minería y Metalurgia, 1992; 1993; Ministerio de Planeamiento y Coordina-

ción, 1993; Müller and Asociados, 1993: 48-52). Politically and economically the NEP has been remarkably “good for business” (Morales, 1994: 132). Hence it should come as no surprise that Bolivian capitalists have reached a “remarkable consensus” (Conaghan, 1992: 15-16; 1991) in support of it and that “no frontal opposition [by business] to the neo-liberal model” has emerged (Conaghan and Malloy, 1994: 200-219).

In addition, this powerful ideological consensus has been paralleled, in the political field, by a “capturing” of key positions within Bolivia’s traditionally rival political parties (cf. Gamarra, 1994) and the forging of alliances that have ensured the continuation of the NEP and an exceptional degree of political stability. Members of the new private mining elite have taken a prominent role in securing the leadership of some of the most important political parties and in the reconstitution of the state. It is not surprising, for example, that the Minister of Planning in 1985 and the chief architect of the NEP, Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada—who would also later become president of the country—is a major shareholder in COMSUR, Bolivia’s second-largest private “medium mining” company (Ministerio de Minería y Metalurgia, 1993: 7) or that the former mayor of La Paz at the time most COMIBOL miners lost their jobs and later an important cabinet minister, Ronald MacLean, is the most important shareholder of Inti Raymi, Bolivia’s largest private mining conglomerate.

The historical conjuncture that miners faced in 1985 and 1986 was, therefore, an extraordinarily disadvantageous one. On the national level, private mining concerns had already eclipsed state mining in terms of production and accumulation. In addition, a perhaps unprecedented and undoubtedly formidable political, economic, and ideological cohesion among Bolivian elites and a vertical and horizontal fusion between these elites and the state apparatus had emerged. Equally significant, the state apparatus was solidly united and ideologically firmly committed to “curbing union power and . . . dismantling . . . the public sector labyrinth” (Conaghan and Malloy, 1994: 186). On the international level, the circumstances were equally unpropitious. The NEP was solidly supported politically and economically by the United States and key international players such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. Indeed, the stage was finally set for vigorous confrontation of the politico-economic threat posed by the historically militant miners. We shall see that a wide repertoire of classic and proven miners’ “weapons of resistance” (Scott, 1985; 1990) eventually proved fruitless and the state’s uncompromising multi-pronged strategy an overwhelming success.

DESTROYING STATE MINING AND SMASHING MINERS

It is clear from the above that the state was determined to undermine union opposition to the NEP and that the so-called restructuring of the state mining company was an essential component of this strategy. However, it was not until the October 1985 collapse of world tin prices, which presented an immediate economic and political danger to the NEP, that the “problem” of COMIBOL and the FSTMB acquired urgency. Indeed, the fall of tin prices drastically undermined miners’ traditional economic (and hence political) leverage and is possibly the single most important reason for their inability to mount a successful resistance effort.⁶

Plans to dismember COMIBOL and smash the FSTMB were under way by late 1985 or early 1986. The NEP, launched in August, had lifted subsidies to consumer staples, generating widespread food shortages in the company stores where miners acquired most of their foodstuffs, and the supplies that did reach the mines doubled or tripled in price. At the same time a stream of rumors forecasting mine closures were leaked to major newspapers. In this context of anxiety, uncertainty, and hardship, the state moved against miners with a classic carrot-and-stick approach—but, of course, stressing the latter. Elderly miners were first forced to “retire” (they were simply dismissed). At the same time, enticements, including cash bonuses (from International Monetary Fund and World Bank monies designed to prop up the NEP) and promises of being “relocated” to other parts of the country and given jobs there, were offered to others who would “voluntarily” resign (Crabtree, Duffy, and Pearce, 1987: 17). The majority of miners who refused to “retire” were summarily dismissed. Furthermore, the state quickly shut down politically strategic mines, particularly those (such as Catavi, the site of the 1942 massacre, one of the worst in mining history) manned by the most militant segment of the FSTMB. In these mines virtually all underground workers (those directly engaged in the most productive facets of mining and the most militant of the FSTMB membership) were ousted in an unmistakable attempt to undermine the miners’ strength (UNITAS, 1987: 32-65). By the end of 1986 more than 80 percent of miners employed by COMIBOL (virtually all members of the FSTMB) were jobless, and hunger, poverty, and despair increasingly pervaded the rapidly vanishing mining camps (Crabtree, Duffy, and Pearce, 1987; Nash, 1992a). By this time the Association of Relocated Miners, into which laid-off miners had organized themselves, had more members than the FSTMB (Nash, 1992b: 5). Most COMIBOL mines were either shut down, worked by a demoralized skeleton workforce, or sold or leased to cooperatives and/or major private mine owners, and the few that

were still in operation were now jointly managed with private Bolivian and foreign firms (CEPROMIN, 1986; 1987; CEMYD, 1990). The FSTMB would later admit that it had been “gravely wounded” by the assault of the neoliberal state (CEPROMIN, 1993: 15) and that “the national proletariat is one step away from being destroyed” (FSTMB, 1992: 143).

Quite early on the FSTMB recognized that threats to dismantle COMIBOL were really aimed at “destroying the economic power [of the miners] in order to crush our political power” (FSTMB, 1992: 140) and quickly responded by striking and occupying mines—customary forms of resistance that had worked relatively well before. But striking mines whose operating costs were apparently above the market price of tin in the context of the reconstitution of the state and economy represented by the post-1985 NEP made it easier for the elites to withhold salaries and eventually shut down mines. Quick and stiff miner resistance was met with equally rapid and firm repression. Security forces quickly encircled workplaces where miners had gone on strike and/or occupied mines, and both the wages and the supply of foodstuffs and other life necessities (such as electricity and natural gas) to many *pulperías* were deliberately blocked (CEBIAE/CEDLA, 1986; UNITAS, 1987: 103-104), essentially severing the lifelines of mining communities.

This sustained assault worsened the economic plight of the mining camps and of the Departments of Oruro and Potosí, whose budgets depended on royalties from COMIBOL’s operations. In July 1986 the FSTMB once again declared a general strike, this time securing the support of the civic committees of Oruro and Potosí (representing the elite and business interests of their respective departments), which, while pleading for government attention to COMIBOL, also called for a general strike and road blockades (CEBIAE/CEDLA, 1986). This attempt to forge interclass regional alliances proved fruitless, however, almost certainly because of the limited economic and political clout (at least compared with the departments of La Paz, Cochabamba, and Santa Cruz) of Oruro and Potosí, the two poorest departments of Bolivia.⁷ Efforts to muster the support of other societal segments also failed. An alliance with the national peasant federation and particularly with the increasingly militant coca cultivators fizzled, partly because the economic plight of the mining camps was so far removed from the concerns of coca cultivators and because they were engaged in their own struggle against the state. In the end the miners were unable to deepen and sustain alliances that might have allowed them to withstand the state’s onslaught. “In spite of our efforts,” the FSTMB would later admit, “the miners’ problem has not yet become a national problem” (CEPROMIN, 1992: 37).

The futility of early efforts to block mine closings led to an unprecedented and historic demonstration. On August 22, 1986, insisting on the “moral . . . right

to live” (Nash, 1992a: 279), more than 5,000 miners and supporters from the Siglo XXI mine marched to La Paz to dramatize their plight. They rallied considerable support along the way from peasant villages, leaders of Chapare coca federations, urban workers, and the Roman Catholic Church. Four days after the march began the government announced its (long-expected) “restructuring” of COMIBOL. Two days later the columns had swelled to more than 10,000 members. Promises to allow marchers to reach La Paz notwithstanding, on the pretext that the marchers intended to overthrow the government, a state of siege was declared and the military mobilized. Encircled for more than 24 hours by troops, who blocked the flow of food and drink to marchers, the miners abandoned their attempts to reach La Paz (CEBIAE/CEDLA, 1986; Nash, 1992a). Despite having gained widespread support and sympathy, the emotional plea “for life” failed to attain its objective. The Right to Life march was followed in September by hunger strikes by miners and another general strike by the Central Obrera Boliviana (Bolivian Central Labor Union—COB), constant unrest in Potosí and Oruro, and appeals by the church hierarchy to solve the miners’ problem (CEBIAE/CEDLA, 1986: 54-55), all without any seeming effect.

One effective strategy employed by the state was splitting the miners’ union. In mid-September the government signed an agreement with the FSTMB (after which it lifted its general strike), declaring that the “decentralization” of COMIBOL was “not a maneuver aimed at the closure of mines,” that plans to relocate miners did not imply mass dismissals but rather were an attempt to “generate new jobs,” and that it was initiating a “national employment program” (CEBIAE/CEDLA, 1986; FSTMB, 1992: 155-157). The agreement included “provisions to keep the mines open and retain them as state property, with closing permitted after a careful study by professional geologists and economists” (Nash, 1992a: 289). This clever and deceitful strategy worked well. The rank and file’s rejection of the accord revealed the deep fissures within the FSTMB on how to respond to the mining crisis—fissures that had become apparent during its 21st Congress in Oruro in May 1986 when the legendary mine leader, Juan Lechín Oquendo, resigned (Crabtree, Duffy, and Pearce, 1987: 82). This rupture led to the emergence of a reformist union leadership (FSTMB, 1992: 189-190) that enabled “the government to [take] advantage of the split among the leaders during the weeks after the agreement to lay off thousands of workers” (Nash, 1992a: 289).

Not only was an effective national job program not forthcoming but the government’s pledge to relocate mine workers meant something quite different to miners. To the state it meant moving unemployed miners to other parts of the country where they could find jobs, while miners, according to a miner’s

wife in the Siglo XXI mine, understood it to mean “removing from one job and placing [one] in another” (CEBIAE/CEDLA, 1986: 12). Clearly, the belief that the government would find miners employment elsewhere and thus alleviate the misery they were experiencing during the crucial months of 1986 was probably one of the reasons so many “voluntarily” resigned.

Roseberry has recently stated that “forms and languages of protest or resistance must adopt the forms and languages of domination in order to be registered or heard” (1994: 363-364). Yet such a strategy may not be effective, as the FSTMB was to learn. For example, again and again it offered its own plans for restructuring COMIBOL, including proposals for miners themselves to operate the mines (CEPROMIN, 1988), suggesting that many closed mines could be made productive and profitable. These proposals were “not even analyzed by the government” (CEPROMIN, 1992: 44). There were also attempts to contest mine closings through the judicial system (CEPROMIN, 1993: 38), but these appear to have become hopelessly bogged down.

As with previous attempts to “rationalize” state mining, the concerted dismantling of COMIBOL failed to turn the company into a profitable one. Despite having had its “labor problem” solved, its production costs, deficits, and decapitalization continued to rise (Torrico, 1989: 44; CEMYD, 1990: 80-82), increased international aid (Ministerio de Minería y Metalurgia, 1992) notwithstanding. Yet clearly the political goal of smashing the resistance of workers and (especially) miners—the latter now christened by elites and state managers as “parasites” (Nash, 1994, cited in L. Gill, 1997)—and expanding private mining had been achieved.

PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE

The miners’ movement and the FSTMB never fully recovered from the neoliberal onslaught, and formerly successful resistance strategies have continued to prove futile. For example, as late as 1988 mine workers at Huanuni, one of the COMIBOL mines not immediately shut down, were constantly on strike or engaged in absenteeism or other forms of protest, but these efforts failed to stem the workforce’s decimation (CEMYD, 1990). In addition, the lack of solid, cross-cutting support from other societal segments mentioned above became painfully clear when, despite having joined yet another general strike in 1990, miners had to abandon it because “only [they] were left in [the] indefinite strike” (CEPROMIN, 1992: 51). The deep split within the FSTMB and, more generally, the inability of labor to mount an effective counteroffensive to the NEP would also lead to deep divisions within the

traditionally militant COB and the emergence of “middle-class trade unionism” (*Latin American Weekly Report*, 1996). The recent labor unrest in private mines, in which striking miners have been bloodily evicted from their work sites by police and army troops (*Andean Group Report*, 1997; Pérez, 1997), foreshadow the continuing weakness of organized labor and the ineffectiveness of prior resistance strategies in the neoliberal age. Indeed, the June 1997 election of the former dictator Gen. Hugo Bánzer as president, facilitated by a broad alliance among four major political parties, exemplifies the tremendous and continuing political, economic, and ideological cohesion spawned by neoliberalism. Bánzer’s election promises “no fundamental revision of [current] free-market policies” (*Latin American Weekly Report*, 1997a), and his government has already called for a “completion of the capitalization programme,” including “all poorly exploited mining operations” (*Latin American Weekly Report*, 1997b). Moreover, the continuing decline in tin prices, ongoing closings of mining cooperatives, and calls by private mine owners for a total shutdown of COMIBOL and for the state “to withdraw from tin production and transfer operational control to the private sector” (*Latin American Weekly Report*, 1993) all bode ill for what was once one of Latin America’s most powerful labor movements.

CONCLUSIONS

I have argued that neoliberalism in Bolivia has led to increasing cohesion and power for the state and the dominant classes and that miners have fared disastrously against this elite/state project. An adequate explanation for this should take into account five interrelated power configurations that by the late 1980s and early 1990s were wholly disadvantageous for the miners.

First, state mining’s loss of economic leverage severely curbed the ability of Bolivian miners to defend themselves against the reconstituted state and new private mining elite. The systematic decapitalization of COMIBOL during the preceding decades—the siphoning off of its surpluses and profits—and the simultaneous channeling of national and international capital into private mining had greatly reduced the company’s economic clout and the political muscle of the FSTMB. This situation was compounded by the crash of tin prices in 1985 and their continued decline through the early 1990s. As a result, the political cost of doing away with state mining had dramatically declined in the late 1980s.

Second, COMIBOL’s mining activities were concentrated in a few dozen major mines—fixed, capital-intensive, Fordist-like production sites—and mining communities were permanently fixed and easily identifiable in the

landscape. As a result, the state's surveillance and repressive apparatus was able to quickly reach miners at their work sites. Effective and parsimonious policing of miners is far less difficult and costly than, for example, the policing of coca cultivators in eastern Bolivia.

Third, the logic of mining production made miners almost completely dependent on the state for their livelihood—wages, provisions supplied through *pulperías*, gas, and electricity. Capitalizing on their lack of economic autonomy, the state effortlessly crippled their resistance by cutting off supplies to the mining camps.

Fourth, the degree of ideological cohesiveness of the state apparatus and the dominant classes extent to which their domestic and international objectives converged in the 1980s were fundamental to their ability to overwhelm miners' overt and covert resistance. There is little doubt that the Bolivian state apparatus was solidly committed to subjugating the miners. Part of its effectiveness and resolve stemmed from the quite exceptional support and commitment that it received from powerful elites and institutions (e.g., private mine owners, the national business federation, major political parties, the IMF, the United States). What to do about state mining and the FSTMB was not an especially divisive issue politically or ideologically. In politico-economic milieus in which potential hegemonic projects are seriously contested from within (Sayer, 1994) and endangered from without, states encounter serious difficulties in achieving specific policy goals and consolidating hegemonic projects. Hence subaltern groups may have a greater capacity to forge and sustain crucially important inter- and intraclass alliances (domestic and even international) and a superior potential for engaging in successful resistance. This was not the case with the miners, who, faced with a more unified opposition, had considerably less leeway within which to maneuver. As a result, they confronted serious difficulties in building and consolidating the enduring interclass alliances that would have allowed them to cope with the state's assault.

Finally, it is important not to forget the overt political threat to the social order that miners had historically represented.⁸ In many respects the perception of miners by the ruling elites of the reconstituted Bolivian state was not unlike that held by Margaret Thatcher, who, confronting equally militant miners at about the same time, declared them an "enemy within" engaged in an "insurrection against legitimate authority" (quoted in Corrigan and Sayer, 1985: 1). British miners, I should point out, fared as poorly as their Bolivian counterparts against a concerted assault by an increasingly strong state (Gamble, 1988; Bonefeld, 1993; Richards, 1996).

In this analysis I have not attempted to strip Bolivian miners of their agency by either advocating some sort of economic determinism or suggest-

ing that their ineffective resistance was solely or primarily due to the state's increased strength. (I hope, though, to have made it clear that while ineffective resistance and state strength are not necessarily constitutive of each other, they cannot and should not be considered separate.) Rather, I have attempted to place miners' agency within a wider structural and historical context (of which state strength is an especially important constituent) because I am convinced that the minutiae of "everyday" resistance (Scott, 1985) need to be cast, to a greater degree than in the past, within wider and historically constitutive fields of power (e.g., Wolf, 1997 [1982]; 1990) often extremely disadvantageous to members of subordinate groups and because it is precisely in highly conflictive and contested arenas that "states are formed against" (Alonso, 1994: 380). The way we go about thinking and writing on resistance may need to be a bit "thicker" (Ortner, 1995). Yet we cannot overlook the historical process whereby "successive cohorts of peoples [are] drawn into the capitalist orbit," for it is precisely by examining "the opportunities and exigencies of their new conditions" (Wolf, 1997 [1982]: ix-xiv) that we can understand how promising (and seemingly successful) resistance practices and strategies cannot eventually account for effective resistance to state policies.

However, it would be a serious mistake to infer from the Bolivian miners' tragic history that the neoliberal undertaking is a success, for potentially hegemonic projects are never entirely triumphant (Williams, 1977; Roseberry, 1994; Sayer, 1994; Kurtz, 1996). Instead of thinking (and writing) about "hegemony" or, for that matter, "resistance"—which suggests historical timelessness—it may make more sense to think about "unstable hegemonies" or *temporarily* successful hegemonic projects and perhaps *temporarily unsuccessful* resistance strategies subject to deep historical drifts. The persistent difficulties that the state has had in disciplining coca cultivators (Sanabria, 1993; 1995; 1997) and the sustained mobilizations by indigenous (non-Andean) groups in the northeast attempting to defend their lands (Strobel-Gregor, 1994; Albó, 1995) suggest that it is too early to think of the NEP as a historical success. Bolivia's NEP and analogous neoliberal undertakings elsewhere are a concrete result of a specific concatenation of political, economic, ideological, and cultural forces in a distinct historical moment in the current refashioning of global capitalism. What is needed, then, is to keep in mind the historical specificity of hegemonic projects and efforts to resist them and try to understand the specific ways in which and the extent to which they succeed or fail in distinct and constantly shifting historical, cultural, political, ideological, and economic conjunctures.

NOTES

1. This thesis asserts “that there is . . . a pervasive set of beliefs that broadly serves the interests of the dominant class [that] is then adopted by subordinate classes which are thereby prevented from formulating any effective opposition” (Abercrombie and Turner, 1982 [1978]: 396).

2. The notoriously slippery concept of “hegemony” has been embraced, debated, and interpreted in different ways by scholars trying to understand how domination is played out, achieved, and resisted in a variety of historical contexts (Lears and Jackson, 1985; Eagleton, 1991: 112-116; Roseberry, 1994; Sayer, 1994; Kurtz, 1996). It has been variously interpreted as a process embodying a dominant ideology that helps to legitimate domination (for a discussion and critique see Abercrombie and Turner, 1982 [1978]), a form of “cultural [read: ideological] domination” (Williams, 1977:108-114), and a process generating “consent” to domination—a broad acceptance of a state’s economic, political, and ideological projects. Hegemony may in fact be about “obtaining consent and establishing its legitimacy” (Kurtz, 1996: 107), but it is not simply a process of ideological or, for that matter, discursive identification. “Consent” also entails, as Gramsci emphasized and as Roseberry (1994), Sayer (1994), and Kurtz (1996) have recently reminded us, coercive practices through which some level of conformity is enforced (see also Corrigan and Sayer, 1985). Domination, as Sayer (1994: 373-374) has recently stressed, “is not centrally about either inculcating beliefs or securing consent, as many conceptions of hegemony tacitly presume,” but also about the use of coercion and power and of rituals that publicly display “willingness to conform” (“ritual accommodations”) even if everyone knows that “everything is a lie, mass complicity” (see also Scott, 1990).

3. This literature is vast. For some of the most important theoretical positions see Carnoy (1984), Corrigan and Sayer (1985), Evans, Rueschemeyer, and Skocpol (1985), Mann (1986), Block (1987), Abrams (1988), Almond (1988), Levi (1988), Cammack (1989), Migdal (1988; 1994), Jessop (1990), Mitchell (1991), Bendix and Mitchell (1992), and Levine (1987). For the debates among Latin Americanist scholars, see Hamilton (1981), Anglade and Fortín (1985), Stallings (1985), Conaghan (1988), and Gallo (1991).

4. This consolidation stands in stark contrast to its historic political instability and weakness (Malloy, 1970; Klein, 1982: 133-134; Gallo, 1991).

5. The World Bank probably deserves some credit for arming the state and ruthlessly implementing the NEP, since it “has acknowledged its efforts to build up internal coalitions in borrowing countries in support of its policies” (see Walton and Seddon, 1994: 19).

6. In a slightly different but analogous context, by stockpiling coal and turning to alternative energy sources the Thatcher government was able to strip British coal miners of their political and economic leverage during their 1984-1985 strike (see Gamble, 1988; Richards, 1996).

7. It is quite ironic that Potosí—“the poorest region in the poorest nation in South America” (Zorn, 1997: 73-75)—was once a quite wealthy territory that buttressed the Spanish empire.

8. Potosí and Oruro are ethnically and linguistically diverse (e.g., Rasnake, 1988; Harris, 1995; Platt, 1995; Zorn, 1997; Albó, 1981). While many miners still trace ties with ayllu villages and Spanish, Quechua, and Aymara are spoken in mining camps, I can find no evidence of deep ethnic splits among miners that might have helped undermine their collective resistance. Rather, the major fault lines in mining districts appear to be between miners and peasants and between those working in mining camps but with differential access to the means of production (e.g., fully employed miners vs. “peasant miners” and small-scale miners independently foraging for minerals, underground mine workers vs. office/clerical staff, and so on) (Nash, 1979; Harris and Albó, 1986; Godoy, 1990). I am grateful to one of *LAP*’s reviewers for raising this issue.

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His basic assumption is that all systems of domination include a means of resistance – the 'backstage talk' of the oppressed and the subaltern – that the dominant suspect might exist but cannot in any way get access to. My only real concern is that he tends to crudely characterise the Gramscian notion of hegemony as simple. This is a superb book: Scott sets out and for the most part successfully outlines the role of what he calls the hidden transcripts of domination in cultural and political life. James C Scott in his penetrating examination of domination and its historic precedents in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* published in 1990 has captured my attention for these past days. James C. Scott is Sterling Professor of Political Science and Anthropology at Yale University. His work *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* sets forth to apply critical analysis to the task of class relations, specifically between the powerful and the powerless. Chiefly, he is interested in the modes of discourse employed both –publically– and –offstage– between groups possessing socially powerful positions of dominance and those individuals and groups who find themselves under the social, political, economic, and class domination of others. More specifically, this work takes up an investigation Any dominant ideology with hegemonic pretensions must, by definition, provide subordinate groups with political weapons that can be of use in the public transcript. Let us return briefly to the issue of –ethical submission– and hegemony by way of placing the public transcript in its political context. I believe the historical evidence clearly shows that subordinate groups have been capable of revolutionary thought that repudiates existing forms of domination. The basis of the claim to privilege and power creates, as it were, the groundwork for a blistering critique of domination on the terms invoked by the elite. Such a critique from within the ruling discourse is the ideological equivalent of being hoisted on one's own petard. Relations of domination are, at the same time, relations of resistance. Once established, domination does not persist of its own momentum. Inasmuch as it involves the use of power to extract work, production, services, taxes against the will of the dominated, it generates considerable friction and can be sustained only by continuous efforts at reinforcement, maintenance, and adjustment. CHAPTER SIX Voice under Domination: The Arts of Political Disguise. (pp. 136-182). Most of the political life of subordinate groups is to be found neither in overt collective defiance of powerholders nor in complete hegemonic compliance, but in the vast territory between these two polar opposites.

James C. Scott is Sterling Professor of Political Science and Anthropology at Yale University. His work *Domination and the Arts of Resistance* sets forth to apply critical analysis to the task of class relations, specifically between the powerful and the powerless. Chiefly, he is interested in the modes of discourse employed both "publically" and "offstage" between groups possessing socially powerful positions of dominance and those individuals and groups who find themselves under the social, political, economic, and class domination of others. More specifically, this work takes up an investigation of "hidden transcripts," a mode of communication in the public sphere between groups evidencing a disparity of power and privilege. In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (1990) argues that all subordinate groups employ strategies of resistance that go unnoticed by superordinate groups, which he terms "infrapolitics." Scott describes the open, public interactions between dominators and oppressed as a "public transcript" and the critique of power that goes on offstage as a "hidden transcript." Groups under domination—from bonded labor to sexual violence—thus cannot be understood merely by their public actions, which may appear acquiescent. In order to study the systems of domination, careful attention is paid to what lies beneath the surface of evident, public behavior. In public, those that are oppressed accept their domination, but they always question their domination offstage. Abstract. Scott, James. C. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990. xviii + 251 pp. including footnotes, bibliography, and index. \$29.95 doth. Price, Richard. *Alabi's World*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990. xx + 444 pp. including endnotes and bibliography. \$59.00 cloth, \$18.95 paper. Discover the world's research. Loved this book on *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, and how as Humans we express our hatred of the authorities who rule over us. Most of the big shots ignore this resistance because they don't care and they don't understand how it all works. This is a great book on the psychological benefits of being out of step with oppressive authority no matter where it is. Read more. A wide-ranging discussion of the possibilities of the 'arts of political disguise'. . . . A very fine and suggestive book that has opened up many new avenues of exploration for all social scientists interested in the deeper complexities of power relationships."—Bob Scribner, *American Journal of Sociology*. In brilliantly articulating the role of culture and voice in domination and resistance, this book itself becomes a public transcript of sociological issues which have often been ignored or underestimated."—John Gaventa, *Contemporary Sociology*. "Advanc[es] scholarship and produc[es] interesting, even fascinating, insights and other provocations."—Indochina Chronology.