



WAKE UP!! IT'S YER GONE TOTALLY CARACAS...

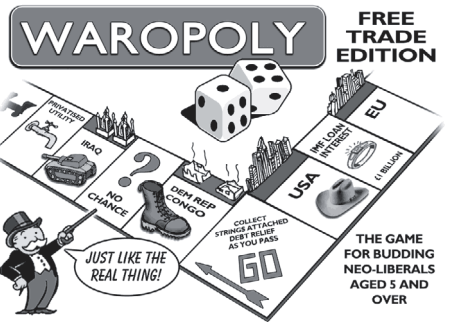
SchNEWS

www.schnews.org.uk

Friday 17th February 2006

Free/Donation

Issue 532



LATIN SWINGERS WHAT SHIFT TO THE LEFT IN LATIN AMERICA?

Over the pond in Latin America it appears that White House Inc. has been too bogged down in the Middle East - sucking the region dry of its black gold for the shareholding buddies of the Bush-Cheney Junta - to notice the radicalisation of some of its Southern neighbours. With experience of a US foreign policy which has overthrown the democratic regimes of almost every Latin American country over the past century, the continent is strangely bereft of coups and dictatorships at the moment. There's been a lot of talk of 'left-wing resurgences' in the region, but is it all as positive as it sounds?

Increasingly some of the 'new left' leaders have been showing their true colours: a love for power, money and a tendency to shaft the more radical groups they relied on to win office in the first place. At the same time though, the upsurge in support for left wing presidents has created a demilitarised space for some community groups to come together to tackle the common misery which affects the lives of half the continent's population: poverty. This is, after all, a region where military dictatorship, repression, 'disappearance' and torture of activists have been the norm for most of the last 100 years.

Despite calling "*Que se vayan todos!*" (All must go!) to a string of corrupt presidents during the country's economic collapse in 2001, a minority of Argentineans did subsequently back Nestor Kirchner for President. Coming from the traditional Peronist faction of Argentinean politics, Kirchner might have refused to bow to all of the International Monetary Fund's demands, but he's still paying off the country's colossal debt, despite half the population living in poverty. He successfully managed to co-opt some of the more 'moderate' social movements during his election campaign and now, just like the politicians before him, he's clamping down on anti-authoritarian movements such as the piqueteros (unemployed picketers) and workers involved in the occupied factories movement. The Zanon ceramics factory (see SchNEWS 477) is among the most successful of these; since the occupation the cooperative has taken on 50% more workers and production levels have increased threefold. However Zanon workers are now facing a new challenge, one which has strange echoes of the military dictatorship of the late 1970s and early 1980s.

Back then, car maker Ford supplied the Argentinean military with thousands of vehicles - especially the green Ford Falcon which quickly became a symbol of repression. One of these driving up your street meant that a kidnapping was in the air, and

in Argentina kidnappings were almost always followed by torture and 'disappearance'. The car company now faces a class action from relatives of former Ford factory workers whose details, as left wing subversives and union activists, were given to the military top brass by company bosses. Despite this, the green Falcons are back on the road, this time being used in the kidnapping and torturing of a Zanon factory worker last spring. Although Kirchner has been prosecuting some of the military for crimes committed during the dictatorship, he continues to cosy up to Ford despite its dodgy record. With his clampdown on the occupied factories he has shown that his sympathies lie with the corporations which continue to line his government's pockets.

KISSINGER OF DEATH

Back in 1970, US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger commented that he didn't, "see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist due to the irresponsibility of its own people". While he was referring to Chile, and setting the scene for the military dictatorship installed by the CIA three years later, current spooks must be thinking the same about Bolivia. The second poorest country in South America has recklessly gone and elected a coca farmer and indigenous man, Evo Morales, for President. He's just announced plans to nationalize the country's gas reserves and redistribute land to poor farmers - and companies like British Petroleum and British Gas who have invested £500m buying up oil and gas reserves, are none too pleased.

Worse still is the support the Bolivian government is giving to the growing of the traditional coca plant, despite the US government's £80m crop eradication plan. La Paz, the capital of Bolivia, lies at 4,000m above sea level and Coca is given to relieve altitude sickness to new arrivals, just as it is chewed by long distance lorry drivers and even coppers on night shifts. This is not about adding kerosene and sulphuric acid to the coca leaf and making cocaine for export to the West; it is a way of life for the indigenous Amerindian population who make up two thirds of the country's 9 million inhabitants.

Like Kirchner in Argentina, Morales came to power on the back of co-opted social movements under the banner 'Movement Towards Socialism'. He has been careful to keep the middle class on board, by tempering the demands of many of his supporting groups. But now he's in power a number of these movements are threatening that if he

BARCELONA UPDATE

Following up from last week... of the nine arrested three are still in jail on attempted homicide charges, and the police are maintaining a heavy presence in the area with random ID checks on the street. The six on lesser charges are under police pressure to testify against the other three, and making sure anyone who saw what really happened (as opposed to the 'official version') are too scared to testify. For more email libertadpresss4f@hotmail.com or visit http://barcelona.indymedia.org/?lang=en_us

adopts a more moderate line, they'll organize the type of protests and strikes which ousted two presidents in two years. Whether this will keep Morales true to his words only time will tell, and with battalions of US troops stationed in neighbouring Paraguay things are sure to heat up.

The use of social movements for political gain has not gone unnoticed in Venezuela, which was host to last month's Americas Social Forum. The lefty shindig was heavily sponsored by the Venezuelan government and worked neatly as an introduction to the re-election campaign of President Hugo Chavez. Neo Labour would have been proud to witness last Thursday's Chavez frenzy; a well-choreographed event at a stadium on the edge of Caracas complete with translation headsets for foreign supporters.

More autonomous groups, meanwhile, had other ideas and an Alternative Social Forum (ASF) was set up. Taking notice of the contradiction in terms that is Chavez's 'revolutionary state', the ASF refused to construct itself on the back of sponsored debates and ran workshops on direct action, video activism and autonomy. Distant admiration for Latin American autonomists may be short-sighted though. ASF meetings were not packed to the rafters with the Latin American poor, but frequented by middle class intellectuals and westerners from the US and Canada - the shanty towns were poorly represented. Meanwhile, Chavez always found himself flanked by supporters with a few western ideological groupies in tow. And it's easy to see why. In a country with massive literacy and health promotion programmes which permeate the shanty towns around Caracas and other major cities, people are better off. "We experience poverty every day" says Paulo, "No leader is perfect but under Chavez we are better off today, not in some distant future. If we don't go with Chavez the business elite will gain power and once again we will be searching for food for our children."

A positive note for those who possess a healthy suspicion of government is the space that has been created for more inspired grass

continues overleaf...

roots action. Despite continuing corruption and the obvious self interest of politicians, the military are not on the streets as previously. The regional co-operative movement has never been so strong - occupied factories are breaking production records and essentials like gas, water and electricity are being brought back under public control. But whether by force or covert action, White House Inc. is not going to sit back and watch its profits dry up. The real question is not whether people like Chavez and Morales are good or bad, but whether grass roots organisations can take advantage of the current breathing space and become a real force to be reckoned with - before power shifts back to corporate-military regimes which have characterised Latin American politics for so long.

* A report from the ASF at www.indymedia.ie/newswire.php?story_id=72541

* More on Venezuela at www.nodo50.org/ellibertoario/seccioningles.htm

DANCING QUEEN'S

The 100 year old Queen's Market in London's Newham is a lifeline to the locals. Over 150 stalls and shops provide work and affordable food to the area's many low-income residents.

Newham Council want to knock it all down and build a new ASDA, amongst other atrocities. 'Development' company St. Mowdens are bidding for a contract that would demolish existing houses in favour of 200 new flats - offering first refusal to Newham locals. And refuse most of them will have to, as no social-housing flats are on offer. St. Mowdens were previously involved in a similar 'development' project in nearby Edmonton Green Market. And the outcome of that? Domination by the chainstores as the local stallholders went bust.

Friends Of Queen's Market are a pressure group made up of people who use and work in the market. Frequent demos outside the Council Offices and a 12,000 strong petition are all part of an active campaign to preserve the community's autonomy. If you are in the area get involved. friendsofqueensmarket@yahoo.co.uk or phone Sasha on 08956 649 696

LAST WALTZ?

The NCADC (National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns) are in danger of being closed down due to lack of funds and are making an urgent call out for help. For the past decade the NCADC have run a 24-7 service to help so-called 'failed' asylum seekers, and fight Britain's inhumane immigration laws. They have prevented thousands from being deported back into life threatening situations in the countries they have come from. Funding has got more difficult in recent years for groups who oppose UK laws, and NCADC may now be forced to close its offices. They are requesting financial help - such as committing £5 a month as a standing order. Make cheques to NCADC. Tel: 0121 554 6947. Email ncadc@ncadc.org.uk www.ncadc.org.uk

FASLANE FOXTROT

Faslane Peace Camp has been a thorn in the side of the nearby nuclear submarine base, with a permanent peace camp outside the gates since 1982. Since then countless protests have come out of the camp including blockades of the base and military convoys, canoeing to the submarines, as well as the camp becoming a living community. The camp needs support and all are invited to come up and check it out.

* **Camp address:** A814, Shandon, Nr Helensburgh, Dumbartonshire, G84 8NT. Tel: 01436 820901 Web: www.faslane.co.nr

* **Faslane 365:** As Blair aims to spend £40billion to replace the current Trident nuclear weapons - housed at the Faslane base - there will be a year-long continuous blockade of the base starting on October 1st this year. (See www.faslane365.org)

DOING THE CONGO

'News' tends to mean the reporting of distinct events, ones which are easily packaged and pigeonholed. This leads to a massive distortion in what's reported - easily described and understood events take much higher precedence than difficult to analyse situations. A tsunami is nice and easy: it occurs, devastates, leaves and then people pick up the pieces. Then a sea of headlines washes in. A complex, multi-factioned civil war, on the other hand, can be so difficult to make sense of that no one bothers, and the public can remain largely unaware that the worst humanitarian crises since the Second World War has actually been taking place over the past few years... in Africa.

While we on our entertaining media-saturated island live largely unassaulted with real reality, another country of 56 million have been living in a nightmare which gets far less coverage than Galloway's pussy impressions. The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is just emerging from a vicious five-year civil war, leading to the deaths of over three million people and mass displacement, poverty, violence and misery. This was driven largely by the misfortune of DRC being one of the planet's most abundant areas for natural mineral resources, and the subsequent scramble by foreign corporations to get a slice of the action - prepared to deal with anyone and fund militias and bandits (often using child slave labour) if precious commodities such as coltan - used in mobile phone manufacture (see SchNEWS 407) - gold and diamonds could be obtained nice 'n' cheap. (Amnesty recently highlighted the catastrophic effects of those particularly blood-soaked trades, but we at SchNEWS assume that most SchNEWS readers won't have been saying it with bling this Valentine's Day.)

Whilst remaining tight lipped about the crisis, and largely ignoring the hell on earth Congo became during the war, so long as the resources continued to be mined, the West's 'humanitarian' response to all this was a small, merely representative UN 'Peace-Keeping force' given insufficient funds, equipment or numbers to achieve very much. Well, they're only Africans aren't they? Not to mention that their resources weren't so interesting at the time to the US Inc. either, who were busy plotting with the likes of Dick 'Crack Shot' Cheney to plunder a different region's natural resources...

Five years and millions of dead later, the place is now devastated. And while there were well-supported UN-sanctioned elections held at the end of last year, establishing a transitional 'democratic government' (read neo-liberal friendly), the state is still plagued by corruption. It has little control of the situation, struggling to reign in or prosecute ex-military war criminals such as Laurent Nkunda - despite claims that they are well aware of his whereabouts. The eastern provinces are still dominated by militias and banditry with murder, torture and rape all commonplace.

Large areas of the country are still overrun by armed militias, with 1.6 million people displaced, and life expectancy dropping by 10 years since 1997. Last week the UN and the European Commission announced a new appeal for \$681 million to respond to the terrible circumstances over 30 million Congolese people are facing - which will be too little too late.

As usual, the West and their economic concerns have been prime motivators behind a terrible war, turning a blind eye to the bloodshed before riding back over the horizon as emergency-aid-heroes. But don't expect the suffering to end until all the resources in Congo have been bled dry.

* **Background to the war** at www.globalissues.org/Geopolitics/Africa/DRC.asp

* For history see www.schnews.org.uk/sotw/congo.htm

* Keep an eye on **Human Rights Watch** at www.hrw.org

SchNEWS in brief

Camcorder Guerrillas will be showing "Why Close the G8?" "Dear Mrs Blair" and "Dun-gavel - Monster of the Glen" this Saturday (18th) at Edinburgh Filmhouse, Lothian Road, 1pm, followed by a discussion on issues of production and distribution in a voluntary, non-profit film collective ** **Challenging Corporate Power** meeting next Wednesday (22nd) with speakers talking about Nestle and the baby milk boycott, private banks, the oil Sector and Asda-Walmart. Room E171, London School of Economics (tube: Temple and Holborn) 7.30pm ** Talk about **rub-bish, consumption, climate chaos and capitalism** with Heather Rogers who has a new book out 'Gone Tomorrow: The Hidden Life of Garbage' (www.gonetomorrow.org). Thursday (23rd) 7.30 pm LARC, 62 Fieldgate Street, London E1 1ES 07708794665 www.londonrisingtide.org.uk ** Want to know about the Radical History of Cycling? Get along to **London Radical History Group** next Thurs (23rd) at 56a INFO SHOP 56 Crampton St, London, SE17 (Elephant & Castle tube) mudlark@macunlimited.net ** **Brighton Critical Mass** cycle ride happening next Friday (24th) 6pm The Level. <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/criticalmassbrighton> ** Next Saturday (25th) the **No Borders Network in South Wales** presents a free workshop by **Legal Action for Women**, based on their booklet "For Asylum Seekers and their Supporters: a self-help guide against detention and deportation" Also featuring: film showing, discussion, free information and food 3pm Friends Meeting House, Charles St, Cardiff noborderswales@riseup.net

Inside SchNEWS

A new anti-prison group established itself at a Prison Abolition Seminar in London recently. Spearheaded by former prisoners, health workers and academics, No More Prison calls for a moratorium on prison building and a redirection of the massive prison budget in to more successful projects for victim and felon alike.

Britain has the highest prison population per head in Western Europe - 88,000 men, women and children. No More Prison are an activist organization and welcome support. Check them out at www.alternatives2prison.ik.com/

...and finally...

As recruitment for the US military hits an all time low, the Bush-Cheney axis are set to get a boost from an unexpected direction. On Valentines Day, grey haired members of San Francisco's Bay Area Grandmothers for Peace turned up at their local recruiting office and tried to sign up to fight the insurgency. The crowd of 300 eager, young-at-heart enlistees carried banners demanding, "Stop Mad Cowboy Disease". Despite the crowd of potential recruits ready to rush the doors, the Oakland recruiting office was dark and the doors locked during the action.

While the office remained empty, one camouflaged soldier stood watching from down the block. He said that he has been assigned to the recruiting office for the past two months and that he was used to protesters at the site. "The pink ladies come every Wednesday," the sergeant said. "They hold up signs of dead people and stay for about a half and hour."

In Fresno, California, 25 members of the Raging Grannies tried to enlist in the military. After a sing-song, the Grannies entered the military recruiters' offices. The marines, air force, and army recruiters were so afraid of the rampaging Granarchists that they closed and locked their doors. Eventually the sheriff's department put in an appearance and rescued the marines, air force, and army from the avenging Grey Panthers.

Disclaimer

SchNEWS warns all readers... don't blame it on the boogie, blame it on capitalism. Honest!

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, P.O. Box 2600, Brighton, East Sussex, BN2 0EF. Tel +44 (0)1273 685913 Email schnews@brighton.co.uk Web www.schnews.org.uk