

Socialist Worker

€1.00/£0.70p

NO 235 | JANUARY 25 - FEBRUARY 8 2005

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interviewed



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Anger as Councils hike charges and leave refuse uncollected

TOGETHER WE CAN BEAT THE BIN TAX

THE ANTI bin tax campaign has hit the streets again as thousands of homes are left without a service. The introduction of the Pay by Use system since the beginning of the year has highlighted huge contradictions in the Government's waste management strategy.

The bin charges have nothing to do with the environment - they are a device to raise new stealth taxes and privatize public services.

This government wants to increase indirect taxes - even though they hit the poor harder. They are introduced because the richest people pay the lowest level of tax in western Europe. Some even declare themselves as 'tax exiles' and pay no tax because they claim to live outside Ireland for more than 183 days a year.

So double taxation on us - is used to subsidise a tax free life style for the rich.

Privatisation You cannot privatize a public service if there are no charges. Bin charges will reduce the number of people who use local authority waste collections services. These will then be declared 'unviable' and handed over to private companies.

Waiting on the sidelines are global multi-national waste collection companies like Onyx and Sita who will hike up prices after they eliminate smaller competitors.

But Irish companies are not far behind in their greed. The last two directors of Oxigen made €1.5 million each last year - even though their company was found to



be in breach of Environmental protection Agency regulations.

Once privatization is brought in, the waiver system for social welfare recipients will come to an end.

The Re-Cycling Lie

This government pretends to be interested in re-cycling. It has given €300,000 to Monica Leech, a former FF fund raiser, to run an advertising campaign. The aim is to take the focus off the government's failures by targeting 'dirty' individuals.

But the real problem is that the government does not invest in re-cycling facilities. People have to drive miles in a car to use

them. No wonder that in 2001, 93% of waste went into land fill and only 7% into re-cycling.

The pursuit of profit from waste has made matters even worse. It is estimated that between 10-15% Irish waste is disposed of illegally.

Somewhere between 500,000 to 750,000 tons of waste are sent to the illegal sites in the South or t Northern Ireland.

Illegal dumping of waste is inevitable when private cowboy firms are allowed to set up waste collections - instead of the public authorities.

Get Organised: Join the Socialists

The battle against bin charges is part of a larger fight against neo-liberalism. This government is following IMF and World Bank policies by trying to get rid of public services. They want to turn water supply, health, waste collection into mere commodities from which profits are made.

Yet privatization has never been more unpopular. There are huge numbers of people who think that 'People Come Before Profit'.

The trick however is to get organised. The Socialist Workers Party is playing a big part in the fight against bin charges - and in the fight for a better world.

Get involved in the wider battle by joining the socialists

Communities organise to fight the Bin Tax >>Page 4

A mass movement can help end the occupation

THE PARALLELS between Vietnam and war-torn Iraq are beginning to haunt the US establishment as the crises deepens and the body count of innocent civilians and occupying forces rises daily.

The ferocity and popularity of the Iraqi resistance is leading to a major decline in the morale of the US Army as over 10,000 US troops are dead or maimed.

Major figures in Bush's own Republican Party fear an impending defeat and are clamouring for withdrawal.

Any remaining legitimacy for the war was removed by the acceptance that Saddam did not possess the WMDs, used to justify the war, as well as the images of British soldiers abusing Iraqi prisoners.

Indeed, those disgusting images

have confirmed what many have suspected, that the use of torture by US/UK forces is the norm, not the exception.

So, no WMDs will ever be found but over \$200bn will be spent on the war by the end of this year. It is well over time

for the occupying forces to leave. Large demonstrations across the world on March 19th will help build the pressure for that withdrawal.



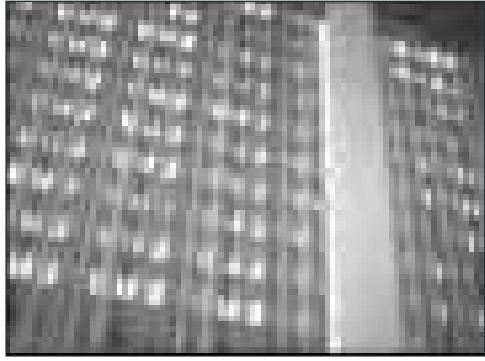
US Military Out Of Shannon

UP TO 1,000 American military personnel pass through Shannon everyday, while a staggering 350,000 US troops have passed through Shannon in the past three years.

The airport is also being used to transport illegally held prisoners to illegal prisons and torture centres like Guantanamo Bay. In allowing the US unrestricted access to Shannon, the Fianna Fail/PD government is just as much a Bush ally as Tony Blair is. March 19th is the chance to voice opposition to the Fianna Fail/PD support for Bush's murderous empire-building.. **More on Iraq >>Page 7**

Eamonn McCann column

Migrant workers' rights: Unite and fight



Belfast City Hospity where Oksana Sukhanova was treated for severe frostbite

THE ORDEAL of Oksana Sukhanova sparked widespread concern across the North in January and prompted a series of articles about the plight of immigrant workers.

But there's no sign of employers or mainstream political leaders learning lessons. This is because what's at issue here are workers' rights and racism. And powerful interest groups don't put a high priority on either.

The 23-year-old Ukrainian had both her legs amputated in Belfast's City Hospital after being found sleeping rough in freezing weather in Coleraine.

Oksana had been paid off by McKeown's poultry factory in Rasharkin. The company insists it behaved properly. Indeed, Oksana had been treated no worse than immigrant workers generally. That's the scandal.

Most immigrants are cheap labour, on minimum wages or worse. Their permits mean they can't change jobs. When their contract is up, employers can dump them. In many trades, like the meat trade, they tend to live in poor accommodation provided by the employer or by the agent who brought them in. When they lose their job, they become homeless too.

It's rare for immigrant workers to have their few rights explained. Those, like Oksana, who can't speak English, have no way of finding out.

Employers enjoy a disposable, two-tier workforce with cheap transient labour used to meet fluctuating demand.

There are around 25,000 immigrant workers in the North. Skilled engineers tend to earn the minimum £4.85 an hour. In 2002, mushroom pickers were found to be paid £1.20 an hour! The Simon Community says increasing numbers of migrants are arriving at their door. Non-British and non-Irish people account for up to 25 percent of Simon's clients in Coleraine.

Virtually all immigrants in the North experience racism of some sort. How could it be otherwise when ministers talk of society being 'swamped', local politicians play on irrational fear and newspapers spew lies about 'scroungers' every day?

What happened to Oksana won't shift official attitudes. The Government and the bosses hope the new workers will create downward pressure on wages by filling shortages and undermining unions' bargaining power. They see immigrants as workers who won't burden the state (with the cost of their education, for example) and can later be denied benefits and pensions.

What's happening here is an attack on workers' rights and the welfare state, couched in the language of race.

One positive practical response has come from the ATGWU in Dungannon which has combined with the South Tyrone Empowerment Project (Step) to unionise immigrant workers alongside locals and to combat racism in the community, through practical programmes and by encouraging all workers to stand up for their rights. This is a model to be followed.

There was genuine, widespread distress when Oksana's experience emerged. Campaigners need to understand that sympathy from ministers and employers is double-edged - welcoming immigrants as a cheap alternative to local labour, but hostile towards immigrants and local labour linking up.

What's needed is a fight for full union rights and for open borders to admit workers of all countries on the basis of equality.

Post workers fight on

AS SOCIALIST Worker went to press An Post workers were waiting to see the outcome of talks between the union and management at the labour court.

Speaking to Socialist Worker, An Post workers said that they are still poles apart from management's proposals. There are over 84 issues outstanding relating to proposed changes in work practices.

If management don't change they plan to escalate strike action such as work to rule.

The workers are clear about what An Post management are doing. "Donal Curtin (An Post Chief Executive) is out to break the unions. He sees himself as a male Margaret Thatcher trying to turn An Post into a private profit-making company. But the postal service is a right," said one worker.

The feedback from workers is to overwhelmingly reject management's proposals. One worker said that "following the protest and strike in December the morale is very high. We are taking them on, that's the gut feeling, and if management don't change then it's all out".

It is clear that the fight to save An Post from privatisation will require further strike action. It is a vital struggle that all workers should support.

The last edition of Socialist



An Post workers striking at the end of 2004

Worker carried a special feature on the An Post strike- here are some workers' comments;

"It stated the facts; put our side into the public eye not like the Independent"

"It dealt with the real issues not what they (mainstream press) put out to muddy the waters"

"The paper gave great support;

they (Socialist Worker) had a lot of people on the ground on the day of the march."

"The feedback very positive from the job. It was good for morale."

"It put our point across for a change. It seems like management have a hotline to the mainstream media."

Ahern's hypocrisy: leave students' right to work alone



Bertie Ahern drumming up business in China

BERTIE AHERN and Irish Education representatives recently travelled to China to make business deals and encourage Chinese students to come and study here in Irish Universities.

But just before Christmas the Minister for Justice, Michael McDowell removed the right to work for students from outside the

European Economic Area who are attending part-time courses under one year duration.

This affects English Language courses. Thousands of students, particularly Chinese (who make up almost 80% of students in these courses) will not be able to afford to do such courses if they cannot work.

They will be forced to return

home due to economic pressures. It also puts the jobs of up to 3,000 English Language teachers under threat.

The Chinese government issued a warning at the start of this month against students considering English language study in Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland excluded representatives of the English Language sector from the education forum in China.

The Irish government instead wants to attract wealthy Chinese who will pay up to €20,000 in fees to attend universities and thus be cash cows for the funding crisis in Irish universities.

Ahern expressed concerns about human rights in China yet here at home he is removing the right of students to work and putting in danger the jobs of English Language teachers.

Students and teachers of all nationalities should unite and protest for the right to work before April 18th. The Date the decision is expected to be enforced.

Obituary: Patsy Cronin

By RICHARD BOYD BARRETT

Patsy Cronin, a member of the Dundrum/Ballinteer branch of the Socialist Workers Party, died on January 21st after a long battle with cancer. Patsy will be sadly missed by her family, friends, neighbours and comrades in the SWP.

Patsy first came into contact with the SWP through her daughter, Deirdre, who joined the party in the early nineties. However, long before Patsy encountered the SWP, she was already someone with strong left-wing convictions, as was her husband, who himself passed away some years ago.

Patsy first became active, alongside party members, in the successful fight against water charges. The campaign, which

spanned two years, involved many meetings, protests and the distribution of thousands of campaign leaflets. Patsy was ever-present in all the activities of the campaign. She played a central part in making the Ballinteer anti-water charges group, one of the strongest and best organised in South Dublin area.

From the water charges campaign, Patsy moved on to participation in many of the campaigns and issues with which the SWP was involved over the following years. Whether it was demonstrating against political corruption, opposing racism, fighting for women's rights or protesting against war - Patsy enthusiastically participated, whenever she could.

A key battle for Patsy, over recent years, was in

the fight against the bin tax. Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown was the first Dublin County to introduce the tax five years ago. Patsy threw herself into the battle.

Though small in height and slight in build, Patsy showed tremendous strength and determination when it came to her convictions. Despite being a great supporter of the SWP and her active involvement in many issues, Patsy did not formally join the party until February 15th 2003. On that day she joined the great demonstration of 150,000 in Dublin and millions world-wide to protest against the planned US war on Iraq. No doubt, on that day, she felt like many of us, both the urgency to challenge a criminal war but also the hope that the

collective power of millions of ordinary people could actually change the world.

Over the last number of years Patsy, has bravely and without complaint, fought her illness with the support of Deirdre and her younger daughter Roisin. Despite this long and difficult battle, Patsy continued her active involvement in campaigns and politics, whenever she was able.

As a caring, generous and lovely person, Patsy will be greatly missed by her family and all that knew her. For her comrades and fellow-activists, she will also be sorely missed in the campaigns ahead. Yet her strength and quiet determination will also be an inspiration.

Our deepest sympathies go to Deirdre, Roisin and all Patsy's family.

International News

Anti-war rallies in US on Bush's inauguration day

ON JANUARY 20th over 10,000 people protested at Bush's Inaugural Parade route in Washington.

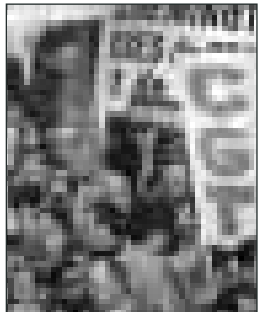
Thousands of other protestors were blocked at Secret Service Checkpoints

The first thing that Bush saw as the presidential motorcade began the parade route was antiwar protestors lined 10 deep along the side walks and in anti-war bleachers.

Atop the bleachers was a giant banner that said, "Iraq is Bush's Vietnam, Bring the Troops Home Now." It was the first time in inaugural history that the antiwar movement was able to have bleachers, a stage, and a sound system for a mass antiwar demonstration right on the parade route.

Over \$40 million was spent on Bush's inauguration ceremonies.

French public sector workers show the way



210,000 public sector workers marched through French cities last week in protests over pay, reforms and job cuts.

There was a one-day strike by teachers, a stoppage by air traffic controllers, rail workers, energy workers and postal workers. Unions said 50,000 had joined a protest march that snaked noisily through Paris.

"I'm protesting against the quasi-reforms the government is carrying out. They're killing the public services. It has to stop. Soon there'll be nothing left," said a civil servant in Paris

Victory in Bolivia against the privatisers

THREE DAYS of militant protests last week forced the Bolivian Government to expel a multinational water company from the country.

A general strike shut down the financial capital of Santa Cruz. Some business leaders and politicians called for force to be used to drive protestors off the street. But the power of the movement forced President Mesa to make concessions.

WATERFORD:

Campaign launched to stop deportation

By **ROY HASSEY**

A CAMPAIGN with the support of the Waterford Council of Trade Unions (WCTU) and Waterford Against Racism has been launched to stop the deportation of Weziwe Olubuunor.

Weziwe, who is originally from South Africa has been resident in Waterford for almost four years and faces the risk of political violence if she returns to South Africa.

Since Weziwe came to Ireland she has been active in voluntary work with the Healing Arts Project at Waterford Regional Hospital, the Spraoi festival and Waterford Against Racism.

She has also addressed trade union branches and schools, raising consciousness on racism and issues facing asylum seekers in Ireland

A protest in support of Weziwe was called at the

Waterford Institute of Technology when Minister for Justice Michael McDowell spoke there.

Representatives of the WCTU handed a letter to the Minister asking him to rescind the deportation, and Weziwe attempted to make a personal appeal.

A recent ERSI report stated that Ireland needed up to 40,000 emigrants to fill jobs and keep the economy afloat.

The deportation of such a hard working, conscientious and talented person at this time when there is a shortage of workers is indicative of the insanity of Ireland's immigration policy and the racism which is at its core.

Weziwe told Socialist Worker: "I have made so many friends here, I don't want to leave. I don't know why the government is doing this. I am pleading with the minister to change his mind and allow me to stay".



Weziwe Olubuunor with campaign supporters in Waterford

Dublin City action group defeats development plan



Demanding Fair Play for Dublin 8

THE FAIR Player Action Group along with the rest of the Dublin 8 community started the New Year with a surprising victory. Dublin City Council (DCC) rejected NABCO's proposed development plan for the 11 acre Player Wills/Bailey Gibson site.

A hefty document was compiled by the council and sent to NABCO.

This detailed technical problems with the plan but more interestingly made significant references to the large number of objections.

These came from the community and both groups and individuals (including An Taisce, the Georgian Society of Ireland, the Coombe Hospital, St Catherines Church and school).

The 28 storey building was deemed inappropriate for the area.

Community needs and gain was mentioned as was proposed regeneration plans for the surrounding areas such as Teresa's Gardens, Dolphin's Barn & Rialto.

Whilst this surprising result is a huge boost to those who fought against the plan we are all aware that

the battle is far from won. Cork Street remains our constant reminder of the kind of profit-before-people development DCC has repeatedly dumped onto the area.

But we have seen first hand that our real strength is in our unity and our organisation. So, watch this space!

Defend free speech campaign scores a victory in Galway

By **DETTE MCLOUGHLIN**
Chairperson DFSAA

THE "DEFEND Free Speech, Assembly and Activity" (DFSAA) campaign in Galway has successfully resisted the introduction of draconian byelaws restricting the civil liberties of its citizens.

Galway City Council intended to introduce extremely restrictive laws.

These would prohibit the distribution of leaflets and the use of posters on the streets, only allow demonstrations and gatherings and busking in the city that had permits from the local authority.

They would also outlaw certain activities such as kite

The witch hunt against Padraigin Drinan

THE CLOSURE, by the Law Society of Northern Ireland, of Belfast solicitor Padraigin Drinan's office has been greeted with anger and dismay by all who support human rights.

She can no longer represent her clients and the Law Society have asked the High Court in Belfast to freeze her assets.

There are several bureaucratic reasons why the Law Society has gone after Padraigin but few working in the area of human, civil and political rights have any doubts. Her biggest crime has been to represent the poor and oppressed, most of the time for free.

Worse, in the eyes of the establishment, she continued the work of murdered human rights lawyers, Pat Finucane and Rosemary Nelson.

When Pat Finucane was murdered, Rosemary Nelson represented the relatives of those victims of collusion between mid-Ulster loyalist murder gangs and security forces.

Padraigin took on that work after Rosemary Nelson's death. Over two years ago, in an interview with this paper,

Padraigin said it was unlikely that she would be killed "it would be too much of a coincidence, if every lawyer working on mid-Ulster were killed", she said.

However, she did predict that she might be closed down by the Law Society.

Now, victims of collusion, asylum seekers and other immigrants and all those that other lawyers are afraid to represent will be left without a champion.

Socialist Worker urges all its readers to write to the Law Society and object to this witch hunt. You can email it at: info@law-soc-ni.org

FREE MARTIN 'DUCKSIE' DOHERTY

A WAVE of anger swept through Derry when news emerged of the arrest of 54-year old Martin 'Ducksie' Doherty, for contempt of the Bloody Sunday Inquiry.

Doherty was sentenced to three months jail at Belfast High Court on January 7th and he was arrested at his Creggan home on 19th. In court Mr Doherty shouted at the judge: "I'm the only man to be punished for Bloody Sunday, it's a disgrace."

Though relatives of those murdered on the day had called for co-operation with the Tribunal John Kelly, whose brother was murdered on the day, pointed out that British army soldiers had got away with clear contempt of the

Tribunal. Some refused to answer questions while one had refused to enter the witness box.

The Bloody Sunday Trust similarly described the arrest as disgraceful. After the arrest, Michael McKinney whose brother was one of those murdered on Bloody Sunday spoke on behalf of the Trust.

"It was not Martin Doherty who killed or wounded 28 people in Derry on the 30th January 1972", he said. "But of those who were responsible, none have been arrested and none have been imprisoned for their actions that day. Martin Doherty has shown a lot less contempt for this inquiry than those who took the stand

and refused to answer questions or told downright lies."

Colm Bryce of the Socialist Environmental Alliance called for Mr. Doherty's immediate release saying "former Tory Prime Minister Edward Heath, who seems to have the memory of an elephant on most matters" and General Sir Michael Jackson "both sat in the Tribunal witness box in London and claimed not to remember much about the events surrounding Bloody Sunday.

They showed far more contempt for the Inquiry than Ducksie Doherty ever did. But there was never any question of them being locked up."

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ANTI BIN TAX CAMPAIGN

COMMUNITIES GET ORGANISED

As the battle hots up, Socialist Worker compiled these reports from campaigns across Dublin



Mass protests were called in response to jailings of protestors a year ago. We now need to get mass demonstrations on the streets to defeat the councils

Ringsend/Pearse Street

By SHAY RYAN

The Ringsend/Pearse Street Anti Bin Tax Campaign has been back on the streets in response to Dublin City Councils decision to implement non-collection of un-tagged bags in Irishtown and the South Lotts Road area.

Campaigners visited the depot in Rathmines to talk to bin workers who have been left between a rock and a hard place with management instructing them to leave untagged refuse behind.

Six supervisors followed the workers on their routes to force implementation of the non-collection policy. But the community responded by throwing their bags into the lorries when stationary.

We collected a large number of untagged bag's from the South Lotts area and got them into the lorry. An angry and productive public meeting was held a few days later in Ringsend and it was agreed that a mass clean-up of untagged bags in the Irishtown area would be undertaken by the campaign over the weekend.

Dun Laoghaire

By RICHARD BOYD BARRETT

In a major revival of campaigning spirit hundreds of people attended lively public meetings organised by anti-bin tax campaigners in localities throughout the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown Borough.

Fine Gael and Labour councillors have voted in a pay by weight system and slashed the waiver. Even if they put out their bin only once a fortnight families will pay at least 350euro for the service -50 more than last year.

Waivers will cover only the first 80 of the charge.

A lot of anger was expressed at the bullyboy tactics the council is using to try and increase the low levels of payment. Many elderly people

spoke of being intimidated into paying. A severely physically disabled person contacted the campaign to tell us that she is being refused a transfer to suitable accomadation until she pays arrears of over 1200euro.

The meetings agreed to continue non-payment and to support a number of other initiatives

■To highlight the lack of accessible recycling facilities we are going to bring our plastics to the next council meeting to give them to the councillors for disposing.

■Organise mass clean-ups in the local areas in the event of non-payment

■Call for a Dublin wide demonstration to the Dail

The Socialist Worker articles on the Bin Tax Campaign went down very well and over 70 copies were sold at the meetings.

Ballymun

By KEVIN WINGFIELD

In the Poppintree area of Ballymun, thirty people braved the storms to attend a local bin tax meeting.

The meeting agreed that in the event of non-collection being implemented in the area, they would collectively take the uncollected rubbish to a central point.

Those present agreed to contact their neighbours to encourage them to participate in the action.

The meeting also called for bin tax campaigners across Dublin to organise a unified demonstration to the Dail.

Campaigners are also planning a meeting for the people of Ballymun East.

■ To contact the campaign in the Ballymun are phone 086-3074060.

Galway

By MARGARET HENEGHAN
SWP/GBCC committee member

Galway City Councillors showed their disregard for the people of

Galway when they voted to accept the annual budget, which once again included an increase in domestic refuse charges.

The four Labour Party councillors had actually pledged support to the Galway Bin Charges Campaign (GBCC), which had lobbied each councillor to stand with the people and vote against any budget that included bin charges. One of the Labour Councillors was even attending GBCC committee meetings and had spoken on campaign platforms. However on the night all 4 decided to align with the right wing parties and vote in the increase rather than stand with the one Sinn Fein and one independent councillors that voted against.

GBCC had mounted a campaign against the bin-tax in the run up to the estimates meetings and had gained such publicity that even councillors from the Green Party, Fine Gael and PD had felt compelled to speak out against the hike in bin charges. Labour could have forced these councillors on the issue but instead they added a clause outlining the Councillors' lack of control over refuse charges then voted in the increase! GBCC did actually force the councillors into reducing the amount of increase for this year, now we have the introduction of "pay-by-use" to battle with.

Ballyfermot

By BRID SMITH

The Ranch is a small old estate in Lower Ballyfermot with about 150 houses.

The area was left in a dreadful state two weeks ago when the council workers were instructed to remove tagged rubbish bags only.

Over two thirds of the houses had not paid the bin tax. The Ballyfermot anti bin tax campaign called a street meeting on the Saturday morning which was attended by 18 local people. A mass clean up of the area was organised for the following Thursday

morning. It was 100% successful with a large number of local people involved in throwing bags in the bin trucks. The police were called into the area by the council but found a very peaceful good humoured protest and had no reason to intervene. The Ballyfermot campaign is holding a mass meeting in the area this week - Report by Brid Smith

Inchicore A large angry public meeting in the Inchicore area was addressed by councillor Joan Collins and heard details of the council's attempts to leave refuse bag areas without a service.

The meeting agreed to come onto the streets for the next refuse collection day and to organize a mass clean up of the area.

There was an enthusiastic response to a proposal for a city wide demonstration against the governments waste management policies.

Many people complained about the lack of recycling facilities and the huge increases in bin charges. It was also agreed to visit the local depot and lobby the council workers for their support.

East Wall

Socialist Worker spoke to
JOE MOONEY

We had a public meeting where residents recommitted to supporting the campaign. Last Monday 1,300 houses were left without their bins collected.

This Monday over 40 residents were organised and met the bin trucks when they came into the area. We had leafleted for this in advance. We followed around the bin truck and we got everything in.

This co-ordinated group of residents got all the rubbish in themselves. The Corpo is now delivering leaflets saying that under the Waste Management Act (which they don't specify) it is illegal for anyone other than Corporation officials to put waste in the back of a bin lorry.

However the under the 1997

Litter Pollution Act we have the right to put it in.

We will be ready to take action again on Monday. But some people are nervous because they have seen how Dublin City Council is prepared to turn their area into a public health problem. If they stop us from putting into the trucks we are prepared to go to court to ensure all bins are collected.

Crumlin

Socialist Worker spoke to
JOAN COLLINS

In the area of Mount Brown near Kilmainham over 80% of the bins are not tagged as people refuse to pay.

The council didn't collect and a street meeting was held with over 40 people where residents decided to organise their own clean-up. Bin workers came down to collect the rubbish at around 9.30am.

However when the shop stewards saw the crowd (after being up at the ranch), they refused to collect under health and safety grounds. The rubbish from the estate then turned up in a public space away from the estate.

The council picked it up from that place. We wont allow the council turn our estates into ruin. Litter wardens will go through the rubbish and try to find evidence so that they can fine people.

The campaign is arguing that we need to get re-organised in local meetings.

We need to organise people to assist in clean-ups of the estates. The general feeling is one of anger against the council. They are clearly trying to pick off one group at a time.

Now its those with bags, next it will be unregistered bins. We will not let the council divide us. We need to stay strong until the end of March when the new bills come out.

Then we need to push for higher rates of non-payment and make this a political issue and get out and demonstrate.

MINERS' STRIKE

WHEN WORKERS ROSE UP AGAINST THE NEO-LIBERAL AGENDA

By OWEN McCORMACK

TWENTY YEARS ago British miners and their union took on the Thatcher Government in an attempt to save their industry, jobs and communities.

Miners' solidarity with other workers was legendary, and in 1974 they had forced the last Tory government out of office. Thatcher wanted to smash this strong, militant tradition.

In March 1984, Miners at Cortonwood colliery in Yorkshire were told their pit would close. Within days they had picketed out all of Yorkshire, Scotland and Wales. Nottinghamshire coalfield collaborated with the employers and the Govt, believing that any pit closure programme would not affect them.

Within weeks, over 165,000 miners struck.

The full force of the police, army and secret service was mobilised to crush them. The mass media vilified the strikers; the courts and judges dropped any pretence of dispensing Justice as they denied basic human rights and tried to close down the NUM.

During the strike two miners were murdered on picket lines and five others died scavenging for coal during the winter of '84.

Over 11,000 were arrested, 200 jailed and over 900 sacked in a heroic struggle that inspired millions across the world.

Yet the Miners fought on

The strike unleashed a massive wave of solidarity from workers across Britain and abroad, raising an astonishing £60 million. Thousands picketed alongside miners. Rail and dockworkers struck to stop scab coal being moved.

Miners and supporters became politicised in a way that many would have thought impossible. Miners' wives and partners set up 'Women against Pit Closures' groups all across the country.

They picketed alongside miners, were baton-charged and arrested, ran the food kitchens that kept the strike going, and travelled the country arguing for solidarity from other workers.

Yet, in the end, the miners were defeated, their industry vandalised and the way paved for a massive attack on all workers and oppressed groups by Thatcher and her succes-



Above: Scargill and the miners 20 years ago, (inset) police brutality

sors.

But it could have been very different.

Ian McGregor, the American hatchet man hired by the Tories, admitted years later in his biography that on three occasions the Thatcher government wobbled and were ready to give in.

Lack of rank and file

Two things saved them. Firstly, the treachery of other trade union officials.

Leaders of the TUC, alongside steel, transport and engineering unions, ensured that real solidarity such as the blacking of scab coal never took place.

The second reason is that by '84 there was no effective rank and file

organisation in the miners union so he had to rely on the union machine.

Tragically, on several key battles Scargill was undermined by his own area leaders who turned away from mass picketing and allowed coal to be moved to local steel plants.

Thousands of miners wanted to follow Scargill's lead but the lack of rank and file organisations across the coalfields meant this didn't lead to widespread action.

The lessons of the strike

Today, many young trade unionists are told that the Miners strike was the last stand and that it teaches us that unions cannot challenge a Government.

They are told we must obey the

law and that we can no longer use our industrial muscle, but must now use our brains to negotiate clever deals while maintaining industrial peace.

They will say that workers these days would never fight like the miners, they have mortgages and cars and are too content.

The reality is very different. In '84, Miners were amongst the best-paid workers in Britain.

They had mortgages cars and families too, yet they still fought.

The NUM had a history of fighting because socialists like Scargill had organised years before and challenged their right-wing officials.

They showed in the strikes of '69, '70, '72 and '74 that workers could fight and win. This is why the bosses hated them.

Partnership and workers

Fifteen years of 'Partnership' in Ireland have left thousands of workers at the mercy of the logic of the market as unions placidly accept lay offs and cutbacks in the name of 'remaining competitive' and raising profits. Thousands more work in non-union firms with no rights or entitlements.

Partnership has meant union leaders accepting the privatisation of Telecom, Aer Rianta and other semi states or mass redundancies like at Greencore or Smurfits. Scargill and the miners are a reminder that there is an alternative – we fight for our class.

To start that means challenging our union leaders, demanding a return to the basic rule of trade unionism – solidarity. We need to organise now to ensure that the next time our side wins.

'You either fight back or you lose' Arthur Scargill talks to Socialist Worker

ARTHUR SCARGILL's name is still synonymous with struggle. Tony Blair recently warned of a return to 'Scargillism' – unions defending their members!

Before speaking at a packed meeting in Liberty Hall to commemorate the Miners Strike, ARTHUR SCARGILL spoke to Socialist Worker:

SW: What is your view of the so-called Partnership deals we have in Ireland?

Arthur Scargill: Partnership deals are a sell out, an utter betrayal of trade union principles.

It took the miners strike of '72

and '74 to show that there was another way, you fought and if you fought you won. What social partnership advocates is getting into bed with the employer but there is another way – that is to fight back!

Let me remind them of what happened in the Notts coalfield. They supported Thatcher (although 35% backed their union).

So what happened to them today? There are only three pits left in Nottinghamshire!

You either fight back or you lose. The trade union movement was developed in struggle.

SW: So how did you go about

challenging your union leadership?

AS: We had to be careful how we did it because we could get expelled from the union very easily.

The NUM was very conservative in the sixties. It was still overcoming the defeat of the 1926 strike.

In fact we didn't even have a left majority on the national executive until '88 – four years after the strike!

First we set up the Barnsley Miners' Forum. I was in the youth wing of the Communist Party at the time and the idea was to put on meetings for miners to discuss what was needed in our industry,

but also to bring in speakers from outside, from other unions and struggles.

At first we would struggle to get a crowd.

But within a year meetings were stacked full with up to 500 or 600 miners to hear speakers talk about the economic and political issues of the day.

We then moved on to a Yorkshire-wide Miners' Forum – an organisation that debated not just our own issues but issues affecting ALL workers, and miners began to understand they were the same issues.

That's how we created the conditions that lead to the great strikes in '72 and '74 that brought

the Heath Government down.

SW: Was the idea to use the forums to politicise miners and take on the conservative miners' union leaders?

AS: Yes, and we did it; and it also affected every other union. From '65 to '72 we completely turned the whole face of British politics.

Miners went from being perceived as the country's most right-wing workers to standing on picket lines at the Grunwick strike, a strike of mostly Asian women workers.

And in 1970 we had four thousand miners fighting alongside anti fascists in Manchester and taking on the racists.

PALESTINIAN ELECTIONS

Democracy under occupation?

ON 9 January, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) was elected President of the Palestinian National Authority (PA).

His election was hailed by the international peace industry as a "new dawn" for peace. However, before Abbas had even been inaugurated, Ariel Sharon suspended all contact with the new president and threatened a fresh round of extra-judicial killings of resistance leaders in Gaza.

In this issue, Socialist Worker speaks to **SAIF ABUKESHEK**, a Palestinian activist from Nablus and organiser with the International Solidarity Movement, about the aftermath of the elections and the prospects for justice for Palestine.

Socialist Worker: Although initially the media reported a 70% turnout in the election, the Palestinian Central Elections Commission has now revised the turnout down to 47%. Why was the turnout so low?

Saif Abukeshek: Forty-four percent of eligible voters cast their votes on 9 January.

This means Abu Mazen received the support of 25% of those old enough and eligible to vote.

There are many reasons why this number was not higher.

Most importantly, that in reality the PA has no real authority. Israel's occupation continues to destroy its infrastructure, its buildings, services and police.

While Palestinians made many compromises under the Oslo Accords, Israel has fulfilled none of its obligations and the PA lacks the authority or ability to challenge this.

In the face of continuous Israeli attacks and violations, in the eyes of its people the PA can do little.

The voters thought, "What is the point to vote?" As well as the low turnout, there were many "empty" — i.e. spoiled — votes, which in itself was a protest.

Most Palestinians believe that it is not a new government that we need most urgently, but an end to the occupation.

But the media equate a new Palestinian government with a "historic opportunity for peace." Forty-five people were killed between Arafat's death and the elections and another 35 have been killed since the elections.

It is only by ending the occupation that peace will come. Yet the media does not report this.

Another factor was the boycott by Hamas who have a majority of support in many areas. People see Hamas as an alternative to the main parties of the last 30 years.

In addition, Mustafa Barghouti's National Initiative is a very interesting development.

More people are becoming drawn to the Initiative as a third force outside of main parties,



Palestinian children play over the rubble of an apartment block bomb by Israeli army

which is calling for international solidarity against the occupation.

SW: How do you think Abbas will reconcile his reputation as a "moderate" with the expectations of the Palestinian resistance? Will he be quick to compromise?

SA: No, I don't — and not because I have any particular faith in Abu Mazen, but because I have great faith in the Palestinian people.

President Arafat made many compromises and we have now nothing left to give away.

Abu Mazen cannot surrender the right of return.

After all, how could he? Half of the Palestinian people are refugees.

He would never again be able to go to Jordan or Lebanon. He cannot negotiate our water away.

How could he run a state without water? And Jerusalem — Palestinian politicians know well how serious this issue is and how we are not prepared to surrender our city. The people will not let him sell away our rights.

SW: Across the world, anti-war demonstrations have demanded justice for Palestine. Will a defeat for the US in Iraq give confidence to the Palestinian resistance?

SA: I don't see the US forces pulling out of Iraq anytime after the Iraqi elections. The elections will change nothing.

It is the Iraqi people who will decide their fate.

But if the Iraqi resistance is defeated it will empower the US throughout the region and will open the possibility for Israel to mass transfer Palestinians into Jordan.

However, the US is not in control in Iraq and the impact of a defeat would be a tremendous

confidence-booster for the Palestinian struggle. The US could no longer support Israel in the way it has done. It would also mean pressure on Israel to accept UN resolutions and decisions, such as the most recent International Court of Justice ruling against the Apartheid Wall.

If the US loses in Iraq, it would force the US and Israel to begin to compromise. I don't believe that this would result in an immediate solution for the Palestinians but it would be a step forward to reaching a final solution between Palestinians and Israelis.

SW: What can we do in Ireland?

SA: I understand that the Ireland-Palestine Solidarity Campaign will be organising events around the World Cup qualifier matches between Ireland against Israel.

I would encourage people to get involved in these protests and to boycott Israeli goods. Also, come to Palestine and take part in campaigns with Palestinian and international activists against the occupation.

If you cannot get to Palestine this summer, go to the Mediterranean Social Forum in Barcelona and discuss how together we can build a network of peace and solidarity between the Middle East and Europe.

Saif Abukeshek is speaking at public meetings around the country.

See page 11 for details

Further info:

www.ipsc.ie

www.electronicintifada.net

www.stophthewall.org

www.palsolidarity.org

Protest at World Bank President

JAMES WOLFENSOHN, president of the World Bank, is due to be in Dublin from the 31 January to 1 February

The Structural Adjustment Policies, or SAPs of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have had devastating effects on the lives of millions of people around the world.

These SAPs imposed by the World Bank and IMF force governments to divert money away from social and public spending and into debt repayment and compliance is a condition of ensuring new loans.

The privatisation of public services is a key part of this structural adjustment.

Water service privatisation has been a recent IMF/World Bank imposition in a number of African states, leading to a situation where, according to the Integrated Social Development Centre of Ghana, "Water has increasingly become a commodity in Ghana — a commodity that many people in both urban and rural areas cannot afford on a regular basis."



James Wolfensohn

This is the context where according to the World Health Organisation 2 million people die annually from diseases associated with poor water supply.

James Wolfensohn visit to Dublin is part of the public relations response by the World Bank to its image problem.

The World Bank has been a major target of the anti-capitalist movement in recent years most notably in Prague in 2000 where protesters forced the IMF/World Bank

conference to be cut short, and in Barcelona where in 2001 the mere announcement of planned demonstrations caused the canceling of a World Bank summit.

Protest 30th January 6pm Shelbourne Hotel

A quarter of the world's population, 1.3 billion people, live in severe poverty...

Nearly 800 million people do not get enough food, and about 500 million people are chronically malnourished. More than a third of children are malnourished.

In industrial countries more than 100 million people live below the poverty line, more than 5 million people are homeless and 37 million are jobless.

Of the world's 23 million people living with HIV/AIDS more than 93% live in developing countries.

More than 840 million adults are illiterate - 538 million of them are women.

Around 2 million children died as a result of armed conflict in the last decade.

In developing countries 160 million pre-

school children are underweight.

1.2 billion people live without access to safe drinking water.

110 million landmines lie undetonated in 68 countries.

Today's society has the resources to eradicate poverty...

The net wealth of the 10 richest billionaires is \$ 133 billion, more than 1.5 times the total national income of the least developed countries.

The cost of eradicating poverty is 1% of global income.

Effective debt relief to the 20 poorest countries would cost \$ 5.5 billion - equivalent to the cost of building EuroDisney.

Providing universal access to basic social services and transfers to alleviate income poverty would cost \$ 80 billion, less than the net worth of the seven richest men in the world.

(Figures supplied by the United Nation Development Programme)

WHY ELECTIONS IN IRAQ WON'T BRING PEACE OR DEMOCRACY



An blood splattered Iraqi girl moments after US troops had shot and killed her parents

By **RICHARD BOYD BARRETT**, Chairperson, Irish Anti-War Movement and SWP Candidate, Dun Laoghaire

THE US is heralding the elections to take place in Iraq on January, 30th as a credible exercise in democracy and a major step towards self-determination and peace. Sadly, this is yet another lie from the Bush administration.

The US admitted that security conditions would not allow for a vote in four of Iraq's 18 provinces, meaning millions of Iraqis will not be able to vote even if they wanted to.

Over 70 political parties, including most Sunni parties, have called for a boycott.

They say that elections, held under foreign occupation and organised by the occupying forces along with an installed puppet government, are illegitimate.

The US assault on Fallujah was the last straw for many Iraqis where

estimates suggested 3,000 people were killed, including 500 children.

Some 200,000 civilians were driven from their homes and the city flattened.

More than 100,000 Iraqis have died as a result of the US invasion.

The US tries to blame the insurgents for the violence whereas in reality the insurgency has grown as a response to brutality of the invasion and occupation.

There were no attacks on US troops in Fallujah until 13 unarmed Iraqi protesters were shot beside a school in the city in April 2003.

In Ramadi, an embedded journalist with the Economist magazine was told openly by a US marine commander that they had an indiscriminate shoot-to-kill policy against any Iraqi vehicle that came within 50 yards of a US convoy.

"If anyone gets too close to us we fucking waste them," he told the reporter adding, "It's a kind of a shame, because it means we've killed a lot of innocent people."

It is no surprise then that the areas that have suffered the most from the occupation are the areas where the insurgency is strongest.

This tends to be in the central, mostly Sunni regions. However, the insurgency and opposition to the US occupation exists in every area of Iraq and all polls show 70-80 percent of Iraqis want the US to get out.

Tracking the polls since the start of the invasion in 2003 shows a steady increase in Shia opposition to the US occupation, which since early 2004 matches that in the mostly Sunni areas.

A Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) poll in March 2004 showed 80 percent of Shia and Sunni saw the US "mostly as occupiers". Another CPA poll in May 2004 showed 86 percent of Iraqi's wanted the US to leave immediately or directly after elections.

Muqtada Al Sadr, the popular Shia cleric, has called for a boycott of the elections.

Al Sadr's own popularity shot up to an 68 percent approval rating after he led an uprising against the US occupation in April last year.

So the idea, as some would have it, that opposition to the US presence and the Allawi government is limited to the Sunni, is nonsense.

Furthermore, most Shia want to vote because Ayatollah Ali Sistani, Iraq's most senior Shia cleric in Iraq, has said elections are the best way to end the US occupation.

Both the Shia and Sunni population are united in their opposition to the US presence - the only difference is the Shia leadership has a different tactical approach to the elections.

Opinion polls also show less than eight percent of Iraqis believed a civil war between Sunni and Shia is likely.

When asked which of three groups would be most likely to instigate civil war, 3.7 percent said Al Qaeda, 22 per cent said Israel and 66.7 percent said the US.

The US, meanwhile, is doing what it can to exacerbate differences between Shias and Sunnis to break the unity that has been growing between both groups in opposition to the occupation.

Naomi Klein has argued that the US led its assault on Fallujah in the deliberate knowledge that it would lead to a Sunni boycott and a fracture the unity of Shia and Sunni in the run-up to the elections.

Already the US and Allawi have recruited Shia and Kurds into the Iraqi armed forces to join US assaults on places like Fallujah, in a clear attempt to stir-up religious and ethnic differences.

However, the US tactics are a sign of weakness and desperation, not strength.

There is growing demoralisation within the ranks of the US military itself.

Some US soldiers who have served in Iraq are refusing to return once they get home on leave and are deserting instead. Disquiet about the numbers of US dead and the chaos in

Baghdad in one of the most 'secure' and heavily policed zones of the city indicate that the insurgency have the ability to strike at will.

The elections will encourage tensions between Shia and Sunni but are unlikely to dent the determination of both groups to remove the US presence, once the elections are over.

A resumption of the insurgency in the Shia south is made more likely because the elections are organised in a way open to manipulation by political forces supported by US money.

The limitations, imposed by the CPA's Paul Bremner, on the powers of the new assembly that will emerge from the elections, mean it will have little power anyway.

The Shia will almost certainly find the government after the elections will be much the same as the one in place now.

This government will not call for the removal of US troops and the new assembly will not have the power to do so.

The US will also continue to control Iraq's oil revenues through the Development Fund for Iraq. All the multi-million contracts signed by Paul Bremner with US corporations will be binding on the new "government".

For all these reasons, the enormous insurgency is likely to further escalate in the weeks and months after the election.

Put simply, it will continue as long as the US presence remains.

The only way to end the bloodshed in Iraq is for the US and UK to get out of Iraq and let Iraqis determine their own future without interference.

Of course, that goal of real self-determination for Iraqis was never the intention behind the US invasion. That will only be achieved by the actions of the mass of Iraqi people and the solidarity of the world-

Iraq is growing in the military and among the US public.

This is not surprising. Allawi's Minister for Security estimated there are 200,000 people active in the insurgency.

When asked recently, if the insurgents were winning, he replied: "Well, they're not losing."

In reality, the US has little control over most of Iraq. The killing of the US/Allawi-appointed governor of



The US will continue to control Iraq's oil revenues and the multi-million contracts signed by Paul Bremner with US corporations will be binding on the new 'government'

1905: THE BIRTH OF A NEW POWER

'What are we for?' is a key question within the anti-capitalist movement. **Conor Kostick** gives an account of the great struggle and the alternative forms of power that emerged 100 years ago when the workers and peasants of Russia rose up in revolution.



Clockwise from top left: poverty and wealth in Tsarist Russia; a depiction of the Bloody Sunday massacre in the 1925 film *The Ninth of January*; and a contemporary picture of the workers' procession towards the Winter Palace Trotsky (below) was 26 when he was elected chairman of the Petrograd soviet.

The anti-capitalist movement is absolutely clear in what it opposes, and has a great deal of well researched material to give us irrefutable arguments against war, racism, damage to the environment, attacks on human rights and all the other key issues of today.

But there is a vagueness when it comes to answering the question of what should replace capitalism, and what does a non-capitalist government look like? Insofar as this question is discussed in the movement the models on offer tend to be the rather uninspiring idea of getting the left wing European social democrats into power, or of looking to countries which claim to be socialist, say Cuba.

The problem in answering the question is that there is no clearly existing example at the moment that can rally the anti-capitalist movement to say with pride, 'this is ours, this is the alternative.'

But such models have existed, flourishing briefly several times in the last century, and exactly one hundred years ago in Russia the revolutionary movement gave birth to organisations that are extremely relevant to understanding how to replace capitalism.

Mass Strikes and demonstrations

Many features of Russia in 1905 are specific and do not have immediate parallels to today.

The fact that the government was in the process of losing a war (against Japan) is worth noting, as well as the fact that although much of the country was extremely impoverished and behind the times, Russia also contained the largest and most modern factories in the world, generally financed by capital from France, Germany and Britain.

It was from these factories that a great strike wave broke out at the beginning of the year, with some 140,000 workers protesting against a recent decline in their living stan-

dards.

For many of the workers this was their first major dispute, although a minority of skilled engineers at the time had strong traditions of organising strikes.

On the 9 January a mass demonstration took place in St. Petersburg, with a young priest, Father Gapon, who had helped bring about the movement, leading the march up to the palace of the Tsar, Russia's great autocrat.

The idea was to awaken the Tsar to the misrule of his ministers, and the leaders of the demonstration intended to very humbly bring their grievances in the form of a petition to the Winter Palace.

They were completely unprepared for the response of the authorities, who called out the army and ordered them to fire upon the crowd. Thousands of unarmed and shocked demonstrators were shot.

Father Gapon was representative of the loss of innocence of the movement when he declared of the Tsar, 'today a river of blood divides him from his people.'

The mass strikes that came and went in the months following this massacre, known from then on as 'Bloody Sunday', had a more serious character and in some towns led very quickly to extremely high levels of struggle between the people and the local government forces.

In the Black Sea port of Odessa for example, the sailors of the battleship *Potemkin* mutinied rather than obey orders to fight the people.

Printers spark a new wave of opposition

By August the wave of unrest seemed to be over.

The deeply unpopular war with Japan had been ended; liberal opinion was attracted to the offer of a 'Duma' or parliament; and, more sinisterly, 'Black Hundreds' – the forerunners of fascist organisations – were active in many areas crushing radicals and organising pogroms against Russia's large Jewish population.

Then, on 19 September, typesetters at a Moscow printworks struck because they were only being paid for letters and not punctuation marks.

This tiny detail contains a great lesson – that the most inconsequential dispute can give rise to mass movements under the right circumstances.

Within two weeks all the printers of Moscow and St. Petersburg were on strike, and railway workers on the Moscow – Kazan line, joined them on 7 October.

Gradually the entire railway network after to a halt and soon factory after factory joined the strike.

On 13 October workers from the engineering, cabinet-making and tobacco industries sent their delegates to meet with the printers and decide a course of action.

The St. Petersburg soviet was born and declared a political general strike.

New representation of the working class

'Soviet' simply means council, but in 1905 this was the world's first example of a new form of government, a new representative body of the working class.

The soviet was made up of delegates who had been elected from their workplace.

As more and more factories joined the strike, they too sent representatives to the soviet until it had 562 delegates representing some 200,000 workers.

They started their own newspaper, *Izvestia*, to inform their supporters, and the public in general, of their actions as well as to counter the lies of the right wing press.

Their meetings became the centre of public life, for great issues of state, such as the right of Poland to independence, as well as for local issues of a practical nature.

Only 26 years old, but confident in his understanding of events, a young Jewish man became its chairperson: Leon Trotsky.

He later wrote that 'the soviet's

premises were always crowded with petitioners and plaintiffs of all kinds – mostly workers, domestic servants, shop assistants, peasants, soldiers and sailors.'

People called in to check if their journey might be interrupted by a rail strike; to apply for written exemptions to certain strike rules; to ask for instructions on whether to join the strike.

Latvians approached the soviet to ask for assistance in ending the declaration of martial law in their country.

The all-encompassing nature of the soviet was shown by the fact that people from the countryside wrote to it with the simple address: 'The Workers' Government, Petersburg.'

Lessons for today

There are several lessons from this moment for today.

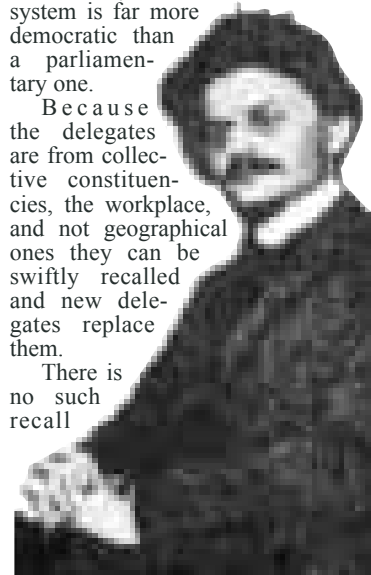
Firstly, such a government is a spontaneous development from a mass working class movement – it is the problems created by great strikes: how to organise food, transport, control of the media that impel workers to come together in this way.

Soviets cannot exist in periods of low levels of strike activity.

Secondly a soviet system is far more democratic than a parliamentary one.

Because the delegates are from collective constituencies, the workplace, and not geographical ones they can be swiftly recalled and new delegates replace them.

There is no such recall



system in even the most advanced parliament.

Furthermore the parliamentary representative, even the most sincere one, deals with politics that are separated from economics.

A parliament can decree that women should receive equal pay to men, but whether that is implemented is another question.

Employers often find their way out of such legislation.

But if the workers themselves are making such decisions then their impact is immediate.

Because it is made up of those who actually run society, the working class, a soviet matches words to deeds.

Thirdly, the soviet and any other form of capitalist government, dictatorship or democracy, cannot exist side-by-side forever.

One or the other must eventually assume full power in society.

In December 1905 it was the soviet that was suppressed, despite a brave attempt in Moscow to organise a rising against the encircling army.

In large part the defeat arose because this was the first experience of revolutionary struggle for the working class; but the lessons of that year, preserved especially in the form of the Bolshevik Party, were invaluable for the return of revolution in 1917.

The proof that the experience of 1905 provides a general model of what a working class government looks like comes from the fact that 'soviet' type organisations occur every time working class militancy reaches a great height.

So, for example, they have been seen all over Europe, including Ireland 1919-20; in Spain 1936; Hungary 1956; Chile 1973; Portugal 1974; Iran 1979; and Poland 1980. It is only a matter of time, and rising levels of strike activity, before they will be seen again and the evidence of what can replace capitalist forms of government be provided by people's own experience rather than from history.

Socialist Worker

It's time to fight privatisation

The FF/PD Government is using the crisis in many of our public services as an opportunity to implement Thatcherite privatisation policies.

The Government is supported in this by FG and Labour Councillors who have voted for Council Budgets that included privatisation of essential services.

The majority of the public are deeply sceptical of privatisation after the sale of Telecom Eireann.

The only ones seen to have benefitted from that were the stockbrokers and fat cats like Anthony O'Reilly (who's company Vodafone reaps one million euros a day in profits). As a result, the Government adopted different methods of privatisation.

While, on the one hand Bertie Ahern denounced Willie Walsh for planning to become rich from the sell-off of Aer Lingus, his government has introduced and continues to ram through break ups, de-regulation, competition and Public Private Partnerships (PPPs) in public services. The private sector is encouraged to step in and provide public services.

An Post, Aer Rianta, Aer Lingus, CIE, Bus Eireann, Dublin Bus, Bord Gais, the ESB, waste collection and disposal services, water services, public libraries, schools and hospitals are (or already have been) all subject to privatisation policies.

Rather than providing more public beds in the health sector, Mary Harney is promoting the provision of private hospitals.

The Beacon Medical group is constructing a 210m medical campus in Sandyford and is in talks with the University of Limerick to build a private hospital on its campus.

A Carlow private health care consortium, Euro Care is constructing the country's first purpose built primary care medical campus. This will add to their 40 bed clinic in Waterford, due to open next year.

Will these help the A&E crisis or get public patients more rapid access to treatment? Not for one second.

Only those who can afford to pay will get health care. We are developing the US model of health care provision.

Privatisation only benefits the consultancy firms, stock brokers, private capitalists and politicians on the take. For the users of public services and PAYE tax payer it means higher charges e.g. Bin Charges, Road Tolls, paying for health care, higher ESB bills. Because the private sector must make a profit, PPPs cost more to the PAYE tax payer than if those services or infrastructure were provided directly by the state.

For the workers it means job losses (see the proposed job cuts for Shannon Airport after the break up of Aer Rianta) and worse conditions e.g. Ryanair's treatment of baggage handlers, Oxigen recycling company's intimidation of union activists).

In Dublin Bus the drive to privatise has been temporarily stalled due to concerted action by the workers. There was potential during the EU presidency for a transport sector strike but the union leadership called it off.

The dispute in An Post has shown that workers are prepared to fight this Thatcherite agenda.

The struggle to save our public services and achieve properly funded services with good conditions for the workers is a fight that every worker must see as their own.

As Aurthur Scargill pointed out in his recent visit, we cannot rely on partnership, the official trade union leadership or the labour party to win these battles. The time was never more urgent for a rank and file movement against privatisation in the unions and workplaces.

LETTERS

Write to Socialist Worker – email to swped@eircom.net

Responses to debate on left unity

I HAVE been listening to a lot of radio discussions about the Tsunami. Time and again people are phoning and texting to call for the cancellation of the affected countries debt.

Many are also pointing to the disparity between the bottomless war chest of the US and Britain and the stinginess of their contribution to the relief effort. Others are talking about the man-made poverty that was the a main reason for so many deaths.

This illustrates how current many radical ideas have become due to the influence of the anti-war and anti capitalist movements. I believe the countless fundraising events spontaneously organised in the wake of the Tsunami are also connected with the rebirth of social activism following Seattle and Feb15th.

It is obvious that there are many thousands of people in Ireland who both understand and want to do something about the suffering in the world.

But when these people look to the radical left for an alternative they find instead a babble of competing organisations often more interested in putting the boot into each other than knuckling down to a serious challenge to the status quo.

The left will only start to grow when it starts to look like it means what it is saying about changing the world. This means putting aside the old factional enmities and beginning to provide a living example of the solidarity we preach to others.

In order to achieve this the debate begun in Socialist Worker needs to continue and to broaden. We should be involving community and trade



Tsunami destruction in Sri Lanka

union activists and the many that are active in anti war, environmental and majority world solidarity organisations. We need to produce special literature arguing the case for left unity. We must organise forums and debates around Ireland and begin to forge closer connections with anyone who wants to work side by side with us for a peaceful and just

society.

Forging left unity will not be easy but every journey begins with first steps. Lets start taking those steps today.

**D. LORDAN,
Dun Laoghaire**

TO BE honest I was disappointed with the contributions to the alternative left section, although less so Dermot Connolly's. It was the usual left analysis determined by the contributor's shade of red.

When is the discussion on building our left alternative going to move beyond vague rhetoric and into proper honest debate on how we can facilitate each other within an alliance to truly challenge the terrible inequalities that riddle Ireland today?

Throughout the country people are organising themselves to fight against the neo-liberal agenda and for housing, proper education, a

clean environment, an end to war etc.

But because of the inability of the left to work together to offer a real political alternative our communities are left with no other option but to vote in the very people who are crapping all over them.

There are no real solutions or processes being offered by the left. The prospect of real change during a highly radicalised time is being squandered by us all.

There are those within the far left who don't believe that an alternative left can be created in Ireland at this moment in time, and perhaps they are right.

But if that be the case I have to ask the question, if our communities can work together to take on the local fights in a structured, organised and united fashion, why the hell can't we?

**B. MURPHY,
Galway**

Defend Northern Ireland education

ONE HUNDRED and fifty million pounds is the projected losses for the 5 Education & Library Boards for the next financial year. The seriousness of this crisis in education funding is underlined by the fact that libraries are being earmarked for closure (5 across Belfast), jobs and support services are facing the axe.

The boards stand accused by the British Government of financial mismanagement. By discrediting the boards they hope to pave the way for further cuts and eventual amalgamation of the boards.

However the roots of financial mismanagement lay with the Blair Government. Having brought in legislation that justifiably encourages spending on Special Educational Needs resources such as classroom assistants, transport, access for wheelchairs etc, the Boards were promised the money to cover the costs. Instead their budgets were frozen. Unfortunately the teachers unions have to some extent let the Government off the hook. They

have argued that only one board is needed in NI. Just like Yorkshire (same size population and area) with only 1 Local Education Authority less bureaucracy and more money spent on schools. This is just not true. Yorkshire has at least 10 LEA s. Support services are crucial for schools especially in deprived areas such as West Belfast or Bradford.

Instead the teachers unions should be linking up with other public sector unions and education workers to fight these cuts. 50 million was spent on keeping the Stormont Assembly up and not running, 120 million was handed back to the British treasury unspent from the NI public sector and billions were spent on the unjust war in Iraq. The money is clearly there but the neo-Liberals in New Labour want to privatise instead of invest.

We urgently need a public sector union response to all these attacks.

**MARK HEWITT
(NASUWT, personal capacity) Belfast**

COMMENT

How Gerry Adams was tripped up

By **KIERAN ALLEN**, Lecturer in Sociology, UCD

MICHAEL McDOWELL uses double standards when it comes to 'criminal activities'.

He fulminates against the IRA for robbing the Northern Ireland bank – but says nothing about the same bankers who robbed the Irish people.

Northern Irish Bank was part of National Australia Bank and its subsidiary in the South, was the National Irish Bank (NIB). NIB set up bogus, non-resident accounts to evade taxes and so rob public services of funding. The same bank also stole from its own customers by charging exorbitant fees and interest rates.

When it comes to 'crime', the IRA – if indeed they carried out the robbery – can only do a spectacular. But the banks make criminal activity a way of life – 'What's robbing a bank compared to owning a bank?'

None of these considerations are, however, likely to have any impact on the political fall-out from this 'Great Bank Robbery'.

Consider what is at stake. The Sinn Fein and the IRA leadership had come within a millimeter of joining a government with Ian Paisley. They were about to declare the final end of the IRA. They would urge their members to join the PSNI and put representatives on police boards.

In brief, they were about to complete the historic burial of armed republicanism. Key sections of the establishment considered this quite a prize.

The DUP-Sinn Fein government would have had to preside over the introduction



Gerry Adams

of water charges. Currently, Sinn Fein opposes these charges but, clearly with an eye to their future, has argued against a non-payment campaign. In government, they would drop the rhetoric and press for implementation of water charges.

The incorporation of Sinn Fein also offered major advantages for the Southern establishment. Fianna Fail has entered a long trajectory of decline in working-class areas. Re-consolidating the FF base among workers through an alliance with Sinn Fein offers attractive possibilities for both party leaderships.

The Sinn Fein leadership is absolutely committed to entering the political establishment. Indeed, they have made it the cornerstone of their medium-term strategy. They desperately want to be in government in both the North and South.

Entry to the political establishment, however, only comes with an entry fee. And this is what the current political row about the Great Bank Robbery is really about.

The press and the wider establishment want to pressurize Sinn Fein to pay a higher price. They must fully acknowledge the authority of the Gardai by leaving the killers of Gerry McCabe in jail. They must respect bankers – not snigger when they are robbed.

Gerry Adams' current problems stem from his own success. Politically, he is little different from Sean Lemass or Frank Aiken – former IRA leaders – who spoke every bit as radical as Adams does – and then paid their entry tickets.

In the past, however, this hugely disgruntled many IRA members and they responded in the only way they knew how – a return to militarism. This is why the history of republicanism has always been one of accommodation and splits.

Adams has used the legacy of a 25-year armed struggle to avoid splits and cement a unity around his own personality. But he still cannot overcome the contradictions of republicanism.

If republicans were involved in the robbery, it most likely came from republican supporters who did not see why they had to retire from active service or who felt they had gained little from all the sacrifice.

So when Adams was a millimeter away from the finishing line, he was tripped up.

If they are cast out again, republicans will undoubtedly return to a more radical rhetoric. But the events of the past two months show that this is only skin deep.

Adams and McGuinness will follow the road of Lemass and Aiken. But for the moment they will have to put up with chastisement until the rich are sure they are fully tamed.

REVIEWS

Safe abortion: Still an issue of class

SINEAD KENNEDY from Alliance for Choice reviews Vera Drake, the new film on backstreet abortions in 1950s Britain. She also outlines the situation in Ireland.

MIKE LEIGH's latest film, Vera Drake, opens with Vera, played by Imelda Staunton, preparing tea for her husband and two grown-up children in their cramped Islington flat.

It is 1950 and Vera is cheerfully caught in the rituals of domestic life.

What is remarkable about this quiet, tight-knit image of domestic contentment is that it is coming from a director whose work repeatedly probes the bruising realities of family life, whose family scenes are usually the occasions of unbearable tension.

But we quickly learn that Vera too has her "secrets and lies." Unbeknown to her family she performs illegal abortions for neighbourhood "girls in trouble."

Vera is a paradox. On the surface she is goodness personified: the cheerful cleaner who toils daily in the homes of rich, a kindly neighbour, dedicated mother and wife, and devoted carer to her sick mother.

She is also the neighbourhood abortion provider. When one of her clients gets septicaemia and nearly dies, Vera is sent to prison.

As in many of Leigh's films, characters rarely speak directly of the things that are on their minds, so the scenes are charged with subtext, and this gives the actors freedom to reveal character in more subtle and expressive ways.

For example, the disconnection between Vera's son and his friends picking up girls in the local dance hall and what his mother does with a syringe and carbolic in terrified girls' bedrooms says it all.

Abortion: an issue of class

Leigh is adamant that the film is a drama rather than a polemic.

"First of all, my job is to present you with the moral dilemma which you have to confront.

"I don't think these things are black and white," he says.

Yet this is one of the strengths of the film especially when it comes to issue of class.

Vera performs abortions for working-class women, free of charge.

Alongside this, we see Susan, the daughter of one of Vera's wealthy cleaning clients, who finds herself pregnant after being raped by her boyfriend.

With the help of her aunt, she pays a hundred pounds for a legal abortion through a psychiatrist.

In the hands of a lesser director this could have been a crude polemic but Leigh treats Susan with great compassion and feeling, while quiet-



Vera Drake is led away by police

ly making his point: the unmentionable fear and disgrace which working class women are subject to but which middle class women with contacts and money can avoid.

His depiction of class divide is subtle and visual — a hospital screen, an IV stand, a staircase, and a court bench cleaving the frame starkly in two.

Vera Drake is a powerful portrait of what it was like before women had access to legal abortion and of how ordinary abortion is, and was, even in the days before it was legal.

Many critics have been surprised by Leigh's success in presenting a "backstreet abortionist" as an ordinary wife and mother carrying out dangerous, but usually successful, procedures.

This is not the image of backstreet abortion that we are familiar with.

Abortion in 1950s Ireland

In Ireland most people think of Nurse Cadden, who was sentenced to death (later commuted) when you mention backstreet abortion.

It was the most sensational but not the only abortion prosecution.

An overview of the State files on abortion from the 1920s to the 1950s

creates an interesting picture of an Ireland rarely depicted in history books, in which abortion and attempted abortion was "fairly prevalent." Our grandparents knew about abortion and practiced abortion, even if it was a largely unmentionable.

Perhaps more in keeping with the moral climate of the day was the message, scrawled in red ink across the front of the case files on abortion, that they were not to be typed by female typists.

Whether this was to protect the "delicate sensibilities" of women or to prevent them from picking up useful information is unclear.

What many of the case files from this period indicate is that women's reasons for opting for abortion are as varied as they are today.

There are no typical cases — both married and single women availed of the option.

Case files of women who had four, five and seven children show how the choice of each of them to have an abortion was supported by their husbands.

Other married women (one married for seventeen years) did not want children or at least not at that time.

In one series of rural cases the

information that a neighbour could perform abortions appears to have been passed by word of mouth among both married and single women in the area.

But many of the women who choose abortion did so because the price of being a single parent, loss of employment, ostracism, poverty, confinement in a convent laundry, was too high.

Attitudes veiled by hypocrisy

There are no accurate statistics to show the magnitude of illegal abortion, particularly in Ireland.

Doctors and lawyers who encounter the issue have been singularly loath to speak about its existence.

What we do know in Ireland is that between 1926 and 1974 a minimum of 58 cases were investigated and/or prosecuted.

These all are cases where something went wrong and the woman was admitted into hospital and in some cases died.

Looking at the figures, two things become clear.

Firstly, abortion exists in Ireland,

despite legal prohibition.

Secondly, backstreet abortion in Ireland rose and fell according to the access of Irish women to England and changes in the law there.

More than 200,000 Irish women, North and South, have traveled to Britain for abortions since it was legalised.

Vera Drake reminds us how attitudes to sex and young people continue to be veiled by hypocrisy.

Young people are bombarded daily by society and the media with sexualised images of how they should look and behave yet they are denied the right to protect themselves from its dangers.

Contraception is expensive and difficult to obtain especially if you are under eighteen.

The Catholic Church, which prohibits the use of contraception, primarily controls sexual education.

Access to abortion in Britain has always depended on being able to come up with a large sum of money in a relatively short period.

Today, an abortion in Britain will cost you at least €1000 to obtain.

Abortion in Ireland, just as was the case in Vera Drake's 1950s Britain, is a question of class.

Listening to the ordinary people of Iraq

THOMAS KADOR reviews Åsne Seierstad; A Hundred and One Days: a Baghdad Journal — Virago Books

"The man and the boy, maybe father and son, get up from the floor.

"They lift what might be a little brother off the metal bunk and place him in the coffin.

"Then they put the leg in with him and close the lid."

This is a typical scene of

what Åsne Seierstad witnessed in a Baghdad hospital on a morning after American bombing raids in March 2003.

Her book describes the Norwegian News correspondent's and author of the bestseller The Bookseller of Kabul's time in the City from her arrival in January, on the eve of Hans Blix's final report on Weapons of Mass Destruction, to the middle of April, when offi-

cial combat ended and the US occupation of Iraq commenced.

Her mission, to 'listen to the ordinary people of Baghdad'. The book is divided into three parts, 'Before', 'During' and 'After' — the invasion.

She grippingly describes the build up to the attacks and the horror of the bombing raids and the targeting of journalists by US tank fire.

After the fall of Saddam the initial air of relief turns to anger with the Americans' targeting of civilians and their brutal behaviour towards the people they claimed to have liberated.

A Hundred and One Days is an insightful perspective to the war in Iraq, adding a human dimension to the often abstract reporting and the futility and horrors of war.



EVENTS

**Socialist Worker Events: PO Box 1648, Dublin 8 Tel (01) 872-2682
Email: swped@eircom.net; Web: www.swp.ie**

National Speaking tour by Saif Abukeshk

**Tuesday 25th
Dundalk 8pm**
Imperial Hotel

**Wednesday 26th
Waterford 8pm**
ATGWU Hall

**Thursday 27th
Clonmel 8pm Post**

House Bar Gladstone
St.

Friday 28th Gorey
7pm The Coach
House

Saturday 29th Tralee
3pm, Abbey Gate
Hotel

Socialist Forums

Thur 3rd Feb 8.00pm,
ATGWU Union Hall,
Keyser Street,
Waterford "From
factories to Call
Centres: Is the Irish
Working Class
Changing?" Speaker

Kieran Allen

Mon 31st Jan, 8pm
Dundrum Recreational
Centre, **Dundrum** Iraqi
Elections: Why the US
can't bring
Peace. Speaker: Sinead
ni Bhroin

Anti-War meetings www.irishantiwar.org

Wed, 26 Jan 7.30pm
Dublin North City Anti-
War Group meets, The
Red Parrot Pub, Dorset
Street

Feb 28th Dublin,
Walden Bello (Director
of Focus on Global
South) 7.30pm ATGWU
Hall

Feb 11th, Dublin
7.30pm, Hani Lazim,
ATGWU Hall, 55 Middle
Abbey St

March 4th, 5th & 6th,
Dublin: Anti-War Forum
with Ahmed Ben Bella,
Salma Yaqoob and
many more

End the Occupation of Iraq and Palestine; US Troops out of Shannon



Demonstrate March 19 Parnell Square Dublin 2pm

Other events

**Tue 25th Jan, Protest,
Carlow Town** against
closure of Sugar Factory

**Fri 28th January, Brazil
Night in aid of Seomra
Spraol Social Centre
Group**

Food, Live music and
film, @St. Nicholas of
Myra Hall off Francis St.,
8pm Adm; donation

Sat 29th Jan, 8pm
Public Meeting on
**'Media and War' with
U.S. journalist Amy
Goodman,** ATGWU Hall
Chaired by Vincent
Browne.

Entry by donation to
Ploughshares Defence
Fund

Friday 4th Feb, 8 pm
Public Meeting;
**Venezuela: The
Bolivarian Revolution.**

Speakers: Richard Gott,
Ricardo Galindez
(Venezuelan Trade Union
Leader), Michael
McCaughan, Finian
McGrath T.D. AT&GWU
Hall

**Tuesday 8th Feb,
7:30pm.**

Rally of people with
disabilities, against the
disability bill in the RDS
concert hall

**16th - 28th February,
Images of Resistance
photography exhibition,**
documenting the anti-
war movements in
Europe and America.

The photographers are
Paul Mattsson, Guy
Smallman from London
and Michael Gallagher
and Paula Geraghty from
Dublin. At Our Lady of
Lourdes Church, Sean
McDermott St, Dublin 1.

Artists take on the World

**EVENTS AT the Project
Arts Centre in Temple
Bar Dublin, got off to a
cracking start in 2005
with an excellent show
created by the students
of the Bull Alley Theatre
Course.**

"Trapped"
imaginatively brought to
life the brutal realities
behind the shocking
photos of US soldiers
torturing people in Iraq.

Another play,
"Master Harold... and
the Boys" by the South
African writer, Athol
Fuggard should not be
missed. This play is
about apartheid, and
how it affected even the
most personal
relationships of those
living under such a
brutal system.

The director, Bairbre
Ni Chaoimh of Calypso
Productions, is famous
for her excellent shows
full of imagination and
entertainment, which
never fail to take on
crucial social issues of
the day. 'Master
Harold... and the Boys'
runs in the Project Arts
Centre from 1st
February 2005 for two
weeks, and is also on a
nation-wide tour taking
in the Mermaid Arts
Centre in Bray and the
Linenhall Arts Centre in
Castlebar, among
others, so check out
your local listings.

A must-see for all
activists is the
'Communism' visual arts
event, which is on in the
Project Arts Centre until

27th February 2005. 10
artists from different
countries have made art
works in response to the
word 'communism'.

For example, one of
the artists, Susan Kelly,
takes Lenin's famous
question 'What is to be
Done?', and invites you
to write your
suggestions down on
paper, as part of the art
work.

(Emmm.. I know!
'Private Ryan(s).. It's
time to hang up that
holster for good! We'll
all support ya!")

As part of the art
event, there's a
discussion on 29th
January 2005 about
communism and the
changes in the nature of
work.

If you can't make the
discussion, there's still
something for everyone
in the exhibition, from
the photo-collage by
Klaus Weber to the
performances of Lali
Chet, whose recent
work included "An
Evening with Jabba the
Hut"!

Hmmm, remember
'Star Wars'?? Not such a
fantasy after all.

Further information:
Project Arts Centre:
<http://www.project.ie>;
Bull Alley Theatre
Training Course in the
Liberties College:
<http://www.libertiescollege.ie>; Coiscéim Dance
Theatre:
<http://www.coisceim.com/>;
Calypso Productions
<http://www.calypso.ie/>

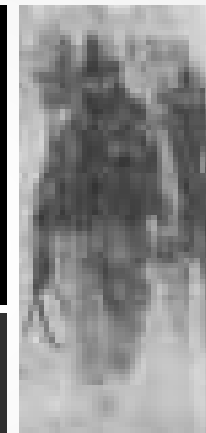
IRAQ: After the elections—

**WHY
US/UK
TROOPS
MUST
GET OUT**

Speaker:
HANI LAZIM
(IRAQI DEMOCRATS
AGAINST OCCUPATION)

7.30pm Friday, February 11th,
ATGWU Hall, Middle Abbey St.

Organised by the
IRISH ANTI-WAR MOVEMENT
www.irishantiwar.org/ / info@irishantiwar.org / 01 8727912



WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

Capitalism is wrecking the
lives of millions and
endangering the planet.

A new society can only be
constructed when the workers
take control of the wealth and
plan its production and
distribution for human need
and not profit.

REVOLUTION

The present system cannot be
patched up or reformed. The
courts, the army and police
exist to defend the interests of
the wealthy.

To destroy capitalism, we
need to remove the present
state structures and create a
workers' state based on much

greater political and economic
democracy.

AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

War is a constant feature of
capitalism today as the
imperialist powers try to
dominate the earth.

Bush's "War on Terrorism"
is a crude device to attack any
country which threatens US
military, strategic or economic
dominance.

END RACISM AND OPPRESSION

We oppose all forms of
oppression and racism. This
divides and weakens the

working class.

We are for full social,
economic and political equality
for women.

We oppose immigration
controls which are always
racist.

FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH

We stand for workers unity
against the Assembly
politicians and Blair
government.

Like great socialist James
Connolly, we believe that
partition has brought about a
'carnival of reaction'

We want to see an Irish
workers republic where all

workers gain.

Our flag is neither green nor
orange but red!

FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

To win socialism socialists
need to organise in a
revolutionary party.

This party needs to argue
against right-wing ideas and
for overthrowing the system.

We call for co-operation
between left-wing parties and
the formation of a strong
socialist bloc.

We stand for fighting trade
unions and for independent
rank and file action.

Join the Socialists

Fill in the form and send to
SWP PO Box 1648 Dublin 8

Name.....

Address.....

Email.....

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WWW.SWP.IE

BROWN ATTACKS WORKERS' PENSIONS

FIVE MILLION public sector workers across Britain and Northern Ireland face an extra five years on their working life.

The government also wants to reduce pensions by as much as thirty per cent if workers retire at 60, the present retirement age.

While research shows the longer you work the earlier you die, governments

across Europe have tried to increase the retirement age for workers.

Unison General Secretary, Dave Prentis said "To suggest that NHS workers should be forced to work until they are 65 is living in cloud cuckoo land. Forcing staff to work more will simply raise the level of ill-health retirements and end up costing the NHS more."

He went on to say, "MP's who will retire at the next election with a five-star pension package are plotting to make NHS staff work longer for smaller pensions."

According to Unison, in Britain almost three quarters of NHS paramedics have to leave work due to illness before reaching retirement age.

Many public sector workers retire early

because of the impact of stress on their health.

Workers are not taking the attacks lying down. On Friday 18th of February there will be a national day of action against the attacks.

Across the UK there will be mass rallies, pickets and walkouts. Similar actions must take place in Northern Ireland.

The great pension robbery

"You can't hide from your financial future forever."

—National Pension Awareness Campaign, 2004

Last September, during "National Pension Awareness Week," the ads were everywhere.

Workers had to take responsibility for their pensions. In reality companies have shirked their pension responsibilities to workers. And now we are being asked to pay the price.

When the stock market was booming in the 1990's companies believed, based on very optimistic assumptions about the stock market, that they had more than enough money in their pension funds.

They could save less and spend more, using the "excess" in their pension funds to top up profits. However, when the stock market crashed it became clear that it would not deliver the required rates of return. This left massive holes in pension funds.

According to Joseph Stiglitz, these holes were enormous: "One study of just the 348 companies in the S&P 500 ... concluded that this underfunding amounted to between \$148 and \$323 billion."

The "excess" had been spent by companies. Now, to make up the shortfall, they would have to put more of their profits into their pension funds.

Reduced profits would leave them with less money to invest; investors became more pessimistic, causing share prices to fall.

Rather than see their profits hit, for companies the "solution was to close the pension schemes, first to new employees and sometimes to everyone."

For example, "Nissan ... closed its scheme, which was £121m short — amounting to an average of £22,000 per worker."

"Defined benefit" versus "defined contribution"

"Defined benefit" (or "final salary") schemes guarantee a certain pension based on the worker's income and the number of years worked with a company. Under this arrangement, the company assumes the risk of investing money in a pension fund on behalf of its workers.

In "defined contribution" schemes however, there is no guaranteed pension on retirement. Both the company and the worker contribute to the fund, which is invested on the stock market. If the market crashes the pension fund — and future benefits crash with it.

More companies are switching from defined benefit to defined contribution schemes, which leave workers more vulnerable to the boom and bust of the stock market, facing the risk of a poorer standard of living at retirement. According to the TUC union in Britain, "there are two million less workers in final salary schemes today than in 1995, and in the private sector, four out of five workers do not belong to a final salary scheme."

PRSAs — the "stakeholder pension"

Following the UK example, the Irish Government introduced Personal Retirement Savings Accounts (PRSAs). "Putting you in charge of your pension" is the marketing pitch of a guide to PRSAs produced by Hibernian Life and Pensions.

This really means "Making you solely responsible for your own pension provision and releasing your employer from any obligation to contribute to your pension." According to the PRSAs — Employers' Obligations guide, "Employers may contribute, but are not obliged to do so." An Irish Times article (Jan 14th) noted that companies



French workers show the way

were profiting from the new schemes, "Employers who do not contribute to their employees' ... [PRSAs]... are making a profit of more than €300 per contributing employee per annum, based on average contributions to the new pensions." Average contributions to PRSAs are around €3,040 per annum. Employers do not pay employer PRSI on their employees' contribution, meaning they save 10.75 per cent per worker - €326.80 on average per year.

The pensions "time bomb"

All of this, we are told, has become necessary due to the

so-called pensions "time bomb" that is affecting Europe: "Across Europe birth rates are falling and governments are waking up to the fact that populations are growing older and the state will be unable to sustain them into old age."

However, there is another point of view, pointed by David Metz in his review of Phil Mullan's book *The Imaginary Time Bomb: Why an Ageing Population is not a Social Problem* "Mullan argues that demographic ageing [as a cause for pension fund problems] came into prominence about two decades ago as a scapegoat for changes in society and

the economy ... in particular the generalised slow-down in all Western economies.... Those on the political right used the threat of the ageing population to justify attempts to narrow the state's economic role and to reform and curb welfare expenditure."

For information:

<http://www.pensionsboard.ie/2004.asp>
Joseph Stiglitz, The Roaring Nineties
http://www.marxist.com/Europe/great_pensions_robbery.html
http://www.politicalreview.net.com/polrev/reviews/P0QU/R_0032_3179_011_20501.asp

Resistance across Europe

By THOMAS KADOR

Over the last few years, reforms of the pension and welfare system have been railroaded in most countries across the EU.

This is a direct result of requirements by the IMF to privatise public services as much as possible. Governments across the globe passed legislation to abdicate their responsibilities to provide for their citizens.

In many places such reforms have met robust resistance from pensioners and workers.

Throughout August and September in Germany hundreds of thousands of people took part in 'Monday demonstrations', reminiscent of the protests that brought down the East German government in the late 1980s. The recent protests were organised against the government's shake-up of the welfare system. The 'reforms' went into effect on January 3rd, with clashes between angry protestors and riot police in Berlin and other cities and smaller demonstrations across Germany.

Millions of people paralysed Italy in a general strike on March 26th 2004 against the Berlusconi government's pension reforms. This was the second such strike in six months and the third general strike since Berlusconi became prime minister in 2001. According to Oliviero Diliberto, secretary of Italy's PDCL union, "Berlusconi is planning to begin his destruction of the Italian society by cutting pensions. The Prime Minister is seeking to regain consensus by promising tax cuts, but in fact his only true goal is reducing taxes for rich and affluent classes and cutting welfare spending and social services indiscriminately".

In France, pensioners took part in some one hundred demonstrations on October 21st and 22nd last. They protested at the devaluation of their pensions against the sharp increase in the cost of living. Pensioners make up one fifth of the French population.

Despite an ageing population throughout Europe, according to Raghuram Rajan, director of the IMF's research department, governments have nothing to worry about. The secret is the use of "multiple policies, such as increasing participation rates, extending work lives, and allowing more immigration".

In other words, ordinary people will have to work longer and pay more into private, profit making pension schemes. The IMF wants these changes to be rushed through quickly. Rajan comments, "pension reforms will become increasingly difficult to implement as populations age because the reforms will hit those who become politically more powerful". We are politically powerful, and across the globe workers must use their power to keep up the fight against these attacks now.