

WAKE UP!! IT'S YER HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO...

SchNEWS

www.schnews.org.uk

Friday 16th November 2007

Free/Donation

Issue 611

Bolivian Marching Power

AS THE LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRY KICKS BACK AGAINST ELITE RULE...

Yesterday (15th), thousands of Bolivian farmers declared themselves in a state of emergency to save the rights granted to them under the new constitution. They have surrounded the Constituent Assembly in Sucre, to protect it from organised opposition gangs working for Bolivia's elites.

The new constitution is aimed at enshrining the rights of the country's indigenous majority and has been prefaced by a rejection of the US sponsored War on Drugs and the nationalisation of key hydrocarbon reserves. The MAS (Movement towards Socialism) headed up by Evo Morales is facing off against US-backed local elites in a conflict which may prove a turning point in Latin American history.

While the majority of Bolivians have been struggling to boot out the neoliberal models of development, the business elites have not been idly sitting by watching their investment portfolios shrink. Where staged protests and political violence haven't worked, opposition politicians have even gone on strike - and now the richest part of the country is threatening to declare independence!

The top 10% of the population own almost half the wealth, whilst 65% of people wallow below the poverty line. One lifeline for farmers was the growing of coca, a millennia-old crop with significant cultural significance. Since the 1970s the US has continually stepped up its eradication programme, entrenching millions in poverty,

stopping them from farming the one plant to provide a liveable income. But every time the US poured Monsanto-made chemicals over the plants, more growers joined the resistance.

The cocaleros (coca growers) formed a loose federation of activists headed up by Evo Morales. They most famously clashed with the authorities in the city of Cochabamba, joining other groups to successfully fight off a disastrous water privatisation plan (see SchNEWS 286). In December 2005 Morales became the first indigenous president of Latin America - stepping into the parliament building (which would have been illegal not so long ago), with a radical programme of reform that sent a shudder through many a Wall Street boardroom.

Morales and his Movement for the Advancement of Socialism (MAS) came to power on the back of a popular rebellion against neoliberalism. It promises to wrestle back control of the country's resources, enshrine the constitutional rights of the indigenous people (80% of Bolivia's population), give more autonomy to local communities and legalise coca production.

Naturally the business community is a little distressed. For 500 years the descendants of the colonists have freely plundered the country, creating a life of misery for the indigenous population whom most of the rich treat with racist contempt. Hostility is especially strong in Santa Cruz, where a programme of land reform



at last **FAIR TRADE COCAINE**
Have your high and support indigenous rural farmers in Bolivia. All the profit goes to the workers co-operative who grew this fine processed organic coca.

CRAP NON-ARREST OF THE WEEK

For Mega-mania

The Labour Party in New Zealand seems to be stuck in the Prescott era. During their conference at the start of November, clashes between protectors and police, over recent arrests of eco-activists (see SchNEWS 608) escalated after delegate Len Richards waded in and attacked two activists, smacking them in the face with their own megaphone.

Despite the incident taking place in front of a large police presence, cops took no action - before forcibly arresting three who dared to confront them about the selective blindness.

Whilst they were later released without charge, Richards emphatically continued to deny he had hit anyone with the megaphone, even after being told that there was news footage of it - footage the police will now have to review after a protester laid a formal complaint against the pugnacious politician.

* See for yourself at www.tv3.co.nz

threatens the wallets of upper-class *cruceño* families like never before.

Santa Cruz has also been sucking up the proceeds from gas and oil exploitation, and investors were not too pleased when gas plantations were seized on May Day 2006. Obligated to sell a 51% stake in their business to the Bolivian state, energy companies must now pay a third more in royalties; cash which has now finally begun to

continued overleaf...

Come Shell Or Highwater

The road protests at the Hill of Tara in Ireland may have been hogging the limelight recently (see SchNEWS 610) but that doesn't mean the resistance isn't still raging at the proposed **Shell pipeline site at Rosspport** (see SchNEWS 603).

In late October Shell moved into a new phase as RPS (Rural Planning Services) began work drilling test bore holes as part of their survey of the potential pipeline routes. The protesters responded by taking direct action at various locations where drilling occurred to stop work there.

These locations included the SAC (Special Area of Conservation) around Rosspport Solidarity Camp. Workers challenged about whether they had permission to be drilling on the SAC, admitted that they didn't but, conveniently, the maps they were using didn't mark the area as an SAC! The workers were then provided with accurate maps of the area and work stopped until the Gardai arrived and ordered them to continue regardless of the land's conservation status.

At this point a nifty climber jumped the fence and scaled the drilling machine stopping work for the rest of the day. On other days work was stopped in a similar manner with protesters either climbing or hiding under the drilling machine with large presences of other local people refusing to move until work stopped.

Last Friday (the 9th November) saw the third in a series of recent national days of action at the site of Shell's proposed refinery. There was an impressive turnout of over 400 up-for-it people.

Actions started at 6am with a blockade of the workers entering site. Over the course of the day there were several incursions onto the site and trucks were blockaded.

There were few arrests but numerous injuries at the hands of over zealous Gardai and security guards as protesters were violently removed from inside the compound and off the road. One man had to receive hospital treatment after his foot was run over by a lorry ordered through a crowd of people by the Gardai. Many other people sustained cuts and bruises, including one elderly woman who took part in an occupation of the site and had a fence thrown at her by a security guard. Despite being bruised and battered, the day of action was widely viewed as a success by those who took part.

Coincidentally, that evening, the two quarry companies involved in the construction of the proposed refinery site had many of their trucks and an office smashed up by unknown assailants...

Early this week the Environment Protection Agency rubber stamped their earlier decision to grant an operating license for the refinery site. This decision was expected but a legal battle against the decision is set to ensue as An Taisce (The Irish National Trust) take the case to the European Court over the sites location in a drinking water catchment area.

Wednesday (14th)'s court session saw suc-

cessive Shell to Sea cases and Erris' favourite Judge Devins once again dished out her own special version of 'justice'. The local spokesperson for the Shell to Sea campaign was dubiously convicted of assaulting a Garda at Rosspport polling station last May (see SchNEWS 597). He vigorously denied the charge and the evidence against him consisted solely of the word of the 'assaulted' garda. At a previous hearing Devins had asked the prosecution to return with more witnesses but despite their failure to do this, she didn't throw the case out for lack of evidence but handed out a six month suspended sentence!

Another woman, who Devins had previously sentenced to 100 hours community service after taking part in a lock-on blockade against Shell, was deemed unsuitable for community service due to illness - so was sentenced to three months in prison in her absence.

Two men who took part in a lock-on that stopped work for the day at the proposed refinery site in July were also convicted and sentenced to 150 hours community service. All are likely to appeal. Whether this signals a new legal 'get tough' intimidation policy remains to be seen. Meanwhile, at the Rosspport Solidarity camp, the tat-down for winter continues and the weather helpfully offers its own resistance to Shell's work. But visitors are still welcome and can be accommodated at the camp's new house...

* See Solidarity camp at www.struggle.ws/rsc

* Shell to sea at www.corribos.com

* Videos of drilling action at www.youtube.com/watch?v=czw37WIF9tQ

BOLIVIAN MARCHING POWER continued...

find its way into the poor communities. With so much to lose, it's unsurprising the rich are ready to fight back and, of course, play a little dirty.

"We're being invaded by Indians for some reason," says one middle-class passerby during a demo to celebrate changes to the constitution in support of indigenous rights. Maybe she's been too busy in the shopping mall to realise that the white descendants of the colonists make up less than 15% of the population! This racist undertone becomes explicit if you listen to a member of the opposition prattle on about the 'backward natives'.

Since the 1898 civil war, there has long been a struggle between the seat of government in La Paz and judicial centre in Sucre to decide which should be the capital. Although Sucre has been the official capital for over a century, the elites would much prefer it if the government was also located closer to their home-sweet-home powerbase in Sucre. The business class haven chosen this debate as a front for a wider attack on MAS policies, with protests being organised by the Comité Pro Santa Cruz (CPSC), an organisation dominated by business executives. One such demo on 8th September was organised with far-right groups, including the fascist Cruceñista Youth Union and the Nación Camba, both known for 'protesting' with wild swinging baseball bats.

In January, coca farmers were joined by other indigenous groups and occupied Cochabamba's central square to protest opposition demands for independence from the rest of Bolivia. They were demanding the resignation of the corrupt governor Manfred Villa who has been planning a re-run of the referendum that rejected the call for autonomy for the richer Eastern provinces.

Armed with rocks and sticks, Morales supporters marched around the government building and, despite a liberal spraying of tear gas, managed to set the building's front door ablaze. Meanwhile Villa's supporters blocked off nearby streets. Calling themselves "Youths for Democracy," the ultra-right-wing pro-autonomists looked like paramilitary gangs as they beat protesting indigenous.

Another demo, held against the nationalisation

of the gas industry, saw a million people on the streets of Santa Cruz – according to one corporate media unafraid of a little exaggeration. Not a bad turnout for an organization with only 300,000 members - many of whom are employees of banks, other businesses and the private universities which gave all staff and students the day off with an order to attend the protest.

In October, hundreds of demonstrators occupied Santa Cruz's airport after retaking it from government soldiers. Morales had sent in 200 troops to ensure that the airport authorities were giving all the air taxes collected to the central government - Santa Cruz residents had decided to take the first step in their independence and replenish their wallets by taking all the taxes for themselves. Airport workers were refusing to take tax payments to the national airline authority, demanding cash payments of £1,000 instead!

And, in an unusual move for people more used to union-busting, opposition senators went on strike, which meant that the government was unable to pass the new constitution, public spending plans and hydrocarbon nationalisation programme.

When they're not striking, opposition leaders like a bit of parliamentary rough and tumble. Back in August fists went flying when four opposition judges were suspended after their supporters started laying into MAS deputies. These tensions have manifested themselves more on the streets of Bolivia as political argument descends into violence, most often along racial grounds, especially in and around Santa Cruz. But for those without a living or food on the table, Morales is dragging his feet. Many groups within the MAS are getting agitated at the slow pace as members of the social movements they represent continue to go hungry. With White House eyes on the Middle East, there is a real opportunity to prise money from the corporations and the rich business elite and give it back to the people who need it the most - just so long as Morales stays on track and the rich don't take up arms...

* More info at www.boliviainforum.org.uk

JOLLY GREEN GIANTS

It's that time of year when news networks and television channel executives turn their attentions to the forthcoming awards season. And we at SchNEWS are no different. Voting has already opened for the 2007 world-renowned Worst EU lobbying Award. The aim is to honour those who excel in employing the most deceptive, misleading or otherwise dodgy lobbying tactics to influence decision-faking in Brussels.

This year's star performers include BMW, Daimler and Porsche for their full-scale lobbying offensive to water-down and delay the EU mandatory targets for CO2 emissions from cars, and individuals like Viscount Etienne Davignon, who advises EU Commissioner Louis Michel about African development issues – while sitting on the board of Suez, a transnational corporation looking to expand its energy and water business into Africa!

Let's not forget nominations for worst green-wash campaign – this year's nominations include ExxonMobil for claiming it is reducing its greenhouse gas emissions while in reality its pollution is on the up and BAE Systems for their slickly presented 'environmentally friendly' weapons!

To find out more about those leaning on the levers of power, and to vote for those most deserving, see www.worstlobby.eu/2007 – and be quick, closing date is Nov 27th...

TOTAL NIGHTMARE

French Oil giant Total Oil is the fourth largest oil company in the world and is one of the biggest foreign investors in Burma (see SchNEWS 604). It works alongside Burma's dictatorship in the Yadana gas project in Southern Burma, earning the regime hundreds of millions of dollars every year.

Cash which has helped the regime more than double the size of the army - responsible for horrific human rights abuses along the route of the total pipe-line, including torture of political prisoners, the use of forced labour and mass rape as a weapon of war against ethnic women and children.

Tougher EU sanctions against Burma have been blocked by the French government because it wants to protect Total's interests in Burma, so take action and join the weekly protests at the Total Oil Garage in Kemp town, Brighton (Pavillion bus stop), every Saturday Morning, 11.30am.

For more info see www.burmacampaign.org.uk

...and finally...

No shoot Sherlock! - **The Royally Strange Case of the Harry and the Harriers...**

It has been confirmed that no charges will be pressed following the disappearance of a pair of hen harriers, one of England's most endangered species, on the border of the royal estate at Sandringham.

Local nature wardens witnessed the birds dropping from the sky accompanied by the sound of a gunshot. A police investigation into the incident later involved questioning Prince Harry, who, er, happened to be there with two pals shooting at the time.

More curiously, the bodies of the birds have since vanished making it impossible to prove evidence of any crime. (The penalty for killing protected birds can carry a six-month prison sentence.)

It is surely impossible that members of the royal family and estate could be fallacious in their interpretation of events. It is also impossible that armed intruders should be roaming in the vicinity of the Sandringham Estate unchallenged. The only possible if improbable solution is that the birds committed suicide in a death pact which just happened to be just after a nearby car back-fired and were immediately swallowed whole by a passing predator... Quick Watson, the game is afoot!

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers - as SchNEWS enters its terrible teens, expect to see a few moody and irrational issues get produced. Honest!

PEACE CONVOY

This Monday around fifty **Block The Builders** activists blockaded **AWE Aldermaston**, Berkshire. The group split into four different actions at various points on the roads, including at AWE Burghfield, the warhead factory. The protesters used concrete lock-ons, tubes and superglue to disrupt the traffic for two and a half hours, with twelve arrested. See www.blockthebuilders.org.uk

* Also on the 12th, a nuclear warhead convoy in Scotland was blockaded by three **Faslane Peace Campers**. Back after Faslane365, they locked on to a road en route from the Trident warhead depot at RNAD Coulport, stopping the convoy for half an hour. The warhead – which carries the destructive equivalent of twenty four Hiroshimas through population centres and public roads - was on its way to AWE Burghfield near Reading. This is the second convoy blockade in two months. See www.nukewatch.org.uk

PARTY & PROTEST

Every Friday there is an **Anti-Guantanamo Bay Protest** outside US Embassy, Grosvenor Square, Mayfair, W1 (nearest tube: Marble Arch) 6-7pm. Next dates - Nov 16, 23, 30th Organised by the London Guantanamo Campaign. Tel 07824 386 747 email london_gitmo@yahoo.co.uk. ** Nov 18th – **Save The Trees Protest** – Network Rail are trying to poison trees on a rail embankment in Hove. Come to the Bridge in Montefiore Rd, Hove, 7am til dusk. Contact 01273 735 770 or hassle the Network Rail Help line on 08457 114141. ** for full listings see www.schnews.org.uk/pap

POSITIVE SchNEWS

Two integral volunteers from the **Unity Centre**, a migrant support group in Glasgow, have had their criminal charges for 'obstructing police' and 'breach of the peace' quashed just before facing court.

Unity was set up in April 2006, making contact with over 1000 threatened families. In an ongoing climate of routine heavy-handed police dawn raids and forcible removals of asylum-seekers, they offer more friendly support and mutual aid to refugees, working to help some out of detention and preventing dawn raids where they can.

And that support lead to Unity workers Cat and Phill being arrested and charged at protests against a dawn raid in Tarfside Oval, Cardonald last October, during a period when police doubled their manpower and increased the frequency and severity of raids accordingly.

On Oct 24th, the judge threw the case out for lack of evidence. It seems the prosecution failed to provide copies of the dawn raid video taken by the Home Office Immigration Enforcement team, even after previous postponements to allow them to do so, and were also strangely reluctant in the end to cough up copies of the police officer's statements to Phill, who was defending himself. Something to hide, fellas?

Whilst pleased to be out of the legal firing line, Cat and Phill were naturally disappointed not to be able to ask the police how they could justify their brutal techniques, which on that day led to one woman being knocked unconscious.

Unity's work continues see www.unitycentre-glasgow.org and www.noborder.org

Subscribe! Get SchNEWS free every week by email in pdf or text file - visit our site, or send us stamps and we'll post it to you. Copy and distribute! Keep SchNEWS free with donations (via website or cheques payable to Justice?). Posted free to all prisoners. SchNEWS, c/o Community Base, 113 Queens Rd, Brighton, BN1 3XG. Tel +44 (0)1273 685913 Email schnews@brighton.co.uk Web www.schnews.org.uk