



WAKE UP! BOLIVIA OR NOT IT'S YER...

SchNEWS

www.schnews.org.uk

Friday 17th October 2003

Free/Donation

Issue 427



IN LOZADA TROUBLE

Bolivia's capital city La Paz means 'peace' in Spanish but over the past month this high altitude town, drenched in tear gas and dead bodies, has come to resemble anything but peace. With tens of thousands of people flooding into the streets, setting up burning barricades and hurling sticks of dynamite at a murderous military, the country is teetering on the brink of full-blown revolution.

Over 70 people have been killed by the army in demonstrations that flared up after the government announced plans to sell its natural gas to the U.S. and Mexico, a deal imposed by the IMF (International Monetary Fund) that would supposedly bring \$US1.5 billion a year to the dirt poor South American country. The throngs of protesters in the streets complain, however, that Bolivia would only get 18 percent of the profits and that even these crumbs wouldn't reach the mouths of the power-starved millions.

Repression of this dissent reached a peak on Sunday when 25 protesters were killed and nearly 100 injured in El Alto, a city near La Paz. Many injured couldn't be recovered because police and military were shooting at anything that moved. 28 more protesters were killed the following day during clashes between demonstrators and security forces in La Paz and El Alto. "They come to surround us with planes and helicopters and tanks. Not even animals are killed like this," said one Aymara woman in El Alto.

More street clashes erupted on Tuesday as enraged demonstrators screamed for President Sanchez de Lozada to go. Protesters dug up roads with picks and barricaded highways to block traffic while supplies of food, fuel and other necessities to La Paz and El Alto ran dangerously low. Although de Lozada announced that he's gonna shelve the gas export plan, protesters have demanded "resignation or nothing" from a president who enjoys 8% popularity. As De Lozada sits in his barricaded mansion his power base is quickly eroding. Apart from the support of the US, which has generously supplied the Bolivian joint military command with top-ranking officials, he has very few supporters. Coming on the heels of the vice president's announcement that he did not agree with De Lozada's actions, Bolivia's armed forces said on Tuesday that the military would no longer support De Lozada "as an individual" but would resist the constitution and the elected government.

As De Lozada's grip on power becomes weaker, the country's social movement is growing stronger. In El Alto despite martial law more than 90% of the town remains under the control of neighbourhood assemblies, market vendors, university students and the Regional Workers' Central, as it enters the fifth day of 'civic strike'. In total one and a half million residents of La Paz and El Alto have paralysed any semblance of

'normal' life. Streets lie deserted, windows and doors are daubed in black and flags at half mast as funeral processions mourn the murdered. The strike called by the Bolivian Workers Central and the Federation of Neighbourhood Assemblies of El Alto has brought the cities to a silent halt.

LOADZA MONEY

The current 'gas wars' have once again brought the Bolivian social movement to the mountain peak of international attention. It first burst onto the political scene with the 'water wars' of Cochabamba three years ago when US multinational Bechtel was handed control of the water system of Bolivia's third largest city (see SchNEWS 339) Within weeks of the takeover, Bechtel hit poor families with massive increases in bills, sparking off a popular rebellion of the jobless, single mothers and working people. Money-thirsty Bechtel were duly kicked out of the country, the water system was placed under control of a local committee and the young, grassroots social movement tasted the success of direct action.

In their clandestine deal with the Bolivian government, Bechtel fat cats were given assurance that the government could handle any protests that might erupt. To defend the water-grabbing multinational's contract the Bolivian government imposed martial law and fired live rounds at its own people. And even that didn't stop the popular rebellion from bursting Bechtel's bubble (who ended up successfully suing the Bolivian state for the \$25 million profits they lost.) Pacific LNG, the company trying to build the Bolivian gas pipeline, seems to be following in Bechtel's footsteps, having tanks sent out in their favour before the dodgy pipeline is even built. Do these corporations ever learn?

The Bolivian social movement erupted once again in Feb' this year in retaliation to yet another IMF-imposed policy (see SchNEWS 393). Thousands of students and workers demonstrated while protesting police were shot at by the military in a huge mobilisation against income tax rises that would hit the poor and lower middle classes hardest. De Lozada's government was shaken and he quickly withdrew the policy.

Bolivia, like much of S. America, is resisting capital and powerlessness with new, diverse social movements. There are many similarities between the Bolivian situation and the IMF-caused Argentinian social rebellion. Bolivia, like Argentina, has been a model student of IMF reforms, and is now also a broken window of failure in free market fundamentalism. After almost 2 decades of 'structural adjustment' Bolivia is one of the least prosperous countries in S. America, having lost its tin, rubber and silver over the years through a jungle of export 'deals'. Unlike Argentina, though, the Bolivian

CRAP ARREST OF THE WEEK

For dressing up as Santa Claus!

A German man who wore Santa Claus clothing over his motorbike suit while protesting against a Nazi march has been fined £140. Cops nicked him for breaking Germany's ban on masking your face during demonstrations, and also claimed his biking suit amounted to "passive weaponry"! At the trial a meteorologist confirmed that it had been a cold, wet day, which justified the biking suit while photos showed him pulling down his beard to look into a camera. Charges were dropped after he agreed to pay a fine. Friends now call him St. Nicked. Ho, Ho, Ho!

social movement has party politics at its core.

Where Argentina saw the explosion of people discovering new forms of grassroots power through the creation of neighbourhood assemblies and squatted social centres, the Bolivian movement is led mainly by the losing socialist presidential candidate, Evo Morales, and his party Movimiento al Socialismo.

However there's still powerful diversity in the Bolivian resistance. The indigenous Aymara peasants have a strong presence, demanding the return of their stolen lands and control over their mining and petrol interests. The small-scale coca growers are also part of the movement as they struggle against the US's nightmarish war on drugs. Add to them the students, workers, unions, and neighbourhood assemblies and you see the Bolivian state and international capital have got a fight on their hands. As Cochabamba-based democracy activist David Schultz says: "In some of the world's most humble people, the would-be makers of economic commandments may well have met their match."

As rebellion spreads all over the mountains and towns; as 2,500 miners march from Huindini to La Paz blocking major roads and resisting the army with sticks of dynamite; as swelling, tear-gassed protests flood Cochabamba; as blockades throughout the southern highlands continue; as the movement declares that it will continue with mass actions – the silent truce in the cities as thousands mourn the dead seems to many as the calm before the storm. La Paz looks set to be without peace for some time to come.

Honduras: The IMF seem intent on spreading social rebellion around South America. It went to Honduras this week to see if the country qualified for nearly \$1 billion of debt relief – and what did it get? Tens of thousands rioting on the streets of the capital Tegucigalpa. It might be because the people of Honduras are well aware that this debt relief comes with strings attached which call for countries to 'slim down' their social programmes and public spending. The last time the IMF were in town, earlier this year, to broker a new \$1 billion loan tens of thousands kicked off on the streets. No wonder seeing as 40% of the national budget goes towards servicing the debt rather than social services.

ANARCHIST BOOKFAIR - Saturday 25th October - ULU Malet St, London, WC1 - 10am – 7pm
books, workshops, videos, food, bar, crèche and evening event. For full programme go to www.anarchistbookfair.org

TRACK MARKS

Last week Jarvis decided to "jump before it was pushed" and pull out of rail track maintenance. The engineering giant complained the work was no longer profitable and was damaging its reputation. And what a reputation... Still under police investigation for last year's Potters Bar train crash, in which seven people died, they at first tried to blame rail vandals for the crash. Last month the removal of a rail by one of their employees led to the derailment of an Inter-City train at London Kings Cross, similar to the derailment of a coal train at Aldwarke junction in Yorkshire last November. The year before the company were prosecuted by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) for "unsafe practice during railway maintenance work" and fined for nearly running over several track workers. In July 1999 they were fined after a worker lost an eye after they had failed to carry out a proper risk assessment and had too few staff working on the track. A year later they were fined £500,000 after two separate train derailments because it "failed to check the track before trains were allowed to run, exposing employees and passengers to risk of injury." In October 2000, 41 year old Mark

Meadowcroft was killed by a train while working for Jarvis.

Jarvis complained that new contracts introduced by Network Rail carried such stringent penalty clauses that "frankly we could never be able to make a satisfactory profit". RMT union boss Bob Crow said: "The safety culture on Britain's railways has been fundamentally undermined by fragmentation. We have contractors who use sub-contractors, sub-contractors who use agencies, agencies who use casual labour and they're all in it for profit, not safety."

The company had hoped to sell its maintenance business but this was vetoed. 3,500 of its workers will now transfer to Network Rail leaving it in direct control of 40% of railway maintenance - which unions say is equivalent to public ownership.

Still, rail maintenance accounts for less than 15% of the company's turnover and Jarvis can now concentrate on its other government PFI activities like building schools, universities and hospitals (see SchNEWS 424). It is also part of the consortium, Tube Lines, which won the contract to maintain the Jubilee, Northern and Piccadilly lines on the London Underground. Have a safe journey!

Bin There - Done That

Residents in Ireland have been busy fighting the Bin Tax which shifts the costs for disposing of waste from industry and agriculture, which produces the most waste, onto the general public, with the poorest sections of society paying relatively more because the tax is a flat charge regardless of income.

The charge is soon to be imposed in Dublin, and a campaign of direct action has started up to blockade bin depots. Recently in an attempt to intimidate people into not protesting, 15 people were jailed for these actions. However the authorities' tactic backfired, sparking a number of protests at the jail, council offices and further blockades of bin depots across the city. Binmen were sympathetic to the campaign and did not break the blockades, realising that the tax affects them too, with privatization of their jobs possibly following. While residents and workers are resolute in their resistance, the same cannot be said for the Union leaders, who have refused to support their workers and some even denouncing the anti-bin tax campaign. The long term lesson is that the union leaders and structure are crap and do not serve their members' interests. But a combination of public action and worker solidarity means that this is a campaign that they could well win. <http://struggle.ws/wsm/bins.html> www.indymedia.ie

Subscribe!

Keep SchNEWS FREE! Send 1st Class stamps (e.g. 10 for next 9 issues) or donations (payable to Justice?) Ask for "Originals" if you can make copies. Post free to all prisoners. SchNEWS, c/o on-the-fiddle, P.O. Box 2600, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 0EF. Tel +44 (0)1273 685913 Email schnews@brighton.co.uk Download a PDF of this issue or subscribe at www.schnews.org.uk

Pull The Other One!

Yesterday the government published the reports of the farm scale trials of genetically modified (GM) crops. The report reveals that two of the crops (oil seed rape and beet) cause more of a reduction in farmland wildlife than conventional crops. A different problem applied to the GM maize: the weedkiller used in the trial is banned by the European Union invalidating the tests.

* If the government does go ahead then it will have to deal with the 1,500 people who have vowed to pull up GM crops. This follows a successful summer of action with all this year's national seed list trials (where new strains are tested) being destroyed. If you haven't yet done so, sign the Pledge. 01865 727972 www.greengloves.org

* Big Noise Demo against Bayer (the number one GM company in Britain) 10am onwards, 13th November outside their HQ in Newbury. 07092 036576 www.stopbayergm.org Transport from Brighton tickets £5 from Cowley Club, London Road For transport from Leeds email leadsef@leadsef.org.uk

* The UK field trials didn't look at

SchNEWS In Brief

Treat yourself to a trip to the seaside! This Saturday (18) **Hastings Against War** is holding a conference 'Waging War, Making Peace' 10 am-5pm, White Rock Theatre, Hastings. Tel. 0845 458 9572 for details ** **London Action Resource Centre** are having a People's Global Action info & social night next Friday (24) 7pm @ LARC, 62 Fieldgate St., London E1 0207 377 9088 www.londonarc.org ** **Peter Tatchell** will be talking next Wednesday (22) 8pm at Quaker Meeting House, 74 Ragstone Road, Slough - about the failure of the western peace movement to offer a viable alternative to Saddam regime, and what should happen next. www.slough4peace.net ** **Noise Art Exhibition** next Friday (24) with Scrap Records DJ's and SchNEWS info and videos from 4-11pm. at New Foundry, 84-86 Great Eastern St., London EC 2 (nearest tube Old St - take 2nd exit). Plus bands from 4pm the next day including Dead Plants ** The world's largest arms manufacturer, **Lockheed Martin**, isn't exactly skint. Yet when antiwar activists blockaded its California headquarters in protest at its central role in the arms trade and Iraq, it sued the 52 protesters for the \$41,000 it claimed were security costs for the demo. But last week a dangerous precedent against direct action was prevented when a judge threw the case out when Lockheed conceded it wasn't "fair to force protesters to underwrite its security costs." www.stoplockheed.org ** A regional **Indymedia** for the south east of England is about to be started. All living in Kent, Hampshire, Surrey & Sussex are invited to be involved, and there will be a meeting at the Cowley Club, 21 London Rd Brighton on Tues 21st at 7.30pm.

cross contamination by GM crops, but in Mexico contamination by genetically modified maize crops of traditional varieties were found in 24% of samples with some samples showing the presence of up to four different GM types. Similar results have been found in Spain where the only European GM crop is being grown. The GM maize has resulted in the first case of an organic farmer losing their organic status due to GM contamination. www.tierra.org/transgenicos/pdf/NotaPrensa03-08-26in.htm

POSITIVE SchNEWS

Ever heard of Yevevan? Ever thought about visiting Tblisi? Or Baku? Not many people pay much attention to these capital cities or the Caucasian countries of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan to which they belong. Nor are people aware of the many environmental and social problems that have arisen in this often forgotten corner of the world since the demise of the Soviet Union. Two Dutch women have attempted to remedy this ignorance by setting up Falkor I.C.Y. which aims to establish a network linking activists in Europe with those working on ecology, human rights, and independent media projects in the former Soviet republics. Since it's conception 2 years ago, Falkor has produced a video documenting the problem of nuclear waste being dumped and stolen in the region, arranged work placements on educational and cultural projects for disadvantaged youth, organised group exchange programmes, and is currently planning to bring Western Ska and rock bands to the republics while helping Caucasian bands to tour over here. www.falkor.org

...And finally

Picture the scene in Iraq one year on. There has been hardly any electricity for 18 months, very little water and no-one's been paid by the occupying forces since they invaded. Attacks by the resistance are running at about one an hour and lots of U.S. and British troops prefer the option of court marshal and jail rather than being target practice for Iraqis. So what does Iraq need? Well according to "well placed banking and commercial sources" loads of brand spanking new McDonalds! That's right, within a year from now these same people envisage the streets of Baghdad to be covered in burger wrappers instead of spent bullets and bomb craters. So the US want to replace the guns with a longer, more drawn out killer instead eh?

*McDonalds employees in Paris have been on strike for 6 months and counting. Not only are they on strike they're also occupying the restaurant 24/7 shutting it down and turning it into a giant banner for their cause. Check out <http://advaloreminternational.com/videos/mcdo.html>

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers you wouldn't Bolivia the Loza-da puns we've got. Honest!