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A New Left: Vital to end poverty

An open call to the movement

By RORY HEARNE,
Editor Socialist Worker

The response to the call from Make Poverty History, Bono and Geldof has been fantastic.

Thousands will be on the streets of Dublin on June 30th and hundreds of thousands will be in Edinburgh to protest against the G8.

This momentum has forced Bush and Blair to concede to debt relief for a small number of impoverished countries.

But the roots of global poverty are the very conditions attached to debt relief and aid.

These neoliberal policies of privatisation and free markets where corporate profit comes before people, workers and the environment are destroying the lives of billions of people from Ethiopia to Ireland.

Rather than opposing such neoliberalism, the traditional left parties like the Labour Party in Britain and the SPD and Greens in Germany are implementing war and privatisation.

It was the grassroots left that defeated the referendum in France and showed that the neoliberal machine can be stopped.

In Britain it was the newly formed Respect alliance and George Galloway that most vocally opposed Bush and Blair's war.

In Northern Ireland the Socialist and Environment alliance (SEA) is building such a new left around opposition to water charges and support for the anti-war and anti-capitalist movements.

From Bolivia to France it is the new left movements that provide a real opposition.

At the U2 gig last Saturday night An Taoiseach Bertie Ahern was booed while the call to Make Poverty History (MPH) was cheered to the rafters.

The boos represent the simmering discontent of ordinary people against neoliberalism in Ireland—the failure to spend the UN-recommended 0.7% of GNP on aid, the health crisis, lack of affordable

housing, Garda corruption etc.

Instead of galvanising this wave of opposition and offering a real left alternative the Labour Party and others are busy making pre-electoral pacts with "free-market" Fine Gael.

Labour party councillors recently supported FG candidate to become Mayor in Dublin and Cork.

Clearly the movement in Ireland requires a new left organisation that will actively oppose neoliberalism, poverty and war.

Those genuinely committed to building movements against war, poverty, racism, privatisation and for civil liberties need to unite and create such a new left alternative.



Drop debt not bombs

The Make Poverty History campaign has done brilliantly to focus on third world poverty and the failure of global leaders to act.

But MPH has excluded the issue of war.

They avoid the war in the hope that Bush and Blair will move on Debt, trade and aid. This is a big mistake.

\$1 Trillion is spent every year on arms. A quarter of that would end all poverty on the planet. Bush and Blair

are responsible for the deaths of up to 100,000 people and mass poverty in Iraq and Afghanistan.

How can these warmongers be serious about ending poverty? Central to their "debt relief" proposal is imposing more free trade on Africa.

But Africa is poor because of free trade and capitalism, not because it needs more of it. Poverty will not be history until capitalism and war are history.

End Ireland's complicity with mass murder in Iraq

By KIERAN ALLEN (IAWM)

After the G8 we need to keep the anti-war movement going. The Irish Anti-War Movement will hold a major mobilisation at Shannon airport on September 24th.

Activists from across Ireland will join a protest against the huge numbers of US troops who use the airport as a transit hub for the war in Iraq.

The Irish taxpayer is also subsidising the US military to the tune of €10,000 a day as we pay for navigation services to warplanes traveling over Irish

airspace.

The Shannon protest will coincide with huge mobilisations in the United States called by "United for Peace and Justice" and the ANSWER coalition.

Bush is rapidly losing the war argument with Americans. 50% think Bush "deliberately misled the American public", and 59% think he is handling the situation badly.

Some members of congress are now calling for US withdrawal from Iraq by October 2006. As the pressure grows on Bush, it is time to turn the heat up on Ahern for his collaboration.

NIPSA supports non-payment

By NIPSA member

The decision by NIPSA's annual conference to publicly support a "mass non-payment" campaign has injected new energy into the anti-water charges movement.

The decision is an indication of the anger over water charges and the desire of union members to see a real fight led by the unions.

The task now is to spread the feeling right across the trade union movement.

Everyone should be pushing their union branch to endorse NIPSA's position and ensure their union is committed to non-payment.

West's hypocrisy over corruption

By PEADAR O GRADY

"Aid just gets swallowed up by corruption." This argument is repeated by the west as a hypocritical excuse for denying aid and debt-relief, and for imposing on poverty-stricken countries conditions favourable to the richest countries and their multinationals.

Charlie Haughey's transgressions are well documented, but he has yet to be charged or stand trial, and multinational corporations like Enron or WorldCom have embezzled billions of dollars, putting them in a different league of corruption to that of any African.

Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan ordered the shooting of over 500 protestors in May, but US negotiators at NATO vetoed any criticism of his actions because the US uses an important military air base in Uzbekistan.

Suharto in Indonesia killed up to a million of his own people and slaughtered 250,000 East Timorans. Mobutu in Zaire, Pinochet in Chile, Houphet-Boigny in the Ivory Coast, Eyadema in Togo, and Marcos in the Philippines—all of these brutal rulers survived for decades with Western support. Saddam Hussein was supported by the US for years, even when he had gassed 5,000 Kurds in Iraq.

Money stolen from many countries by western-backed dictators lies in western banks, yet they refuse to assist in returning it.

Insistence by Blair and the G8 leaders on "good governance" is a cover for imposing conditions that only increase poverty, such as the "Structural Adjustment Programmes" (SAPs). In Mali recently, the World Bank forced the government to sell their cotton at below cost and in Senegal forced the privatisation of the state peanut processing company Sonacos. The EU's "Economic Partnership Agreements" are just the latest example.

We should not be fooled by talk of "reform" or "democracy" when it comes from war-mongers like Bush, Blair and Putin. Real democracy comes from below, from the strikes this week against unemployment in South Africa, the resistance to the CIA-backed coup in Venezuela, and the mass movement against privatisation of gas and water resources in Bolivia.

30,000 children die every day because of the effects of global capitalism. This is the corruption that must be stopped!

UPRISING IN BOLIVIA: REVOLUTIONARY REHEARSAL

Popular movements fight neo-liberalism but revolution is stalled

By KEVIN WINGFIELD

Recent weeks have seen revolutionary upheavals in Bolivia. After a three week general strike and the blockading of cities—particularly the capital La Paz—by workers and indigenous people, President Carlos Mesa was forced to resign. Mesa replaced Gonzalo Sánchez de Lozada who was overthrown in an uprising in October 2003.

De Lozada and Mesa represented the minority white elite, the large landowners and the multi-national and local big business interests.

For twenty years Bolivia had experienced the full force of the neo-liberal agenda.

The tin mines had been destroyed and their workers displaced to the shanty towns surrounding the affluent regional cities; water and sewerage services privatised and the government was busily selling off recently discovered abundant reserves of gas to multi-nationals.

The country's indigenous population, 62 percent of the population, was effectively excluded from the political and economic benefits.

The impoverished coca growers were demonised and repressed. A majority of the population lived on \$2 a day while the wealthy elite lived in luxury in the skyscraper lined cities and gated estates.

Mass resistance

But there had been mass resistance. In Cochabamba, the privatisation of water was resisted by mass action. Workers, indigenous and poor peasants had thrown up social movements fighting for their rights.

But the resignation of Mesa did not solve the crisis. Immediately the head of the Senate, wealthy landowner Hormando Vaca Díez attempted to step into the presidency with the backing of parliament.

Forrest Hylton reported in Counterpunch:

"Indigenous peasant road blockades jumped from 61 on June 6 to 90 on June 7, to 106 on June 8, reaching a high point at 119 on June 9, although no one political force or social movement controlled their implementation. Seven gas fields—property of Repsol YPF (Chaco) and British Petroleum (Andino)—were taken over by the Assembly of the Guraní People and indigenous frontier settlers, while highland peasants shut off the valves at stations in Sayari (Cochabamba) and Sica Sica (La Paz). According to the head of what remained of the state-owned hydrocarbon enterprise, YPFB, takeovers at Los Penoccos, Sirari, Víbora and Yapacaní on June 6-7 reduced the provision of petroleum by more than 3,000 barrels per day. The stock of Repsol, a consortium of Spanish, Argentine, and US capital with fixed assets of \$1.2 billion, plus 2,000 square km of territory under exploitation, and 10,000 under exploration, dropped by 1.4%. Production of cement and beer—two of Bolivia's only remaining national industries—was also brought to a halt because of blockades and takeovers."

On June 9 Indigenous peasant trade unionists and miners from around the country blockaded the parliamentary session, which had been hurriedly relocated to Sucre and prevented the installation of Díez. Later in the evening Díez bitterly withdrew in favour of Eduardo Rodríguez, President of the Supreme Court. Díez' move was no doubt prompted by the head of the armed forces Admiral Luis Aranda, who sensing the movement was too strong to be put down easily, commented "society is demanding profound transformation".

Manifesto

The same day in El Alto, home to half a million poor high above the capital La Paz, the movements proposed a revolutionary manifesto.

This radical-popular bloc—made up of the miners' union (FSTMB), regional trade union central (COR), neighbourhood association federation (FEJUVE), the indigenous peasant union (CSUTCB-



Indigenous protestors from El Alto blockade the roads cutting of La Paz

Túpac Katari), the national trade union central headquartered in La Paz (COB)—established a five-point program.

In a mass assembly held in the offices of the FEJUVE, it was decided:

- 1.) That El Alto was to be the "general barracks of the Bolivian revolution of the twenty-first century;"
- 2.) To form an Indigenous Popular Assembly (Asamblea Popular Originaria) as an instrument of national power led by the above-mentioned organizations,
- 3.) To form self-provisioning, self-defence, media, and political commissions,
- 4.) To keep up incessant struggle for the nationalisation and industrialisation of gas,
- 5.) To form Popular Assemblies at the departmental level under the direction of the Regional Workers' Centrals (COR)
- 6.) To reject parliamentary elections or any constitutional succession.

Blockade

But despite having effectively blockaded the nation's cities, seized control of key industries and by mass mobilisations thrown out one president (just two years after throwing out his predecessor) and prevented the assumption of power by his constitutional successor, and proclaimed a revolutionary programme for reorganising Bolivian society—the mass of Bolivia's workers and poor stopped.

Three days after the El Alto proclamations the movements' leaders met with the new President Rodríguez and all—apart from the Aymara peasants—agreed to demobilise.

Part of the problem is that, despite their revolutionary actions, illusions persist in the minds of most of the workers and poor that fundamental change can be achieved without the movements taking power themselves.

They believe that it is possible to elect a president and a parliament that will fundamentally purge Bolivia of racism and neo-liberalism by a process of radical reform.

Many of these "reformist" hopes are centred on the Movement towards Socialism (MAS) and its leader Evo Morales.

Morales emerged from the cocaleros (coca growers); he is a leader of the Chapare cocalero union. The militant miners lost their jobs with the destruction of that industry as part of the IMF's neo-liberal project in the 1980s.

Many of the 300,000 mostly indigenous miners took up coca farming to scrape a living. By insisting on their right to grow the coca leaf—a powerful part of indigenous culture—the cocaleros soon became a powerful symbol of resistance.

Out of these peasant struggles the MAS emerged. As Morales explained: "After long experiences of broken prom-

ises in the countryside we had to come to the conclusion that what we needed was a way to change the whole political system.

As long as we carried on voting for the mainstream parties, we knew we were going to keep seeing massacres, militarisation and bad economic policies."

As militant representatives of the indigenous people's struggles, MAS and Morales contested the 2002 national elections. Morales almost won the presidency, losing to de Lozada by less than 2%.

After De Lozada's overthrow in October 2003 the new president Carlos Mesa pledged to implement the "October Agenda" of the movements: Nationalisation of gas; a Constituent Assembly to include a real share of power for the indigenous majority and prosecutions of those responsible for the killing of 67 demonstrators.

But Mesa's stalling provoked the movements into re-starting mass mobilisations. Morales and MAS were moderating however, keen not to alienate any possible electoral support. MAS said it "should put forward a critical support of the government without participation in the cabinet and other forms of the executive."

In 2004 Mesa held a vaguely worded gas referendum, which did not even mention nationalisation. Whilst the movement urged a boycott on the basis that a yes vote would allow Mesa to do anything he wanted, MAS urged participation.

Federico Fuentes wrote a week ago in Green Left Weekly: "Not a single ballot box was burnt down and only a few protests registered on the day, signalling that the calls to actively obstruct the referendum process had no resonance amongst the masses."

"In a July 20 ZNet article, Hylton pointed out that the radical left had obtained some success, noting that abstentions were 10% higher than usual, and that more than 20% of votes cast were either blank or had 'nationalisation' written on them.

"However, he added: 'of the rank-and-file activists who voted, perhaps a majority voted "yes" on the first three questions and no on the last two, just as MAS had advocated.' The referendum showed that discontent was still high, but that the left was now split."

Reformism

This demonstrates that although thousands of Bolivian workers and indigenous poor are prepared to engage in militant and potentially revolutionary action, a majority are still prepared to follow the political lead of the reformist MAS.

In the last six months as the establishment parties organised to re-impose the neo-liberal agenda, and the mass actions of the movements became more militant, Morales and the MAS chased to catch up with the popular mood.

Such reformist consciousness amongst the mass of workers and the poor is inevitable under capitalism, even in a revolutionary situation. It is only overcome by networks of revolutionaries, embedded in the movements who have demonstrated in practice their trustworthiness, patiently arguing that the movements and working people must be prepared to act independently of the leaders and organise to take power.

Conscious revolutionaries in Bolivia seem not to have established those networks on any large-scale basis and this is now an urgent task. The right have been

frightened by the power of working people.

They have been knocked onto the back foot and faced a serious challenge. They will now want to use the hesitations of the movements to reorganise.

If the movement does not go forward the danger is the right will choose their time to attempt to crush the movement (just as in Chile in 1973) before it can crush them.

Free market no solution- Join the Socialists

To end poverty we need to go much further than the Make Poverty History demands. There needs to be a re-distribution of wealth from the rich to the poor globally and within countries.

There needs to be an end to war. As Christian Aid and others have argued the imposition of the free market (central to conditions for debt relief) will not solve poverty. Subsidies and market regulation are essential to guarantee access to food and public services for everyone, not just the rich.

The subsidies should go to the poorest farmers and producers not like the current EU CAP structures. What can make this happen is a new society with production based on public need rather than private profit.

The Socialist Workers Party is about supporting movements from below to bring about such a new society. We must stay on the streets and confront rather than plead with Bush and Blair. Get involved in this movement. Join the Socialists

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