

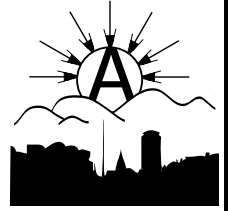
FREE!

WORKERS

Twenty Four years of Irish Anarchist News

# SOLIDARITY

Number 106 November-December 2008



# People Power! Pensioners show the way



**“This Budget serves no vested interest. Rather, it provides an opportunity for us all to pull together and play our part according to our means so that we can secure the gains which have been the achievement of the men and women of this country. It is, a Cheann Comhairle, no less than a call to patriotic action.”**

With these words, Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan concluded his Budget speech in the Dáil on Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> October. Just a week later Lenihan and his colleagues were left in no doubt whatsoever what people thought of his ‘call to patriotic action’. At a meeting organised by Age Action to allow people to vent their anger at the decision to withdraw the automatic right to medical cards from over-70s, Minister of State at the Department of Health, John Moloney stood

up in St. Andrew’s Church, Westland Row, Dublin. To howls of outrage and amid a cacophony of boos he was forced to withdraw and, quite literally, was sent packing.

What we were witnessing was a clear demonstration of people power in action. The government was in a panic and was drastically hurtling to reverse the medical card decision. And when this meeting was followed up 24 hours later with a demonstration of 15,000 organised by the Senior Citizens Parliament and another 15,000-strong student demonstration against the re-introduction of 3<sup>rd</sup> level fees it was obvious that politics in Ireland had changed drastically.

What has been shown is that people power can work, that the sort of ‘patriotic action’ that is required is our standing together

to demand change. The government is attempting to sell us the lie that the current economic crisis is some sort of natural disaster and that we must all equally take the pain. Happily many are refusing to buy this lie. The ‘economic crisis’ is a direct result of the neo-liberal economic policies pursued by governments across the so-called ‘developed world’ for the past 20 years.

Those who made the gains should now be feeling the pain. Banks and property developers have lapped up the cream through the years of the Celtic Tiger. They gave the two fingers to any concept of ‘patriotic action’ as they salted away obscene amounts of profits. So forget Lenihan’s ‘patriotism’ and embrace the spirit of the over-70s. Fight Back. Don’t let them pin the failures of capitalism on our shoulders.

**ANARCHIST NEWS AND ANALYSIS**

# Students say “Feck Fees”



On October 22nd, in the biggest show of student strength in many years, over 15,000 third level students marched through the streets of Dublin. They were united in their opposition to the Budget's 67% College Registration Fee increase and Minister for Education, Batt O'Keefe's threat to bring back full college fees by September 2009. Last month, he announced that the return of fees would raise €530 million in revenue at a family income threshold of €120,000. To his embarrassment, he later had to admit that these figures were wrong and that in fact the maximum revenue would be only €130 million.

Our Minister for Education then stated that the plan to introduce an Australian style loan system in Ireland was a “constructive contribution” to the debate on tuition charges. This is the same system that Australia's Education Minister

Julia Gillard has called “... anomalous, inconsistent and irrational” and where average loan repayments have reached a staggering €40,000 per student. Australia's total debt for this college loan system is growing by €1.6 billion a year and is predicted to reach €14 billion by 2008-2009.

WSM members who are working or studying in University College Dublin (UCD.) have been involved in the setting up of a campaign group called Free Education for Everyone (FEE). This group is committed to opposing the reintroduction of college fees in any form and in favour of extending and increasing the grant system to reflect the cost of living. We believe that education should be a right not a privilege and support funding education through a progressive taxation system where higher income earners and owners of capital pay a disproportionately higher tax. On average, OECD countries

spend 6.2% of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP) on education. In 1995, Ireland spent 5.2%. In 2008, it dropped to 4.6%.

FEE called for a demonstration against the Minister for Finance Brian Lenihan's visit on October 20<sup>th</sup> to UCD under the title of “if you block our education, we'll block yours”. Over 150 students came out to “blockade the budget slasher”. Garda overreaction led to three arrests after a sit - down protest. All of the individuals were released with a caution. F.E.E is in the process of building branches in colleges all over Dublin, hoping to then spread across Ireland.

**If you want to find out more or get involved, please email us at [stopfees@gmail.com](mailto:stopfees@gmail.com).**

*J. Carax*

# 'Partnership' A farce and a con

What a farce! As the economy officially goes into recession, as electricity bills go up by 17.5%, as food bills are officially 6.4% higher than this time last year, the leaders of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions negotiate through the night and emerge bleary-eyed from the 'social partnership' talks with 1) a pay pause and 2) pay increases, when we eventually get them, lower than the rate of inflation. And then they have the cheek to tell us that this is "the best deal available in the current economic climate" (1). Lucky for them they're not on performance-related pay if that's the best they can do for their members.

Unluckily for us however it seems that this is what our trade union movement has been reduced to. The employers' representatives must have a great laugh when they see the trade union delegation coming. The Construction Industry Federation – representing massively wealthy property developers who have made huge fortunes during the years of the so-called 'Celtic Tiger' plead poverty and the ICTU tugs the forelock and agrees that in the 'current economic climate' we would be grateful for any crumbs that the fatcats might deign to let fall from the table.

## Social Equity?

When the first 'social partnership' deal, the Programme for National Recovery, was signed way back in 1987 we were told that we should moderate wage demands in the interests of "social equity" and to "regenerate the economy". The economy was 'regenerated' all right but it doesn't take a genius to work out that any idea that 'social equity' might follow was at best naïve. Throughout the boom years, while profits soared through the roof, we were told that through 'social partnership' we should moderate wage demands to facilitate investment in public services.

Yet at the end of the boom we are left with a health system that is unable to meet even the most basic health needs of the population, an education system that can boast class sizes which are among the largest in the OECD, and a crisis in homelessness with Focus Ireland recently pointing out that there are now five times as many people homeless as there were when Focus was founded 23 years ago. "In 1985, it was estimated that up to 1,000



## ICTU delegation arrives for partnership talks

people were homeless. There are now up to 5,000 people who are homeless at any one time."(2)

'Social partnership' has been one of the greatest frauds ever perpetrated on the Irish working class. It never set out to provide 'social equity' or to develop public services. Its sole purpose was to emasculate the trade union movement, and to provide cover for the unbridled market-driven capitalism that has led us now from boom to bust. And guess who'll be made to pay the costs!

## Stand up

'Social partnership' has provided a cover for the wholesale raiding of our pay packets and a massive transfer of wealth from the poorer sections of society to the pockets of the wealthy. That our trade union leaders have connived in this fraud is nothing short of scandalous. But it need not continue to be so. Rejection of the current deal would be step number one on the road to reclaiming the true spirit of our trade unions. And as 'the new economic reality' comes thundering at us, now more than ever we need a strong trade union movement which will stand up for us and deliver a strong message that those who benefited most from the boom years are the ones who should pay for the bust years and that we, workers and the unemployed standing together, are no longer going to be the fall guys.

(1) Peter McLoone, IMPACT general secretary, 17<sup>th</sup> September 2008

(2) Sr. Stanislaus Kennedy writing in the Irish Times, 25<sup>th</sup> September 2008

*Gregor Kerr*

## Contacts

### ANARCHIST ORGANISATIONS

#### Workers Solidarity Movement

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[cork@wsm.ie](mailto:cork@wsm.ie)

[belfast@wsm.ie](mailto:belfast@wsm.ie)

#### Revolutionary Anarcha-Feminist Group (RAG)

P.O. Box 10785, Dublin 1

<http://ragdublin.blogspot.com/>

#### Organise!

PO Box 505, Belfast, BT12 6BQ

<http://organiseireland.blogspot.com>

### LIBERTARIAN NETWORKS

#### Indymedia Ireland

Alternative user-generated Irish news

<http://www.indymedia.ie>

#### Seomra Spraoi

Dublin social centre

10 Belvedere Court, Dublin 1

<http://www.seomraspraoi.org>

#### Galway Social Space

24 Middle Street, Galway

<http://www.galwayspace.org/>

#### Revolt Video

Radical video collective

<http://revoltvideo.blogspot.com>

### CAMPAIGNING GROUPS

#### Shell to Sea

Campaign to move Shell's gas pipeline offshore from Co. Mayo

[www.shelltosea.com](http://www.shelltosea.com)

#### Hands Off the People of Iran

Anti-imperialist network for solidarity with Iranian trade unions and the women's rights movement.

[www.hopoi.org](http://www.hopoi.org)

#### Choice Ireland

Abortion rights action group

[choiceireland@gmail.com](mailto:choiceireland@gmail.com)

#### Alliance for Choice (NI)

<http://allianceforchoiceni.org>

#### Residents Against Racism

Opposing racism & deportations

24-hour helpline: 087-666 2060

#### Anarchist Black Cross (Belfast)

Assists class war prisoners worldwide

[www.myspace.com/belfastabc](http://www.myspace.com/belfastabc)

# Thinking about Anarchism



## Get out of that relationship!



**“At the heart of the matter is the fact that capitalism is a social system. It is a way that people have dealings with each other in their everyday lives.”**

The financial markets have taken a hammering. Speculators (that's a rich person's word for 'gambler') lost incredible sums of borrowed cash in bets on everything from mortgage values to the possible price of wheat in 2011. Banks who lent out far more money than they actually had needed governments to step in with billions to bail them out. In some countries the state took them over.

Unfortunately, capitalism is not collapsing. Nothing massively unexpected has happened. If the 'econ-

omists' who turned up on every news programme this autumn really didn't know there was going to be a crash at some stage they should think of changing jobs.

Capitalism is definitely going into a slump. Production is slowing down, employment is falling, investment is drying up, wages are starting to fall behind inflation, less is being bought. We didn't know exactly when the boom would end, we don't know exactly how deep this slump will be – but we do know the boom/slump cycle is, and al-

ways has been, an integral part of that system.

Even if capitalism suffered a massive worldwide crash of such a magnitude that production almost ceased entirely (and there is no sign of that), it would not, in itself, mean the end of that particular system.

At the heart of the matter is the fact that capitalism is a social system. It is a way that people have dealings with each other in their everyday lives. There have been other systems in the past, like barbarism, slavery and feudalism. Nothing need be fixed for all time.

Today we live under capitalism, where the means of production and distribution are owned by a small ruling class, the capitalists. The driving reason for this class's existence is to make a profit. Wage or salary earners, with our dependants, are the great majority of the population and make up the working class.

That is the dominant social relationship. The majority are used to make profit for a small minority. Unfortunately, most people are not yet thinking about ending this particular relationship, and no social system simply fades away because it's unfair or just hugely inefficient. A social system gets kicked off the stage of history when it is physically overthrown and replaced by a different one.

Some would have us believe that capitalism can be gradually abolished through 'public ownership' or nationalisation. This odd idea possibly has its roots in the mistaken idea that either 'old Labour' or the Stalinist dictatorships represented some sort of socialism.

The relationship between workers and a state employer, like in the health service, does not differ in any significant way from the relationship between workers and private bosses. From the beginning of capitalism governments have tried to solve certain of the system's problems through nationalisation, more accurately called state capitalism.

It does not change the essential structure of the capitalist system, of workers and bosses having different and opposed interests. Changing a social system is not about changing the people at the top, it's about changing the relationship between people. So, state capitalism is in no sense a step towards socialism.

What then are we to replace the present set-up with? How about a system where production is organised to meet people's needs, where it would be regarded as insanity to have building workers idle while others go without adequate housing, where the idea of paying farmers not to grow food while hunger is still a daily reality in much of the world would be seen as immoral. This can only work when the means of producing and distributing wealth are owned in common, by all of society. That's the meaning of socialism.

How about a system that takes socialism and freedom to be of equal value? One where people can do as they wish so long as they don't interfere with freedom of others? One where you can have a direct say in making the decisions that will effect you? One where control is in the hands of the majority through democratic assemblies and councils? That's anarchism.

Joe King

## *That's Capitalism!*

Recession is just another word when you are rich. Google bosses, Larry Page and Sergey Brin, have just spent €17.6 million on a 60-seater Boeing jet for their “personal use”. Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen splashed out €140 million to buy the world’s eighth largest yacht. It comes with two helicopters, two submarines, eight smaller boats, a basketball court, swimming pool, a crew of 60 and running costs of about €15 million a year.

The Beacon Hospitals group plans to build a 170-bed for-profit hospital in the grounds of the public Beaumont Hospital. It won’t deal with A&E, and any difficult cases will be diverted to the public hospital next door. The state has agreed to this, and to pay at least 30% of Beacon’s building costs. But we are told there is no cash for better public facilities.

Most people in Swaziland live on less than 60c a day. That didn’t stop King Mawati III spending €8.86m on a fleet of BMWs to mark “40 years of independence”.

Fannie May and Freddie Mac chief executives, Richard Syron and Daniel Mudd, pocketed a \$24 million pay-off. How much would they have got if they had turned a profit instead of losing \$14 billion in the last year?

Michael Fingleton, chief executive of the Irish Nationwide Building Society, is “concerned” about wage rises going higher than inflation. Of course this “concern” didn’t extend to his 27% rise from €1.8 million to €2.3 million a year.

Mary Harney and Brendan Drumm are the two people most responsible for our hospitals. They claim they have been sparing no effort to give us an excellent service. Why then do they both have private health insurance? When RTE’s Marian Finucane asked them if they had enough confidence in the public health-care system to let their private insurance lapse, both refused to answer.

Over nine million children died before reaching their fifth birthday last year. Most died as a result of poverty related illnesses. The mortality rate in Western Europe is 6 in every 1,000; in the worst case, Sierra Leone, it is 262 of out every thousand.

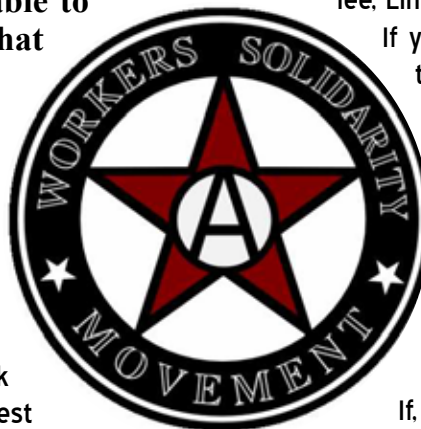
While PAYE taxpayers see our money used to bail out the banks, it’s nice to know that it’s having some effect. Bank of Ireland’s Brian Goggins gets €6.75 million in pay and benefits, and Anglo Irish Bank boss David Drumm gets €5.59 million a year. Anglo Irish finance chief William McAteer also picked up €6.4 million for his ‘expertise’.

Other poverty stricken victims of the recession include Irish Ferries’ slave-driver Eamon Rothwell (€7.03 million), IAWS chief Owen Killian (€10.15 million), Elan CEO Kelly Martin (€6.87 million), Smurfit’s Gary McCann (€6.16 million), and Cement Roadstone’s Liam O’Mahoney (€11.8 million). That’s just what they declared as last year’s income.

# Anarchism and the WSM

**The WSM stands for a society where production is organised to meet human needs and desires rather than to generate profit for a few. We hold that there should no limits on human liberty other than respect for the liberty of others. We believe in democracy, in direct democracy. This means everyone being able to have a say in making the decisions that will effect them.**

We are an organisation of working class anarchists who have come together to maximise the impact of anarchist ideas. Pooling the resources of many people allows us to distribute 10,000 copies of this paper every two months, and 1,000 copies of our twice yearly magazine, Red & Black Revolution. It allows us to discuss the best ways to advance working class interests, and prioritise particular activities rather than be so widely dispersed as to have little effect. The next issue of Red and Black Revolution is due out in the coming weeks.



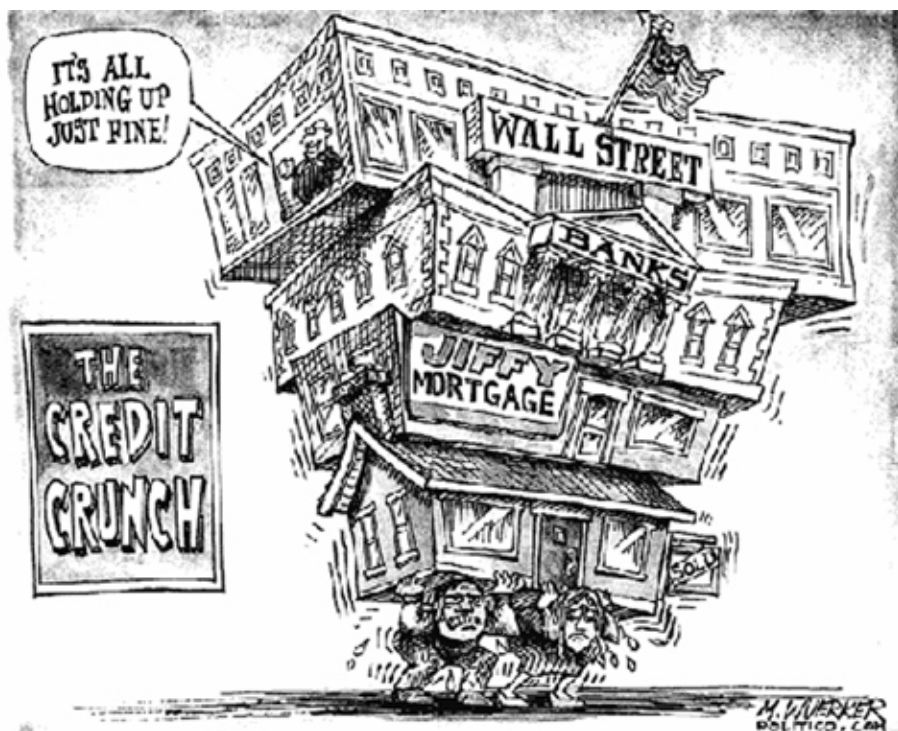
Over the next six months, the WSM will be organizing a series of public talks on the recent financial collapse and the libertarian socialist alternative. We’ve already published extensive analysis of the origin and role of the financial system which are well worth a read. Check out our website for the full articles. We aim to host meetings, in Tralee, Limerick, Galway, Belfast, Dublin and Cork.

If you would like to help out in organising these meetings or are interested in organising one in your area, please get in touch via email at [national@wsm.ie](mailto:national@wsm.ie).

If you think the world needs to be built on a saner and more just economic basis, then consider getting organised in your trade union, residents’ association, women’s group etc.

If, like us, you think that a just world requires the replacement of capitalism by a libertarian socialist approach, then consider getting involved in the WSM; replacing capitalism is going take a lot of people getting very organised.

# Crisis, What Crisis?



Unless you've been stuck in cave for the last few months, you'll have noticed a certain amount of hysteresis in the media about the current financial crisis. A crisis judged so severe by the Taoiseach that he recently decided to back all the top Irish banks with €400 billion. That's nearly twice our annual GDP and €100,000 for every man, woman and child in the state. Money that wasn't available for our broken health system or our children's crumbling schools, apparently. So what's the cause of all these alarms? What's the link to the gathering recession and what does it bode for the future for ordinary workers and tax-payers?

## Pyramids not houses

The official story is that the origins of the current crisis lie in the collapse of the US subprime mortgage market - i.e. poor people not paying their mortgages. Although this may have been the trigger event, it is not the real cause. The real cause lies in pyramids not houses. Specifically the enormous debt pyramid built up by the Western countries, particularly those following the Anglo-saxon economic model - which, unfortunately for us, includes Ireland.

The financial framework constructed to support the globalisation of trade and production, has enabled the growth of a huge, unregulated credit sector known as the "Shadow Banking System" which has allowed the ballooning of credit not backed up by any capital reserves.

Now this system is collapsing and banks are having to take the bad debts back onto their balance sheets. This means that most US and European banks are in danger of not having enough of the reserve cash required by law to back up the loans - many of them dodgy property loans.

The result has been the biggest wave of nationalisations in the Western world since the aftermath of WW2. However we are not nationalising railways, mines or manufacturers but banks.

## Nationalisation = Socialism!

Some blowhards in government and media have labelled this outbreak of nationalisations as a return to socialism. Nothing could be further from the truth. Here the only thing that's being socialised is the risk and the losses while the profits remain privatised. Socialism is about redistribution from the parasites to the producers, not the other way around.

Some commentators on the Paulson Plan's \$700 billion bail-out have noted that the figure almost exactly matches the amount the US has spent on its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, but only in passing, as a coincidence. In fact, there is an indirect connection here. After the burst of the tech bubble and 9/11, the Fed Secretary Alan Greenspan, lowered the dollar interest rate right down below 2% to prevent a crash.

He then kept interest rates very low, right through to 2004, dropping down to 1% just after the US invasion of Iraq. It was this ultra-low rate, in part motivated by the need to provide cheap money to fund the Iraq adventure, which contributed to the growth of the property bubble.

In the American neo-cons' original plan, the Iraq adventure was supposed to pay for itself with seized Iraqi oil. Now it looks like the US taxpayers will have to pick up the bill. But they will not be the only ones to pay. As the collapse of this debt pyramid drags us into a global recession, we will all end up paying.

## Normal service will not be resumed

"Raw capitalism is a dead end", US Treasury Secretary Hank Paulson now says. The political and business establishment are suddenly agreed that government intervention and regulation are not only a good thing, but a vital necessity. Well they've sure changed their tune. These are the very same people who have been bashing us over the head since the 1970s with the neoliberal dogmas that regulation is bad, that markets can look after themselves far better without government interference. The whole neoliberal catechism is now in shreds. So we will not be going back to the way things were before this crisis.

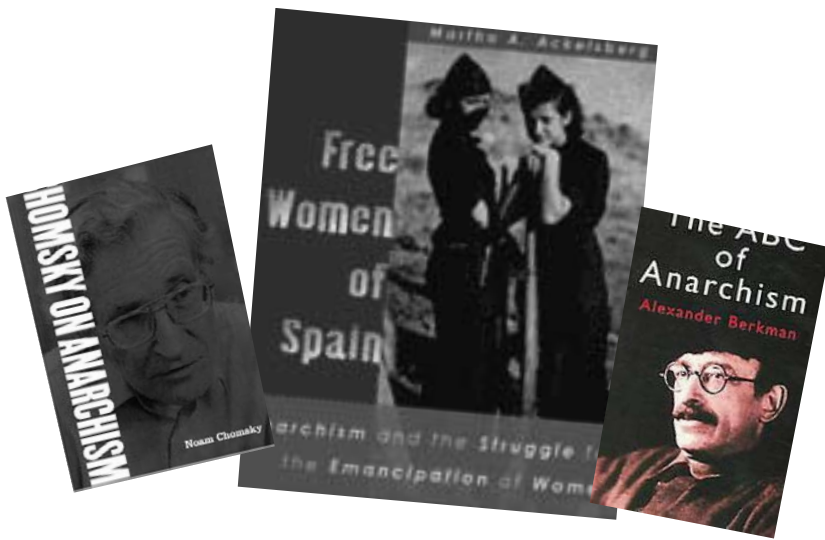
Nor will we be going back to the way things were before neo-liberalism. Globalisation has meant the shift of industrial power to the East. China is now the workshop of the world. With its failure to seize control of the world's oil reserves, US power to continue to dictate the terms of trade and the global economy is waning.

## What's next?

Capitalism is no stranger to crises. In many ways crises are seen as an opportunity to overcome obstacles to profitability that tradition or popular resistance have established over time. The capitalist solution to the crises they create is always to try and make the workers pay. In concrete terms this means an all-out assault on wages through the rotten partnership process and further assaults on public services like health, education and public transport. Our response must be to fight back and not let them saddle us with the bill for their screw-ups.

*Paul Bowman*

# Mail Order Anarchism



Alexander Berkman

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chism', a ground-breaking new book that shows a different side of this best-selling author: the anarchist principles that have guided him since he was a teenager.

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Martha Ackleburg

## FREE WOMEN OF SPAIN

Cowards don't make history; and the women of Mujeres Libres (Free Women) were no cowards. Courageous enough to create revolutionary change in their daily lives, they mobilised over 20,000 women into an organised network during the Spanish Revolution to strive for community, education, and equality for women and the emancipation of all.

Militants in the anarcho-syndicalist CNT union, Mujeres Libres struggled both against fascism, the state, and reaction; and the sometimes less than supportive attitudes and concerns of some of their male comrades. Martha Ackelsberg writes a comprehensive study of Mujeres Libres, intertwining interviews with the women themselves and analysis connecting them with modern feminist movements.

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Philip S Foner

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# What's happening in Bolivia?

**Big Business doesn't like what's happening in South America. The election of reforming governments in Peru and Ecuador might have been a bearable irritant but that Chavez guy in Venezuela has really got up their noses. In Bolivia sections of the local ruling class got so riled up that they tried to overthrow President Morales in September. The US ruling class, in collusion with local bosses, is trying to destabilise political and economic reforms. As they see it, too much is going to workers and peasants, and not enough into their own coffers.**

It certainly isn't socialism, the working class is not in control nor is an economy based on need rather than profit being created. But there has been some real redistribution of wealth to the poor.

In the past, when people tried to tackle the power of the elites they were met with military coups, torture and death squads. The White House and their fellow free marketeers have never had any problem throwing parliamentary democracy and human rights out the window whenever their profits were threatened. The fact that Morales and his 'Movement Towards Socialism' won 67.4% of the national vote in a referendum as recently as August 10th is no protection.

## Limited land reform

The limited land reform programme gave a good example. Since Morales came to power, 500,000 hectares of land have been taken from large landowners and returned to poor peasants and co-operatives. The two million poorest peasants live on just five million hectares.

At the other end of the social scale, one hundred families own a colossal twenty-five million hectares. Those parasites were never going to accept the proposal to limit land ownership to between 5,000 and 10,000 hectares. From their base in the 'Half Moon' provinces, they set about trying to overthrow the government. It is just one of their targets, they also want to destroy trade unions and peasant movements, and undo the improvements of recent years.

On September 8<sup>th</sup>, a coup was attempted in Santa Cruz by large landowners, ranchers and drug traffickers. Government buildings were taken over and roadblocks set up to cut off the city. The local airport was seized, with access only possible through checkpoints controlled by right-wing militias. The extreme right UJC marched, in military uniform, through the poorest shantytowns, where most people support Morales. This followed the murder of 30 peasants in Pando, all of whom were Morales supporters.



The government sent in the army and the country was taken to the brink of civil war. The US ambassador was expelled for "actively backing" the right-wing forces. Not being supported by the rest of the ruling class or any significant section of the army, the coup plotters backed down, having been promised 'negotiations' with the government.

## The lessons of Chile

Drawing on their own bitter experience of the Pinochet coup, the anarchists of the Chilean Libertarian Communist Organisation have cautioned "there is no possibility of dialogue with the putschists: it would simply enable the bourgeoisie and imperialism to align their forces to make the decisive blow, which would lead the Bolivian popular movement into butchery of untold proportions. That is why it is so urgent to take forceful measures against the paramilitary groups operating in the "Half Moon" and against any coup-inclined, middle- and high-ranking officers in Bolivian Armed Forces".

The negotiations may result in a temporary stand off but this won't last long. New battles are certain as long as the opposition of interests between the majority of the population and the elite remains unresolved. This could take the form of an attempted coup by dissident sections of the military, in conjunction with the right-wing-led provinces of the 'half moon' and a lockout by employers.

The overwhelming support for Morales reflects an optimism that big change is possible. Unfortunately the MAS are seeking to channel this into creating a 'capitalism with a human face' rather than a socialist revolution. The vice-President, Alvaro García Linaera, has called it "Andean capitalism" and a "necessary stage".

MAS has already begun to come into conflict with some of the unions, especially the miners. The call for a guaranteed state funded pension at 55 (life expectancy in Bolivia is only 62) was rejected by the government as "unviable". When some workers called strikes and protests to demand these reforms, they were attacked by the government as "agents of the right-wing".

The sad lesson of Chile is that those who make only half a revolution dig their own graves. The ruling class will not passively surrender its power and wealth, never in all of human history has that happened. Nor will it be fooled into doing so if we move slowly.

The anarchist movement in Bolivia is saying that the power of the right has to be dismantled. That means dismantling capitalism and replacing it with a worker controlled economy geared towards satisfying human needs, where the people exercise direct control through their own democratic assemblies and councils.

*Alan MacSimoin*

Informacje i artykuły w języku polskim dostępne na stronie [www.wsm.ie/polska](http://www.wsm.ie/polska)