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WORLD SOCIAL FORUM

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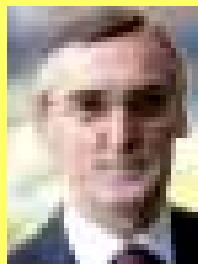
1980, Ireland's tax general strike

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THE REAL CRIMINALS: BANKS, AHERN AND BLAIR

Banks robbing us blind

NIB overcharged customers by €12.5 million
AIB overcharged customers by €34 million
Profit per each mortgage customer (EU average is €221); €693-AIB; €708-BOI

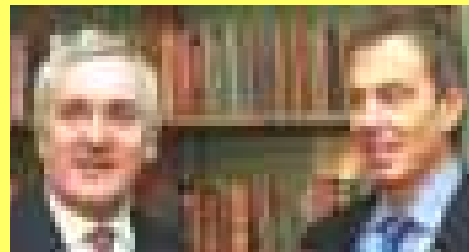


Don Price, CEO of NIB

Tax evaders:

DIRT Tax evasion; €782 million
NIB scam for tax evasion; €53 million
Ansbacher gang evaded €44 million and paid Haughey £5,000 a week between 1988-1991

Warmongers:



Warmongers: Ahern and Blair

Bertie Ahern allowing use of Shannon Airport for illegal war
Tony Blair sending troops to murder innocent Iraqis

Hypocritical establishment now turns on Sinn Fein

THE CLAMOUR against Sinn Fein 'criminality' has been turned up to full volume since the Northern Bank Robbery in December.

However the genesis of this attack began prior to the heist when Justice Minister Michael McDowell called on Sinn Fein to 'disown criminality'.

This was in addition to Ian Paisley's demand that the IRA supply photo-evidence of their decommissioning.

What began as a solo run by a hard-line Justice Minister has become a consensus among the southern political establishment. Everyone from Pat Rabbitte to Mary Harney has turned their ire on Gerry Adams and the republican movement. The Sunday Business Post political correspondent, Pat Leahy, summed up the shift in elite political thinking,

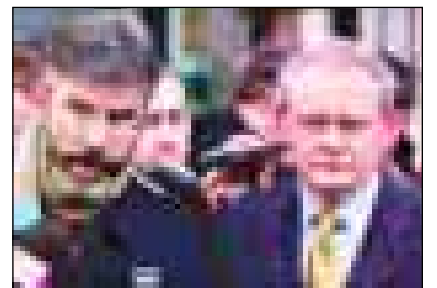
'Some government officials have begun to talk of 'appeasers' - other officials or politicians who believe that the peace process can be put back together again... Previously almost everyone was an appeaser. Now this is not the case.'

The attack on Sinn Fein is grossly hypocritical because the very politicians who attack 'criminality' are up to their very neck in it.

It was no coincidence that on the day after former Fianna Fail Minister for Foreign Affairs Ray Burke was put in Jail for not paying taxes; Ahern launched a blistering attack on Sinn Fein in the Dail. This attack was carefully stage managed to take the media spotlight away from Fianna Fail's role in corruption.

The political establishment, for example, has also closed down the Ansbacher inquiry it before it drew out the links between Cement Roadstone Holdings (CRH) and corruption. Donations to Haughey were run out of the CRH offices and most of its directors belonged to the Ansbacher account. Yet CRH is a global multi-national and its criminality puts anything the IRA did into the shadows.

It has stopped the Mahon Tribunal inquiry into why a company controlled by Tony O'Reilly made a €30,000 donation to Ray Burke just before it was awarded a con-



Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness

rol over distribution of multi-channel television to large parts of the country.

And when it comes to violence and respect for human rights, the political elite put the IRA in the halfpenny place.

The British government - with the complicity of the Irish government with the US military use of Shannon Airport - has helped to murder tens of thousands of Iraqis.

Socialists do not advocate the use of secret armies. Despite the dirty tricks of the state and the big corporations, we rely on open democratic organisation to encourage the mass of people to liberate themselves.

But that is a far cry from siding with a state establishment who are mired in criminal corruption and violence.

See Comment >> page 9

All out to protest against Bin Tax February 26th

FIVE DUBLIN anti bin tax activists will contest the High Court injunctions served against them, as Dublin wide campaigns gear up for a city centre protest this month against the unpopular double tax.

The community activists were stopped by gardai in Dublin's East Wall last week in an attempt by council management to prevent locals opposed to the tax from throwing sacks of rubbish into the bin trucks.

Despite the city council's attempts to break the anti-bin charges campaign through the forces of the state, the campaign has huge support and continues to grow.

While the council is continuing

with its scandalous policy of non-collection in many areas around Dublin city, hundreds of people are turning out to campaign meetings and engaging in mass clean-ups in their areas including the North Inner City, the Liberties, the Ranch and Mount Brown.

Campaigners are urging a large show of support at the protest on Saturday, 26th February in Dublin City Centre which will insist that refuse collection is a public service and must stay in public hands.

The protest beginning at 2pm, from Parnell Square, will be the ideal opportunity to show the anger and opposition that exists to the government's waste management policies, a policy that is more concerned in allowing dioxin-pol-

luting incinerators go ahead than significantly investing in recycling facilities and ways to reduce waste at source.

This demonstration is supported by the Dublin anti service charge campaigns, The Dublin Council of Trade Unions, the ATGWU, Sinn Fein and independent deputies.

Meanwhile in Wexford the majority of the 1,200 households given a New Year's ultimatum to pay charges have refused to comply.

In Cork, Householders against Service Charges has called a protest on Saturday, 12th February.

More on Bin Tax >> page 2



*The Eamonn McCann Column***Sinn Fein: Armed struggle and isolation or into government?**

MITCHEL MCLAUGHLIN was splattered with scorn last month when he told a Radio Foyle interviewer that if the IRA had been behind the Northern Bank job it wouldn't have been a crime.

It would have been a crime, he conceded, if IRA members had carried out the heist for reasons of "personal aggrandisement." But if the operation had been properly authorised by a competent IRA authority—which he denied—it wouldn't have been criminal at all.

His underlying point was that the IRA embodies the nation, and that its interests and the 'national interest' are therefore one and the same. And nothing done in the national interest could be a crime.

Taken on its own, this isn't an outlandish suggestion. Governments come out with the same sort of stuff all the time. The "national interest" is regularly used to justify everything from withholding evidence from courts to waging war to telling the poor to tighten their belts.

This perception of the IRA as the equivalent of a government is regarded by virtually everybody outside Republican ranks as a ridiculous delusion. But it's taken more seriously by Republicans than they often care to admit within earshot of outsiders. It's at the core of their justification of the 'armed struggle'. Since the IRA embodies the nation, runs the theory, the IRA Army Council, tracing its succession back to 1916, has governmental authority.

The problem for the Sinn Fein leadership now is that they have abandoned the objective which the armed struggle was intended to achieve. When they signed up to the Belfast Agreement they accepted the 'principle of consent'—that the North will remain constitutionally part of the UK until such time as a majority within the Six Counties decides otherwise. This directly contradicts the idea of the nation which underpins the Provos' conception of themselves.

Whether or not they actually did the bank job, this contradiction has now come to the fore and will have to be dealt with.

If Sinn Fein wants to continue to progress towards holding government office North and South, it will have to give up the fantasy of the Army Council as the government of the whole island. It will have to accept, fully and formally, the existing two States and the legitimacy of their security forces. That's what the two governments and the other major parties want it to do.

One of the reasons Sinn Fein would be acceptable in government on both sides of the border—if they ended association with the IRA—is that, seeing their Movement as representing 'the nation', they don't advocate the interests of any one class against another. In class terms, they are reconcilers.

They can use rhetoric suggesting they are on the side of the oppressed and exploited, while being trusted by their potential partners in government not to destabilise the system which generates exploitation and oppression.

What are their options if they don't ditch the IRA and go for government at Leinster House and Stormont? Resume shooting and bombing for 'Brits Out' and an all-Ireland Republic? There'd be little support for such a course in any of the overwhelmingly working class areas where Sinn Fein is well-rooted. And they wouldn't be taken seriously anyway, having spent the last seven years extolling the virtues of the Agreement.

So, it's into government, chastened, with right-wing parties on a right-wing programme—or back to armed struggle and isolation.

Rank and file Republicans should ask themselves whether the time has not come to free themselves from the nationalist contradictions in which they are entangled and look for a socialist way forward instead.

All out to fight the bin tax on Feb 26th

By BRID SMITH, PRO. Dublin Bin Tax Campaign, SWP Candidate, Ballyfermot

THE CITY councils want to break the anti-bin charges campaign but the campaign has huge support and continues to grow. Despite the council's policy of non-collection in many areas around Dublin city, hundreds of people are turning out to campaign meetings and engaging in mass clean-ups in their areas.

Council workers are increasingly frustrated with management's policy of non-collection, finding themselves being used to implement a very

unpopular policy in the face of community protest.

These workers are, in the main, opposed to bin charges and many of them are campaign members.

The Dublin Council of Trade Unions will be supporting the Dublin wide demonstration on 26th February, a very important move as it is in the interests of the workers that this campaign succeeds, as the less rubbish that is collected the more their jobs and conditions will be threatened.

Reports roundup from local anti bin tax campaigns

BALLYFERMOT

Over 200 people turned out to a lively and angry meeting in Ballyfermot last week with local people preparing for the threat of non-collection in their area.

Organisers described how "the mood is more defiant than ever" and as Evelyn, a local activist, explained: "We are constantly being told to reduce and recycle. But when you go to the trouble of separating your refuse you have a real problem recycling it."

"There are too few bottle banks, only one bank for plastic - and that is always full - and nowhere at all for organic waste. People are fed up being lectured at and charged through the nose for making the effort." John complained: "As a PAYE worker all my life I have paid taxes - for what - so that Magnier horses get a better life than my kids. We have to fight this because if we don't they'll have us paying for water, sewage, lighting and even the air we breathe." The meeting voted unanimously to take leaflets and posters around the areas and into the workplaces to build for the

biggest possible demonstration on 26th February. The mood was summed by Alice, who said: "The people of Bolivia fought with their lives to stop the privatisation of their water and succeeded. It was because they came together in mass numbers and organised civil disobedience that they were able to win. We can do the

same. Let's take our inspiration from the workers and peasants of Bolivia."

WEXFORD

Wexford Borough Council has started non-collection of waste in the town. Before Christmas the Council issued an ultimatum to 1,200 households that the charges had to be paid by

the 1st January or non-collection would commence.

However, most of the 1,200 households have refused to be intimidated by the Council's threats and have continued with their non-payment campaign.

Bin charges are higher in Wexford than they are in any other county with the council claiming that the householders in question owe around €700,000.

CORK PROTEST SATURDAY, 12TH FEBRUARY

Last December, Cork City Council agreed a budget for the coming year, which included a substantial increase in refuse charges.

The new charges were agreed by a majority of councillors, including some from the Labour Party.

They consist of a standing charge of €255, plus an approximate €255 per year for tags giving a total just over €510. This compared to last years charge of €377 represents an increase of 33 per cent.

Despite a publicity campaign to encourage recycling even households that succeed in recycling

will still be forced to pay the standing charge of €255. The council also drastically reduced the number of people entitled to a waiver. Because people cannot afford tags and with a large number of people supporting the campaign of non-payment being led by Householders against Service Charges (HASC), domestic refuse is being left uncollected on the streets and estates. The City Manager is insisting that this is litter and is threatening prosecution against the 'perpetrators'. But it is the City Council's refusal to collect domestic refuse that is causing the build up of rubbish.

Some city councillors who have consistently supported the campaign, from the Socialist Party, Sinn Fein, Green Party and Independents occupied the city manager's office last week.

HASC is stepping up the campaign of non-payment. A demonstration against charges has been called for Saturday 12th February.

It is important all those who oppose this double tax come to the protest. Contact HASC at 087 2994796.

ALL-OUT PROTEST DUBLIN, SATURDAY, 26TH FEBRUARY

THE ARGUMENT that the bin tax is some kind of environmental levy is rubbish when compared to the miserly investment in recycling.

The bin tax is an unjust double tax introduced by the government, via the councils, which has more interest in building incinerators than providing real recycling facilities.

They did nothing about the closure of Irish Glass two years ago and Smurfit Paper Mills even though these facilities re-cycle paper and glass.

A special effort to get out and protest on Saturday, 26th February at 2pm, will mean we can send a strong message of people power to the government and the councils.

This demonstration is supported by the Dublin City Campaign Against the Bin Tax; Dun Laoghaire/Rathdown Campaign Against Service Charges; The Dublin Council of Trade Unions; The Amalgamated Transport & General Workers Union, Sinn Fein TDs and councillors and Independent deputies Finian McGrath TD and Tony Gregory TD.

Contact 087 9090166 for more details or 086-3888151.

FUNDING TO THE COMMUNITY WORKERS COOPERATIVE AXED

Government censors dissent

The Community Workers Co-operative, a national anti-poverty network, which for 24 years has been an independent critical voice of government policies on anti-poverty and equality issues has had its funding withdrawn by Minister Noel Ahern, in what the CWC calls a sinister move to silence an effective critical voice.

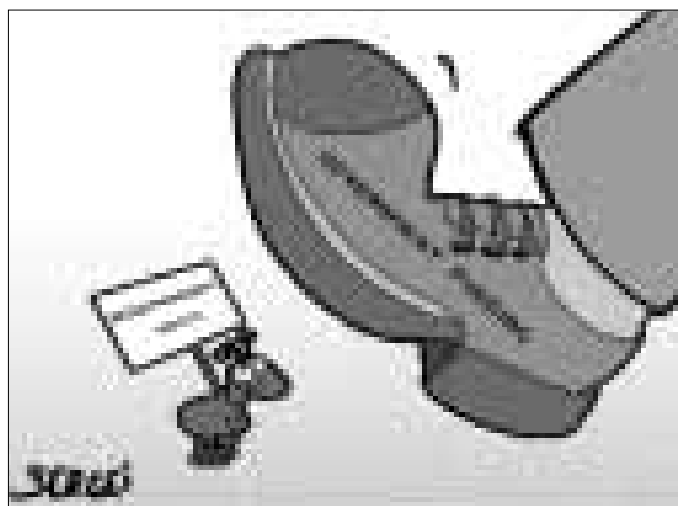
This is despite the fact that all evaluations of the funding programme have shown the CWC to be one of the most active and effective organisations in addressing poverty and exclusion.

It has earned respect locally, nationally and internationally for its anti-poverty and equality work.

The CWC coordinates the Community Platform (a network of 25 national anti-poverty and equality organisations) that refused to endorse the last 'Sustaining Progress' national agreement.

The CWC provides disadvantaged communities and those working with them an avenue to collectively analyse and express their experience of government policies.

In recent years this has been an experience of frustration and increased concern at what is perceived to be increased top-down control of community organisations by the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (DCRAGA).



When the CWC received the notification of the withdrawal of funding just before Christmas last, efforts were made to resolve this issue within Government structures, but to no avail.

Therefore a nationwide campaign was launched at the end of January to highlight the real reasons why the cut was made: dislike of any form of independent voice.

Over the past two years community organisations have been given a clear (sometimes explicit) signal that they should not be too critical

of government policies. In effect they should busy themselves dealing with the symptoms of poverty and inequality, but not to challenge the causes.

The CWC has always insisted that independent constructive criticism is necessary for a healthy democracy.

DCRAGA has so far refused requests by the media to take part in any public debate on the issue, instead churning out the same statement again and again.

According to them, the funding

was withdrawn because the CWC doesn't fulfil the criteria of a national anti-poverty network and that it has received €358,413 under the PEACE Programme, implying that the organisation has plenty of money.

But according to the Government's own 'White Paper on Voluntary Activity' the CWC does fulfil the criteria as a national anti-poverty network.

And the criteria have not been changed since 1993 when the CWC received this funding for the first time.

As to the pot of money stashed away ... that money was for the period of 2002 - June 2005. Besides, this money is specifically tied to a project and cannot be used to cover core costs.

The decision to effectively try to close down the CWC has been met with outrage throughout the country, by hundreds of both national and local organisations.

These groups recognise the value of the work of the CWC. They also recognise that the CWC is being punished for maintaining an independent, often critical voice, and have decided that now is the time to take a stand against it.

For further information contact the Community Workers Co-operative on 091 779030 / info@cwic.ie

DISABILITY RIGHTS GROUPS ORGANISE RALLY AGAINST DISABILITY BILL IT'S TIME FOR ACTION!

ON TUESDAY, February 8th people with disabilities in Ireland are planning to step up their campaign for civil rights.

A range of disability rights groups have called a rally at the RDS to protest against the Disability Bill. The expert group set up by the FF/PD government to advise them has described the Bill as 'fundamentally flawed'.

The bill gives no right to services and no ability to seek redress in court when services fail. Current miserly allocations of money from PD minister Tim O' Malley show there is no real plan to improve standards.

The organisations who have represented people with disabilities have too often focused on the charity model and simply lobbied politicians.

That would change with a full-blooded political campaign. The potential for such a campaign is really great.

When People with disabilities started to fight back in America, in the early 70's, they achieved real change very quickly.

Unlike many other oppressed groups, people with disabilities can be politically awkward for a government to attack openly.

But, like any other campaigners, public protests can be used effectively to force concessions.

An example of this is when a small group of people in wheelchairs demonstrated outside the Dail about cutbacks in their bus service.

After the demo they had their bus

service restored temporarily, in the space of 24 hours.

The threat of protesting again has kept the bus service going since.

Whilst the government will not come out, openly, and attack this section of society they will still not hesitate to cut services, play one disabili-

ty rights organisation off against another, and suggest as 'justice' minister McDowell has put it, that "inequality furthers the entrepreneurial mind".

It is high time for people with disabilities to take to the streets to assert their rights.

The many organisations representing people with disabilities have been talking to the government about this legislation for the last 10 years.

It is now safe to assume that the government is not listening. Now is the time for action!

**RIGHTS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE,
THE DISABILITY BILL & THE NATIONAL
DISABILITY STRATEGY,
TUESDAY 8th FEBRUARY - 7.30pm
RDS CONCERT HALL**

Viking site campaign win

THE NATIONAL Roads Authority has, for the first time in their history, recommended to the Minister for the Environment that a major road be moved to facilitate preservation of an archaeological site. Michael Egan of the NRA announced in Waterford that the NRA report to Environment Minister, Dick Roche, will call for the Waterford bypass to be re-routed to save the Woodstown Viking Site. The announcement comes after a concerted campaign by the Save Viking Waterford Action Group to call for the full excavation of the site.

However, although Roche has had this report for some time and it is two years since the site was discovered, he still has not made a decision on whether Woodstown will be excavated. Under the National Monuments Act 2004, the Environment Minister has sole authority to decide the fate of archaeological sites.

Despite the fact that Woodstown is widely regarded as the most important archaeological discovery in Europe in recent times, Dick Roche has not even visited the site despite being Environment Minister for over four months.

Although a victory for the campaign, the re-routing of the road may be an attempt by the NRA to divest itself of responsi-

bility for Woodstown. Legally if the road is moved, they are no longer obliged to fund any excavation of the site.

The chairperson of the SVWAG, Dr. Catherine Swift said in reaction to the announcement: "We warmly welcome the fact that the higher echelons of the NRA now appear to recognise what their own archaeologists have been telling them for some time: namely that Woodstown is a site of immense European importance."

"We believe, however, that preservation in situ is simply road-developer-speak for abandoning the site altogether and leaving it as a useless white elephant in Waterford City Council ownership. As the NRA no longer has a legal obligation to protect and excavate the site, it leaves open the question: What will happen with Woodstown? Dr Swift concluded: "If the NRA has divested themselves of all responsibility for this site, then it is morally incumbent on the government to step into the breach and fund a full excavation of Woodstown to international standards". The SVWAG plans to continue and step up its campaign to see Woodstown full excavated. To lend your support, sign the on-line petition at www.vikingwaterford.com.

Democracy Now! comes to Dublin



Amy Goodman, Vincent Browne and Ciaran O'Reilly at a packed meeting in Dublin in January

NEARLY TWO hundred people attended a packed ATGWU hall to hear American radical journalist Amy Goodman talk about Independent Media in Time of War.

Amy is the host of New York radio show Democracy Now which has gained an international reputation on the left for challenging the propaganda machine of the corporate news stations.

Amy said that the mass anti-war movement had changed the way many people see the world.

Now it was up to political activists to create the media to report on the thousands of grass roots struggles that are taking place across the globe.

She also emphasised the need to report truthfully on the motives and actions of Western governments.

20 copies of Socialist Worker were sold at the meeting, which was organised by the Pit Stop Ploughshares, some of whose activists go on trial on March 7th for non-violent anti-war activities at Shannon Airport.

You can read about their case at www.ploughsharesireland.org

See Amy Goodman's show at www.democracynow.org

Support the nurses' protests over A&E crisis

On February 22nd nurses from A&E sections across the country will protest outside all units affected by the overcrowding crisis.

Over 250 patients are on trolleys in hospital A&E units awaiting admission to acute beds.

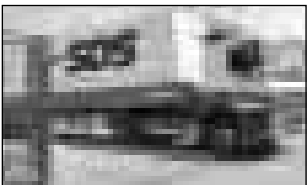
One nurse speaking to Socialist Worker said that "this protest reflects a generalised dissatisfaction with the crisis. It's a good start but we need to take the problem by the throat and deal with the real causes rather than just making gestures."

The response of managers and the government to the crisis is the privatisation of our health service. They offer massive tax incentives for the construction of private hospitals and subsidise private nursing homes.

Over two years ago similar protests took place which resulted in a plan between unions, management, consultants and the Minister for Health. It worked for a while but the underlying problems have worsened. This has given rise to the demand for action. There is a crisis in both bed and nurse numbers. The overseas recruitment is not solving the problem and this year there will be no nurses qualifying in Ireland. By the summer there will be a national crisis of nurses. Many units cannot be opened because of the lack of nurses.

Furthermore the sustaining progress agreement has been a disaster. This is all fuelling a considerable level of discontent that is reflected in the protests. They are a good start but we need to pull out of the sustaining progress agreement and begin serious action to solve this crisis."

An Post workers resist SDS closure



TWO WEEKS ago over 80 workers at the An Post parcel depot SDS were suspended by management for refusing to re-locate.

The move by the company was intended to start the process of closing down SDS. But workers resisted the move and stuck together by reporting for work each day during the suspensions.

The Communications Workers Union has a mandate for strike action across An Post and were prepared to call action. But management backed down and re-instated the workers following the intervention of the National Implementation Body (NIB).

The NIB is notorious for backing the bosses and at least the workers got back. However, they are now tied to a process of binding arbitration in the Labour Court.

Socialist Workers spoke to one of the SDS shop stewards.

"The suspensions were a very aggressive act by management. They wanted to move workers from their bases in Dublin to Sandymount and Portlaoise. We could not tolerate that action. There was no negotiation on this.

They justify the closure of SDS by cooking the books. A year ago we were told that the company was making a profit. Now out of the blue it's losing to the tune of €40 million. That is some cooking. Our union carried out a survey to prove them wrong but they won't listen. At least we got the suspensions lifted but we are not happy about being tied into the Labour court findings. They don't have a great record on defending workers.

Talks at the LRC are not going well. The company are dragging their feet and refusing any agreement. Even the LRC are getting frustrated with them. Some workers who opted for redundancy and retracted are now left in a limbo.

Their fate is in the company's hands and Human Resources told them not to hold their breath. So it's not looking good. We did a rescue deal with them in 2003, gave them flexibility, changed shifts and cut overtime. And the owner/drivers are losing a fortune since SDS cancelled over 5,000 contracts.

I believe the company are dipping their toe into the water for the privatisation of An Post but they won't get away with it. We have fought back before and will fight again. They still have not paid the 7% pay deal we are owed. I think this has to signal the end of social partnership."

Protest defers Waterford deportation

THE DEPORTATION of a South African woman has been deferred for at least four weeks following a 100 strong protest at a Michael McDowell public meeting in Waterford.

The protest, which was jointly called by the Waterford Council of Trade Unions (WCTU) and Waterford Against Racism, greeted the Minister for Justice as he arrived for an engagement at the Waterford Institute of Technology.

Trade union mem-

bers, community workers and political activists joined with friends and supporters of Weziwe Olubuunor to demand that the Minister repeal her deportation.

The large turn out forced McDowell to meet with Weziwe and accept letters from the WCTU and others calling on him to reverse his decision.

This meeting occurred despite his earlier refusal to meet with Weziwe and a small delegation from the WCTU.

The campaign to stop the deportation has now stepped up a gear with a planned protest at the clinic of Waterford minister, Martin Cullen; a protest/carnival with African culture and music in the city centre on Saturday 12th; and the executive of the Waterford Trades Council has also agreed unanimously to recommend to the full council that the WCTU nominate Weziwe for the Metro Eireann Multicultural Award due to her involvement in the No Racism

Campaign, the Waterford Healing Arts Trust, Spraoi Festival, and the African Cultural Awareness Project.

Weziwe told the Socialist Worker: "The Minister said he would review my case when I met him and repeated this on local radio the next day."

The support and solidarity of all those who came out for the protest has given us more time to organise the campaign and keep the pressure on the Minister".

-ROY HASSEY

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THE TAX MARCHES AND GENERAL STRIKE OF 1980

When class anger lit the streets of Ireland

Ireland's most important general strike took place on January 20th, twenty-five years ago. 700,000 workers came out on strike and a staggering 300,000 people marched through the streets of Dublin. Kieran Allen describes that inspiring period and draws some lessons for today.



Ireland's most important general strike took place on January 20th, twenty-five years ago. 700,000 workers came out on strike and a staggering 300,000 people marched through the streets of Dublin. They demanded that PAYE workers would no longer carry most of the burden of taxation.

All over the country, protests occurred in small towns that had barely seen union activity before. In Abbeyfeale in West Limerick, for example, 3,000 people marched to the home of the Fianna Fail Minister Gerry Collins.

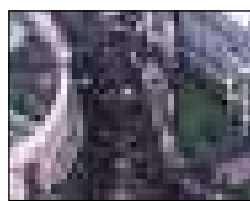
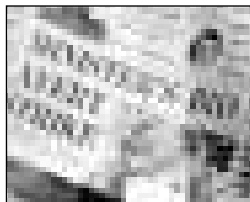
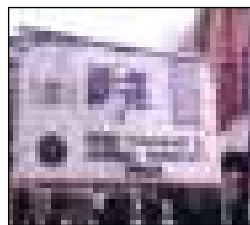
The Irish Times was deeply alarmed: 'The numbers demonstrated the strength of the trade unions and of the PAYE taxpayer – it may also have demonstrated the vulnerability of this small state'.

The protests started spontaneously over what appeared to be a small issue. In the budget of 1979, the Fianna Fail Minister for Finance George Colley imposed a 2 percent special levy on farmers. The Irish Farmers Association responded with a number of modest protests and the levy was quickly withdrawn. Workers were disgusted. The levy would have hit the bigger farmers who traditionally paid little tax. The vast majority of income tax was extracted from PAYE workers.

Disgust turns to outrage

At a relatively small factory in Howth in Dublin, disgust turned to outrage when two hundred and fifty workers at CA Parsons stopped work. The next day, representatives of 32 unions in Dublin airport came together to organise a demonstration. It was a magnificent display of working class solidarity and anger. But like all sponta-

If the union leaders were flattered by Haughey's offer of 'a say in running the economy', the rank and file were far more sceptical



Top: Dublin's O'Connell Bridge on the eve of the strike; above: Ministers panic as strike goes ahead

neous explosions there were elements of organisation and political consciousness.

Towards the end of the seventies militancy had begun to grow in Ireland – in contrast to a downturn in union activity elsewhere. Post office workers, for example, stood up to police baton charges in a battle for higher wages.

The language of class politics was best expressed by the Workers Party that had begun to expand. It combined a fanatical hatred of Sinn Fein – branding them 'fascists' – with uncritical support for the Stalinist regimes of Eastern Europe. But to the majority of workers, it was a party that spoke the language of class. Its paper, the Irish People was distributed widely in working class housing estates and in factories. Its readers played a key role in spreading the tax revolt.

The call for strikes

The growing protests soon found an echo in the Dublin Trades Council – then a much less bureaucratically controlled body. They called for a citywide strike, but this, in turn, produced panic in the headquarters of the ICTU who, unable to disown it, shunted it off onto a demonstration outside working hours.

However, this apparently clever manoeuvre backfired when a massive 50,000 people turned up to the protest on March 11th, 1979 – whetting appetites for more determined action. The call for a general strike grew even louder, provoking the ICTU general secretary Ruaidhri Roberts to declare that: 'by the constitution we are committed to support the democratic system of government... (we are opposed) to strike against the state itself or its democratic institutions'.

His rank and file did not share this veneration for state institutions. In union branches, offices and factories, union leaders were howled down when they pontificated about the 'democratic institutions of the state'. The calls for a general strike grew stronger and stronger.

Finally the Dublin Trades Council broke the logjam and called for strike action on March 20th and the largest union the ITGWU – now called SIPTU – was forced to back it. According to the Irish Times: 'The urge for action came from the rank and file and swept the leadership along with it'.

Official Ireland in turmoil

Official Ireland was horrified. Sean Moore, a veteran FF TD said: 'It is baffling why there is so much hatred

towards the state. The old order of unjust employers has almost disappeared'. Labour Minister, Gene Fitzgerald, cried in despair: 'I wish to God I had some magic formula which would once and for all remove from our country the hardship and damage caused by strikes'.

But the enormous display of workers' power provoked an intense ideological argument. Inside the unions, a battle raged between rank and file militants and union leaders who argued against 'political strikes'.

The rise of militancy also provoked a dramatic decline in FF electoral support. In Dublin, the Labour party vote grew from 18 percent in the general election to 30 percent in the Euro election. The electoral collapse intensified the factional struggles within FF. Eventually Charles J Haughey came out on top. Haughey was seen as a hard line republican who had been associated with the importation of guns into the North. He offered the party a strategy of returning to 'republican values' in the hope of warding off the new class conflicts. Sile De Valera summed it up, 'we've got what we needed, a strong man able to handle the political and economic challenges'.

At first it looked as if a 'wrap the green flag around me' style of politics might work. Haughey's inauguration as leader was carefully choreographed. He was led into a hall of screaming FF supporters by an ITGWU band playing 'A Nation Once Again'. He immediately set about pulling the union leaders into a closer embrace under the guise of a National Understanding.

But if the union leaders were flattered by Haughey's offer of 'a say in running the economy', the rank and file were far more sceptical. At union conferences in 1979, the leaders got a roasting for opposing a general strike. Eventually the pressure built up to such an extent that the ICTU was forced to call a general strike.

Anger lights the streets

On January 20th 1980, class anger lit the streets. Almost every single worker took a day off. Office workers mixed with the uniformed ranks of postal workers and firefighters. It did not matter that you hailed from Clonakilty or Tuam – the message was that the urban working class had arrived. The days of being treated like suckers while the friends of FF were let off taxes was over. The BBC described the event as 'the largest peaceful protest in post-war Europe'.

And yet all this sheer class energy

was squandered. The higher the struggle – the greater the disillusion for a generation afterwards. Even today the tax marches are still used by conservatives as an example of how 'marching does not get anywhere'.

The general strike and the lessons for today

The reality was that the general strike posed the question of power. Once it was unleashed, the only choice was further escalation – or retreat to the normal channels of politics. Escalation would pose a challenge to 'the institutions of the state' and raise huge questions about the nature of working-class politics.

The Labour Party and the union bureaucracy were at least clear – they were prepared to sacrifice workers interests to defend state institutions. They believed in capitalist democracy and so, accepted as necessary, a division between politics and economics. Politics must be conducted through the safe channels of episodic elections while economic problems had to be sorted by industrial relations machinery. Business could use money to shape political structures but workers had to forego using the strike weapon. Barry Desmond, a Labour TD, summed it up:

'I have never supported, and will never support as long as I am in public life, the idea, concept or practice of a political one day strike. I believe in the ballot box ...the power of democracy should reside in the Houses of the Oireachtas...and not the street'

For a period, the Workers Party activists resisted this excuse for passivity – but eventually they succumbed. They believed that the tax protests laid the basis for electoral advances for the party – and this, rather than mass action, held the key to gains.

They were wrong. Twenty-five years after the tax marches Ireland is far more unequal. The rich blatantly flaunt their many forms of tax subsidies in the eyes of the majority.

The real lesson of the tax marches is that the general strike needed to escalate. It should not have been called off in favour of petition gathering and elections. Either the rich should have been forced to pay up – or they should be forced aside.

(For a wider account see K Allen, Fianna Fail and Irish Labour. Order from your library).

INSIDE IRAQ:

ELECTIONS AND WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. TROOPS

By HANI LAZIM, Iraqi Democrats Against Occupation

THE US did not want this election but were forced into it. The initial US plan to rule Iraq through General Garner and Paul Bremner fell through as the prime objective, to put their hands on Iraqi resources through direct rule, is illegal.

The resentment and the hostile environment under which the occupation is continuing has corroded the morale of the Army and the US Treasury.

Bush's second term election loomed and he had to show the American electorate that something had been achieved as the lies and fabrications became too clear. Suddenly, the card of bringing freedom and democracy was pulled out of the magician's hat.

The occupiers have ignored the Iraqi people from day one and tried to divide them along ethnic and sectarian lines.

The IGC (Iraqi Governing Council) was established to enshrine this, and it continues in the present "sovereign" government of Iyad Allawi and the temporary assembly (very much the same composition of the IGC in terms percentages for each sect or ethnic group).

Aim of the elections

The aim of this election is to get an assembly, which will write a constitution and appoint a government.



One of the 150,000 US military on the streets of Iraq in front of election posters

It is known that this election was held under dubious circumstances, in a country at war with an illegal occupation, where basic amenities and safety are none existent, information about programmes and the candidates were almost secret, where there was no

impartial supervision and where numbers of eligible voters were non-existent.

Though there were many instances of fraudulent practices in the registration process and the disappearance of election boxes and papers, especially in the north of the coun-

try, the participation of the people was sufficient to make it a sort of success (57% participation) despite the boycott of many including me.

Time to withdraw the troops

The most important coming

out of it initially is that the majority of the

Iraqis who took part in the election and those who boycotted it are demanding a time table for withdrawal of foreign troops. The so-called

Ayatollah Sistani supported slate is the biggest block, if

not the clear majority (72% in favour in the southern six provinces according to the returning officer).

This slate has a clear demand for time table to withdraw all foreign troops from Iraq and no military bases.

The USA hopes to get a favourable result and withdraw its troops to the huge bases they have built in Iraq.

The Iraqi Army and police will then do the protection and suppression to get Iraqi oil in the hands of corporate America.

The collision between this interest and Iraqi people's aspirations is looming.

The US and UK have made a big fuss about the participation and success of the election but they know that elections have more authority among the international community and its own population than any declaration of intent by US government in legal terms.

The Shia are approaching election boycotters in parts of the country in order to be inclusive.

The USA will not pack its bags and go without causing further destruction and death because the new assembly asks it to do so.

It is unlikely that so called Sistani slate will accept presence of foreign troops without a time table to withdraw, and the impoverished Iraqi people would oppose any privatisation of the countries resources.

Hani Lazim is speaking at anti-war meetings throughout the Island. See page 11 for details.

Just who are the insurgency in Iraq?

By RICHARD BOYD BARRETT

TO JUSTIFY occupation, the US paints insurgents in Iraq as blood thirsty Sunni extremists who hate democracy or ex-Baathists who long for the return of Saddam.

Most Iraqis welcomed the overthrow of Saddam and had a wait and see attitude towards the US military presence.

Attacks on US forces by insurgents were negligible.

Disillusionment set in as US forces allowed the country to be looted moving only to secure control of Iraq's oil.

US troops quickly adopted a hostile stance towards the population protesting against the failure of the occupying forces to restore public services and security.

Protests

In the Sunni triangle there were no killings of US troops until 13 unarmed protesters were shot in Fallujah in April 2003.

Huge Shia protests in the same month, calling on the US to leave also led to clashes with US forces and civilian deaths. From here, the first insurgent attacks began.

An Observer interview in September 2003 with a resistance fighter revealed the mindset of many who joined the insurgents: "The only way to breathe under the old regime was to watch American films and listen to their music.

"It gave me a glimpse of a better life when I heard the Americans were coming to lib-

erate Iraq. I was very happy.

"When I saw the American soldiers watching and doing nothing as people took everything, I began to suspect the US was not here to help us but to destroy us.... We had to act."

Repression

The US responded to growing Iraqi protest with repression. Troops raided homes, smashed down doors, handled women and children roughly and made mass arrests.

By September 2003, 10,000 were detained in prisons like Abu Ghraib.

As word got out of US soldiers torturing and sexually humiliating Iraqi prisoners, it produced revulsion and further fuelled anger against occupation forces.

The attitude of Iraqis towards the occupation forces changed rapidly. By March 2004 a poll found 80% in both Shia and Sunni areas thought of coalition forces "mostly as occupiers."

Significantly many Shia changed their minds in less than a year. At the time of the invasion only 47% of Shia viewed coalition forces as occupiers.

In April US moves to ban the newspaper of Shia cleric Muqtada Al Sadr for criticising the occupation produced a major revolt against the US.

Sadr's Madhdi army, though numbering only 10,000, gained widespread Shia support. The revolt coincided with the first US assault



on Fallujah producing an unprecedented show of solidarity between Sunni and Shia against the occupation.

Demonstrations took place across Iraq, including a demonstration in Baghdad of 200,000 Sunni and Shia calling on the US to get out.

The lesson was clear – the

US lost control of Iraq when Sunni and Shia rose together.

Brutality Anger against the brutality of the US occupation fuelled a dramatic growth in the number of insurgents. In November 2003 the US military estimated there were 5,000 insurgent fighters, which had risen to 20,000 by July 2004.

By September, the British Deputy Commander in Iraq, estimated 40,000 to 50,000 active insurgents. Iraq's Intelligence director now puts the figure at 200,000. This is more than all coalition forces combined.

With such numbers, US suggestions that most insurgents are foreign fighters led by Abu Musab Al Zaqarwi are ludicrous and deliberate lies.

In reality, the Iraqi insurgency is a loose alliance of a very wide variety of groups from Islamists to ex-Baathists, de-mobbed soldiers, secular nationalist and left forces.

Few in the resistance subscribe to Al Zaqarwi's extremist views. Most are simply fighting to remove the US presence and allow Iraqis to decide their own future.

Another false impression conveyed by the US and much of the media is that insurgents are responsible for most civilian deaths.

Yet, the BBC recently revealed figures from Iraq's Ministry of Health showing 60% of civilian killings since July 2004 were carried out by occupation forces.

The figures certainly do not include all those resulting from the US assault on Fallujah. Throughout Iraq US bombings continue daily but are rarely reported in the western media.

Sympathise Most Iraqis want the US out and sympathise with the aims of insurgents. Two residents of Ramadi put it simply: "The Americans want every city in

Iraq to be like Fallujah. They want to kill us all – they are freeing us from our lives.

His friend added: "Everyone hates them because they are making mass graves faster than Saddam."

The US decision to concede elections to Shia cleric Ali Sistani and then attack Fallujah was an attempt to drive a wedge between Sunni and Shia insurgents. Certainly, it exposed the lack of a co-ordinated national leadership to the insurgency.

However, with most Iraqis determined the US must leave and the US making clear they plan to stay, the insurgency is certain to escalate.

Sir Jeremy Greenstock, former British representative to the coalition authority admitted recently, the security situation in Iraq was "irredeemable and ineradicable."

James Dobbins of the Rand Corporation, said, "the beginning of wisdom is to recognise that the ongoing war in Iraq is not one the United States can win.... Washington has lost the confidence the Iraqi people's confidence and consent, and it is unlikely to win them back."

As in Vietnam, the US is almost certain to be driven out. The question is how many more will die before this happens.

The anti-war movement around the world must support those in Iraq trying to ensure it is sooner rather than later.

European Military Project advanced in new EU constitution



Irish soldiers being trained to fight in Euro-wars?

By **ANDY STOREY**, Development Studies Dept. UCD and Action from Ireland (Afri)

THE EU Constitution extends the range of tasks the EU's military wings may engage in. Previously, these were set out as "humanitarian and rescue tasks, peacekeeping tasks, and tasks of combat forces in crisis management, including peacemaking".

This could obviously cover some genuine peacekeeping or humanitarian missions that few people would take issue with, but it could cover much else besides: for example, the 1999 NATO bombing campaign vis-a-vis Kosovo was described as a humanitarian intervention, a description which even its supporters might find somewhat inadequate.

Now that agenda of tasks is to be expanded still further.

Under the new Constitution, the EU may undertake all the abovementioned tasks and others, and "All these tasks may contribute to the fight against terrorism, including by supporting third countries in combating terrorism in their territories". What does this last sentence mean?

Could it cover the dispatch of European military advisors to dictators suppressing

rebel movements? Perhaps this is an alarmist scenario, but the 'blank cheque' nature of the mandate for EU military action (and the vague generalities of EU policy documents) means that we have little or no idea of what EU, including Irish, troops are actually likely to get up to.

UN Mandate

Two sets of questions flow from this analysis. First, do we want the EU to assume increasing military functions, and, if so, what do we want these military functions to consist of? Second, what, if any, role should Ireland play within a more militarised EU, and should there be restrictions on Irish participation?

At present, the requirement for a UN mandate constitutes one such restriction – an excessive one as far as some are concerned, though those of us mindful of how UN mandates have been abused in the past (including for the legitimisation of the murderous Iraqi sanctions regime) might prefer to see a far more meaningful restriction in place.

The upcoming debate in Ireland about the EU Constitution provides a forum – by no means an ideal one, given the multitude of

other issues the Constitution covers – for some debate along these lines. It would be helpful if participants in that debate could refrain from three misleading arguments that have plagued discussion of these matters for many years.

The first is that the EU can be automatically assumed to be a force for good in the world and that any enhancement of EU powers will therefore advance the causes of peace and development.

We might all wish this to be the case, but we are dealing with power politics – witness, for example, recent increases in European arms sales to China – so it seems unwise to simply assume it. As Andrew Cottey (Irish Times, 24th January) points out, European governments, not just that of the US, have records of supporting "unsavoury allies". It is not 'anti-European' to ask, at a minimum, that the debate be based on realism rather than naivete regarding the likely intentions of those who govern us.

Ireland's neutrality unaffected?

The second misleading argument, popular amongst successive Irish governments, is that

nothing of any substance is happening and that Ireland's traditional position (including commitment to neutrality) is unaffected. Even if this were true in some narrow, technical sense, it dangerously elides the fact that significant changes are being made to the military competences and practices of the EU and of Ireland.

(By the same token, the government insists that allowing US troops, torturers and equipment through Shannon airport en route to Iraq has no implications for Irish neutrality!)

The third argument, popular amongst some campaign groups, is that Ireland is joining up to an alliance for the territorial defence of Europe.

This is also not the case, at least not at present; rather, the point is that Ireland is joining up to an alliance for military action outside the territory of the EU.

Dr Clonan raises the possibility that "Irish men and women will serve as foot-soldiers in EU military operations [and] become involved in whatever military adventures – or misadventures – the EU sees fit to pursue". That is a prospect that should cause the utmost alarm and generate the greatest resistance.

Is the EU a force for good?

By **ANDY STOREY**

Afri has in the past questioned the claim that the European Union (EU) acts as a force for good in the world, especially in relation to the development of a European military capacity that might be deployed for far from altruistic reasons.

Scepticism about the claimed good intentions of the EU is reinforced by consideration of the EU's trade policy towards the developing world.

For example, at the World Trade Organisation (WTO) talks in Cancún, Mexico, in September 2003, the EU pursued an aggressive strategy designed to maximise market access for European companies, whilst clinging stubbornly to high levels of protection for European agribusiness.

EU and GATS

The previous year – on 4th July

2002 – the EU tabled requests under the worldwide General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to 109 countries; each such request involves asking the government of the country concerned to open certain, specified service sectors up to competition from EU firms.

The EU is targeting the poorest countries in the world in its pursuit of services market access for European companies. Mozambique, for example, has received six sector requests.

EU requests constitute attacks on the principle and practice of public service provision.

Again, the water sector is an example – the state-owned water company of Honduras has performed successfully in recent years, but would find itself exposed to potentially ruinous competition if EU requests are acceded to.

The EU 'Water Initiative' (EUWI) in general is orientated towards creating business for the European multinationals – including Suez, Vivendi, RWE-Thames and SAUR – that dominate the water sector worldwide.

EU requests for binding commitments to the liberalisation of services undermine democratic policy making (by taking aspects of economic policy making out of the realm of political debate once the binding commitment is entered into).

For example, India was able to evict the notorious US energy company Enron from its activities in the state of Maharashtra in 2001 for environmental and other reasons, but a binding commitment to liberalisation of the energy sector (which is one of the EU's requests to India) might render such actions illegal in the

future.

EU requests seek to restrict countries' abilities to regulate foreign investment. Examples include the EU request to Malaysia to drop its current cap on foreign equity participation in its insurance sector, and to Brazil to end its restrictions on profit repatriation.

Economic Partnership Agreements

The EU approach is also evident in the trade negotiations being pursued since 2002 under the Cotonou Agreement with the 78 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries with which the EU has traditionally had special trade and aid relationships (previously formulated under the framework of the Lomé Convention).

The EU now seeks to establish Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) involving the

establishment of reciprocal market access arrangements with these countries on a regional basis.

There is nothing at all surprising about any of the above, unless one starts from the position that 'Europe' is a benign, altruistic agent in world affairs. It is not.

This is not to demonise European leaders, merely to point out that they, like their counterparts in other parts of the world, follow largely selfish and corporate agendas.

Opposition to such agendas does not make one 'anti-European', anymore than distrust of European militarisation makes one an insular xenophobe. Rather, to criticise current policies, and to try and make the EU a real (not illusionary) force for development and peace is the mark of a true internationalist.

WORLD SOCIAL FORUM 2005

THE MOVEMENTS FIGHT ON

Rory Hearne who participated in this year's WSF reports from Brazil



Crowds rally at the opening of World Social Forum in Porto Alegre

THE FIFTH World Social Forum took place last week in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Five years on from the Seattle protests, the 'alter-globalisation' movement continues to grow. 120,000 registered for the forum, almost 200,000 took part in the opening march and three hundred and fifty two proposals and calls for action came out of the more than 2000 panels and workshops that took place.

The opening demonstration was a sea of colour and noise, where the diverse movement united in chanting 'um outro mundo e possivel' (another world is possible!).

There were gay and lesbian groups, trade unions and workers such as the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions and the World Trade Union Forum with its banner 'workers unite in solidarity for a fair world'.

Also there, were Christian peace groups, indigenous peoples from Latin America and Asia (most visible were the Dalits from India), NGOs like Action Aid, student groups, anti-war movements, African movements against the debt and women's organisations.

The popular support amongst Brazilians for the forum was visible from the banners they hung from their windows and bridges and, beautifully, an old couple who leaned out of their apartment window banging pots and pans in solidarity with the marchers below.

The spirit of resistance to war and neo-liberalism that is central to this new movement was visible throughout the forum in the 20,000 who filled the youth camp and the ubiquitous flags and t-shirts emblazoned with images of Che Guevara, 'another world is possible' and against Bush.

It was visible in the spontaneous demonstrations against the war and the occupation of Palestine; in the meetings where thousands, young and old, sat and stood in 40 degree heat to debate and discuss poverty, power and revolution and, in the tens of thousands who queued for hours to hear Brazilian President Lula, and Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez speak.

Lula and Chavez – two separate worlds?

Thousands of Lula's Workers' Party (PT) faithful were bussed in to the Gigantinho Stadium before he spoke.

The gates were closed when the stadium was

only three-quarters full but thousands more still queued outside.

Chants of 'ole, ole, ole, Lula, Lula' rang around the stadium but were not unanimously supported and 200 or so activists booed

Lula's entire speech. Lula was defensive and he condescendingly turned to those booing and said 'you are immature, and will grow up and then we will be waiting for you to come back to us'.

There is growing disillusionment with Lula's PT government. It has broken promises made before its election just over two years ago, signing an agreement with the IMF, attacking pension rights and backing the employers in a bitter strike of bank workers.

A number of deputies expelled from the PT have formed a new party: P-SOL, that was very visible throughout the WSF.

Despite all this it was obvious that Lula still commands huge respect and support from the workers and poor of Brazil.

Chavez – hero of the movement

The meeting of Hugo Chavez was a different world. 20,000 people packed the stadium. They were predominantly young, radical and anti-imperialist.

Their chants rang around the stadium before he arrived; 'ole, ole, ole, ole, Chavez, Chavez'; and in reference to Lula's reforms: "1,2,3,4,5...1000. Stop the reforms or we will shut down Brazil".

Socialism is clearly on the agenda of this movement as 20,000 voices joined in unison singing the Internationale followed by "down with imperialism, long live socialism". A large section of the audience chanted, "Lula nao, Chavez si" (Lula no, Chavez yes), to booing from some other sections.

His speech was much more left-wing than Lula's, even though he said that each country in Latin America had to proceed according to its own conditions.

However he showed a worrying tendency towards appeasing regimes, saying: 'there is a

good president in Russia, Mr. Putin', and when he uncritically praised China's fast economic growth.

Despite these flaws, Chavez is clearly the leader most in touch with the new anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal resistance in Latin America. His aim is to use a block of poorer governments as a lever against US power. He wants to build up unions and civil society to support his reforms in Venezuela. These reforms have, however, been too 'top-down' in their approach.

While Chavez' anti-imperialist stance and social reforms should be supported, the growth of independent movements of the poor and workers is necessary so that when Chavez or other leaders bow to neo-liberal pressure or when US imperialism intervenes, there is an organised force of workers to resist and build a new world from the bottom up.

Debate at the forum

Venues were far apart and each one discussed only one individual theme over the entire week.

The only large events where unity could be forged were the two very tightly organised and controlled rallies of the political leaders Lula and Chavez (WSF principles state that political parties and representatives are not supposed to be represented at the forum).

The forum appeared to have been set up to avoid a deepening radicalisation of the movement including criticism of Lula's government and to avoid the war on Iraq becoming the central feature.

The organisers wanted the 'Global Call against Poverty' (aimed at lobbying Bush and other world leaders to make a declaration on tackling world poverty) to be the main focus. Indeed some of the leading intellectuals and organisers of the WSF broke the consensus, horizontal, open space model of the WSF and issued a statement on democracy, debt and the Tobin tax that appeared to be on behalf of the forum.

However this attempt to channel the movement towards simply pressurising heads of government did not dampen the increasing radicalisation at the base.

The main call from the assembly of the social movements was to protest on March 19th against the US occupation and for people to mobilise against Bush wherever he goes (particularly in Argentina in November).

Voices of resistance

Hugo Chavez: "We must reclaim socialism as a thesis, a project and a path, but a new type of socialism, a humanist one which puts humans, and not machines or the state ahead of everything. That's the debate we must promote around the world."

Korean Confederation of Trade Unions:

"Globalising struggles, globalising solidarity, globalising hope. No to WTO, No to FTA, No to War".

Walden Bello (Focus on Global South):

"The WSF is a very important institution. It should not ossify and just be a liberal kind of marketplace of progressive ideas but should also be an instigator of those ideas. It should take a stand on neo-liberalism, the WTO and the war on Iraq and Palestine. It should move into action as, after all, the WSF was born out of the inspiration of Seattle and Seattle was an attempt to bring down and destroy the WTO."

Medea Benjamin (Global Exchange & United for Peace and Justice) USA

"A country like the US that sends its young people particularly the poor and immigrants to fight a war based on lies is decaying from within. A country spending €270 million a day on a war in Iraq when we are closing our schools and hospitals at home is decaying from within. We are working together to have the empire decay from within and from resistance outside. On March 19th the organisation I represent United for Peace and Justice with over 1000 organisations as part of it – will get 1 million people on the streets in over 500 US cities to protest against the occupation of Iraq, Palestine and empire."

MST Representative:

"We are in opposition to the current government of president Lula because they are implementing anti-worker policies, they have not met their promises from before the elections. Our struggle by workers and peasants is a fight not just against the Brazilian economic system but against capitalism which is the source of our problems."

(200,000 landless members of the MST are camping out on highways to demand action by the PT government on their right to land).

SUICIDE AND DEPRESSION IN IRELAND

Between 1994 and 2004 more than 4,000 people killed themselves. Over 300,000 suffer from depression. Dave Lordan examines the reasons that underlie the rise in suicide and depression, and looks at how movements of solidarity can bring hope into people's lives.



WHY DO people kill themselves? Because they have lost hope. What is hope? It appears to be the ability to visualise and feel the moments, hours, days or years ahead in a positive way.

So says a recent report into suicide by depression support group AWARE which draws attention to the shocking number of people who find themselves hopeless in today's Ireland.

Since the mid 1990's more than one person a day has committed suicide. Suicide is now the leading cause of death among young men.

The latest figures show that 444 people died by suicide in 2003, compared to 336 in road accidents. Between 1994 and 2004 more than 4,000 people killed themselves.

Ten times this number attempted suicide. 300,000 people suffer depression.

The increase in the suicide rate since 1990 is 8% but young male suicide increased by a much higher 70%.

'Spiritual Vacuum'

One common explanation for these figures is the 'spiritual vacuum' left behind by the collapse of religious faith and authority in the 1990's.

But the real explanation has to do with this world, not the next. The rates of suicide, attempted suicide and depression have increased as the standard and extent of public health provision has declined under the neo-liberal policies of Fianna Fail/PD's.

The public housing shortage, together with chronic underfunding for vulnerable groups like the mentally ill and the long term unemployed, have also contributed to making living extremely difficult for many.

As in most areas of public health, services for patients with depressive illnesses are totally inadequate. Patients wait up to a year for a psychiatric assessment.

Services are particularly poor in rural Ireland where suicide rates are up to 25% higher than in Dublin.

In many towns there are no public counselors. One of the highest rates of suicide occurs among psychiatric patients who have been released from hospitals and left with little support.



A romantic image of suicide far from reality while GPs compensate for the lack of services by over-prescribing anti-depressants

Over-Prescription

GPs compensate for this lack of services by over-prescribing anti-depressants. These controversial drugs work by stimulating the brain to produce a mood enhancing chemical called serotonin.

They can have severe side effects and in a significant minority of cases have been shown to contribute to worsening depression, particularly during withdrawal.

In 2003 205,764 medical card holders were prescribed anti-depressants at a cost of €34,404,555.

Another €16m euro was reimbursed by the state under the drugs payment scheme.

This compares with an average of €3 million a year spent by the government on suicide prevention and awareness.

Studies show that the poor and oppressed are at a greater risk of suicide than the upper levels of society.

This is most obvious in extreme cases like Hitler's Germany where suicide rates among persecuted groups like Jews and homosexuals increased dramatically.

But poverty and oppression affect suicide risk in Ireland too. One in three suicides is unemployed, 75% of these for over one year.

Other high risk groups are prisoners, drug addicts, homeless people and elderly people living alone.

Obviously these are also the sections of society that are worst affected by the overall lack of social services.

High Risk

Young gays are also at a high risk of suicide. An American study found they were 3 times more likely to kill themselves than other young people.

A study by the Combat Poverty Agency found that over 40% of Irish gays had experienced violence because of their sexuality. Some are bound to turn that violence in upon themselves.

Alcohol abuse is a factor in 1/3 of suicides and alcoholics have a far greater likelihood of killing themselves than the general population.

Alcohol and drug consumption levels have soared in the Celtic Tiger though there has been no matching increase in public treatment for addiction. Many media commentators glibly put the rise in self-intoxication down to

primitive hedonistic urges unleashed by the boom.

However a more likely explanation lies in an increase in material and psychological pressures brought about by the expansion of capitalism in Ireland.

Changes in management practices and the high cost of living force people to work harder and longer than they did a decade ago.

We try to balance our high stress levels during the week with high levels of self-intoxication at the weekends, putting ourselves at risk of addiction and mental illness.

Image

Alongside this, the advertising industry exerts an enormous pressure on people to 'keep up with the Jones', using the mass media as well as every available public space to try and convince us that we need to buy the latest products.

The fantasies of the market can have a hugely negative impact on the self esteem of those who don't look or behave like advertising models.

I once taught a very intelligent nine year old girl who told me that when she grew up she wanted to be stupid and work as a 'dancer' in a club.

No wonder she thought like that as whenever she watched TV she was presented with a blaring stream of similar one dimensional images of adult womanhood.

One way to keep feelings of inadequacy at bay is through self-intoxication.

Some therapists refer to addiction as 'slow suicide' and it is obvious that the two phenomenon are linked; a drug erases pain for a short period- death gets rid of it forever.

Aside from poverty, the most marked common feature of the groups with the highest risk of killing themselves is isolation.

Out on the hard shoulders of society interaction with others is loose and irregular and loneliness can be acute.

Often those in the worst throes of despair simply have no-one to talk to, no network of friends they can trust.

Professionals emphasise group therapy and other kinds of peer interaction

treatment for addicts and the mentally ill in recovery precisely because the less alone people feel, the more valuable their life becomes to them.

Alienation

Suicide rates are high in societies where many people feel powerless to change desperate situations. The feeling of having no way of influencing the institutions that run our lives and so of having little control over our destinies is what Marx describes as alienation.

Alienation is particularly acute where there is a low level of social solidarity and individuals are left to fend for themselves in what can seem a hostile world not worth living in. During the mid 90's in Russia, as society began to breakdown due to mass unemployment and immiseration, the suicide rate leapt to 42 per 100,000- compared with 13 per 100,000 in Ireland.

Conversely, studies have shown a significant decrease in suicide rates among societies that have been shaken out of long-term stasis by a mass movement for radical change.

In mainland Britain the years between 1963 and 1974 saw a huge increase in the involvement of people in active politics, culminating in the overthrow of a right-wing government by a miners' strike, which was supported by a majority of the population.

These years also saw the suicide rate decrease by 34%.

This is because mass movements like today's anti-war movement raise the general level of hope in society.

They provide a positive focus around which many can break out of their isolation and despair.

When they win they can provide an incontrovertible example to millions of how by working together we can alter both our individual circumstances and change the overall direction of society.

As solidarity increases so does hope for a better future for everybody.

Today we must show solidarity for those at risk of suicide by campaigning for better health services.

But we must also work together to overthrow capitalism, since it is the placing of profit before people which is the root cause of the wars, poverty, and environmental catastrophes that provide such good grounds for hopelessness.

Socialist Worker

Why a big turnout on March 19th is crucial - Bush's next target: Iran

THE SECOND global superpower must re-emerge on March 19th because Iran is the next target

George Bush's State of the Union address was a bold speech of defiance that clearly indicated that the neo-conservatives do not intend to reverse their permanent "war on terror." His speech gave no hint of the crisis that faces the United States government over the Iraq war. In his view, now that democracy is installed in Iraq, it's time for Iran.

However, the elections in Iraq were far from free, fair or democratic.

If Bush's mission was really about democracy then he would immediately withdraw the troops, since it is clearly the expressed will of over 80 percent of the people of Iraq for the occupation to end.

The elections were not about democracy, or ending the occupation. They were an attempt to stabilise the occupation and leave a veil of democracy so that the neo-conservatives can move on to the next target: Iran.

Bush referred to this in his speech when he said, "We will not set an artificial timetable for leaving Iraq, because that would embolden the terrorists and make them believe they can wait us out. We are in Iraq to achieve a result."

In words similar to those used in the build up to the Iraq war, Bush went on to say that "...today, Iran remains the world's primary state sponsor of terror ... pursuing nuclear weapons while depriving its people of the freedom they seek and deserve."

"We are working with European allies to make clear to the Iranian regime that it must give up its uranium enrichment program and any plutonium reprocessing, and end its support for terror."

Ever-widening cracks in the US Empire

As a result of the growing resistance movement, the US is unable to gain full military control of Iraq. This failure in Iraq combined with mounting economic deficits at home and growing international competition, all point to an empire in decline. Facing this defeat, the US perceives an escalation of their offensive as the only way to retain their hegemonic empire.

Bush's defiant plans, however, cannot conceal the cracks that grow ever wider in the armour of the empire. In the US, opinion polls show a majority believe it was wrong to go to invade Iraq and there are even open calls within the Republican Party for the withdrawal of the troops.

As the casualties continue to mount, increasing numbers of US and British soldiers are failing to turn up for duty. Several are beginning to come forward to urge mass refusal among the soldiers called to serve in Iraq.

Lance Corporal George Solomou, from the London regiment of the Territorial Army, said: "I am not going to Iraq, point-blank. I am a conscientious objector to this war and I am going to see how the army plays it from there. I would rather spend a year in prison than a minute in Iraq as part of an illegal war."

Furthermore, Spain, Poland, the Philippines and other coalition partners have withdrawn their troops from Iraq due to domestic anti-war pressure. In the same way, we must ensure that the use of Shannon airport by the US military follows suit.

It is the historic global anti-war movement, manifest on February 15th 2003 — when over 40 million demonstrated across the world — and the defiant resistance in Iraq which have created the crisis for Bush and Blair.

It is only through the continued growth and resistance of these movements that we can end the bloody occupation of Iraq and ensure there are no more wars against Bush's "axis of evil": Iran, North Korea, Venezuela, etc.

Everyone must make it their task, wherever they are, to ensure that on March 19th 2005 the second global superpower — the global anti-war movement — re-emerges in our millions throughout the world.

LETTERS

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

Western Writers' Centre and refusal of Arts Council grants

I WAS intrigued by your article, 'Artists Take on the World' (January 25th). Unfortunately, some are not being permitted to take on anything at all!

I am founder/Manager of Galway-based Western Writers' Centre - Ionad Scr bhneoir Chaitl n Maude - the only centre of its kind West of the Shannon, up and running for nearly three years now. I have been involved in trades' unionism in my time, as was my father and uncles, and the Centre is named for a woman who was a poet and activist in hers.

I am writing in a private capacity to inform readers that in the last round of Arts Council grants, the Centre was refused grant-aid for the sixth time in succession since it opened.

To paraphrase Wilde: two rejections may be caution - six is looking like policy. We are appealing the decision.

The Writers' Centre, since it opened, has established the first-ever writers' residency in a Galway hospital, organised, with Bus Eireann, a Poetry-on-The-Buses project, held course, organised two winter festivals and a Publishing Weekend and has other projects in the pipeline, including a Diverse Cultures writers' group for immigrants. We are supported by FAS and groups such as the Ireland Funds, Poetry Ireland and Udaras na Gaeltachta on an events basis.

On the face of it, there would seem to be no reason why the Arts Council would not fund us to some degree. Yet a grant-request for the purchase of a computer last

Autumn was also turned down. Intriguingly, at one meeting with Arts Council representatives, we were told that it was perceived that we were doing 'too much.'

Too much for whom? Why? My own view is that the Council are merely in line with a long-established policy to combine as many arts disciplines into the one - controllable? - area as possible, and that there is no room in their philosophy for independent operations.

There is an Orwellian feel to this sort of thing; controlling the Arts by herding them into centres where their development can be monitored, as it were, and funding regulated in terms of the kinds of art featured there.

I have written very often in book reviews as well as letters about the need for writers to

become political, of the falseness of the argument that Art and Literature are divorced from Politics. Perhaps this is not the sort of thing one should say, if one is looking for funding?

Or is such a thought far-fetched? On the other hand, I am a demonstrator, a marcher, a letter-writer - as opposed to those who write poems about political involvement as a sort of fashion.

It would be interesting to hear from any other Arts groups around the country, who, for one reason or other, are persistently refused funding from the Arts Council.

Recently we held a petition-signing in Galway's Shop Street and proved quickly that we had the support of ordinary Galwegians - the majority of whom, thankfully, had read of

our plight.

Twenty writers signed a letter in our support which was published in The Irish Times.

FRED JOHNSTON,
Galway,
sylfredcar@iolfree.ie



Health Service emergency motion

The following motion below should be forwarded as an Emergency motion for Union AGMs (Annual General Meetings) and ADCs (Annual Delegate Conferences), most of which are happening around this time.

This is so that we, the workers, who do have the clout, can really up the ante on this government to properly fund our health service, instead of wasting money on such things as exclusive golf courses, and increased military spending! Where are our priorities?

"Given the worsening crisis in our health service this ADC (Annual Delegate Conference) in union with other unions and concerned groups such as patient's groups actively campaigns for:

- Free primary Health Care for all. The GP service is the cornerstone of every effective health care system. GP visits, along with basic dental and eye-care visits, must be free to all citizens.

- An end to Hospital Charges. Hospital charges

are a tax on illness. Hospital charges mean that poorer families postpone essential GP and hospital visits until an emergency.

This has a massively detrimental effect on the health of those families and in the long run is actually more costly on the health system.

- No more private consultant beds in Public Hospitals. Private consultant beds in public hospitals are a subsidy from the taxpayer to the private patient.

They also totally distort hospital admissions and impinge on the availability of beds for emergency public patients, as well as effectively allowing lucrative double-jobbing by some consultants."

"And that we campaign by whatever means necessary (i.e. strikes, marches, lobbying TDs/Ministers, letter writing etc.) to ensure equal access for everyone to the health service.

PAUL KINSELLA,
Santry, Dublin 9,
paulkinsella53@yahoo.com

COMMENT

Why the offensive on Sinn Fein now?

By KIERAN ALLEN, Lecturer in Sociology, UCD

THE ATTACK on Sinn Fein has little to do with 'criminality' — it is rather part of a strategy to shore up the political establishment in Ireland.

The backdrop is the growth in repressive tactics since Bush declared his 'War on Terror'. Instead of cajoling guerrilla movements like the IRA, the Basque ETA or the Colombian FARC, into peace processes — the emphasis has shifted to full crackdown if they do not quickly adhere to the rule of the establishment game.

For all sorts of reasons — not least the big business Irish American connection and the extraordinary fact that companies like Coca Cola were financing Sinn Fein - Irish republicans were given a little more leeway. But not any more.

Second, the establishment is worried that Sinn Fein may completely annihilate the SDLP in May's British general election. On current voting trends there is a real prospect that that no SDLP MP will be returned.

The party has declined dramatically and its only strategy for the future appears to be some amalgamation with Fianna Fail.

However, the more serious concern is the rise in Sinn Fein's vote in the South. The establishment were alarmed that in the first few weeks after the Belfast bank robbery, Sinn Fein's vote stayed up at 11 percent. Many people did not appear too worried that a bank was robbed!

Up to now Bertie Ahern has pursued a strategy of coaxing Sinn Fein into con-



Gerry Adams and Alex Maskey

ventional politics.

The Sinn Fein leadership, in turn, is more than willing to make the same passage that Fianna Fail made in the late 1920s.

They want to be in government North and South — and see this as an important part of their strategy for the unification of the island. And if the price is implementing a neo-liberal agenda, that is what they will do. On a smaller scale, this is precisely what happened in Sligo when Sinn Fein backed bin charges.

However, despite the leadership's intentions, the entry of Sinn Fein carries certain dangers for the establishment.

Sinn Fein received votes in the South because they appeared to be more left wing than Labour — so naturally their supporters expect some real changes.

They do not display enough respect for the institutions of the state — in particular the Gardaí and PSNI who continue to harass them.

And, of course, you cannot have supporters who stash away their guns — just in case things go wrong.

So the ferocious campaign against Sinn Fein is all about increasing the entry ticket into the establishment club. Sinn Fein are going to have to get down lower — and grovel more before sections of Irish capitalism will accept any future political alliances with them.

If this campaign creates new difficulties for the Adams-McGuinness leadership within the republican movement, this is seen as an extra bonus point.

This explains why there is both a propaganda war against Sinn Fein 'criminality' — and continuing invitations to come back inside.

A week ago Ahern, was denouncing Adams and McGuinness for knowing about the bank robbery beforehand — but then the following week he asked for the 'volume' of the attacks on Sinn Fein to be toned down.

A 'back door' channel between Sinn Fein and the government is still in constant use. Despite the clamour, both the British and Irish governments want Sinn Fein to go to Bush's St Patrick's celebrations.

And even McDowell has argued that sanctions should not be put on Sinn Fein after the Independent Monitoring Commission report.

REVIEWS

BRIGHT EYES: A creative force against war

Album: I'm Wide Awake, It's Morning / Digital Ash in a Digital Urn reviewed by **Karen McCormack**

IN RECENT years Conor Oberst and his ever changing line-up of musicians has taken many unexpected twists and turns. They have appeared on The Late Show with David Letterman. They were nominated for the 2003 Shortlist Awards and performed with a full band including trumpets and strings, where they were beaten by none other than our own Damien Rice.

Oberst, a staunch Anti War Activist who backed Ralph Nader in the presidential elections was invited in October of 2004 to join Bruce Springsteen and REM on an arena tour of swing states calling for a vote for change.

He succeeded in sealing his reputation as a creative force, able to command the attention of thousands with just his voice and an acoustic guitar.

Oberst has just released two new albums simultaneously, which could not be more different in style.

I'm Wide Awake, its Morning is a red blooded folk record of Oberst finest acoustic songs, featuring guest vocal appearances from Emmylou Harris and Jim James (My Morning Jacket). Digital Ash in a Digital Urn is a more electronic and experimental pop record.

The two albums work in tandem and show both sides of Conor's current creativity.

The upbeat electronica flavoured-pop of "Digital Ash in a Digital Urn", which is dedicated to Stella Marie Mogis and RoseMarie Gentile sees Oberst projecting his voice more concisely where he tries something



Oberst's new material is very political

totally different to anything he has done before.

It has a kind of Nightmarish, Claustrophobic feel to it, dealing with the complexities of love, life and death in an abstract way with exciting beats.

"I'm Wide Awake, Its Morning" opens with what seems like a stream of consciousness that draws you into the record.

The opening song is so upbeat but the lyrics are very contrasting "While my mother waters plants, My father loads his guns, He says death will bring us back to god just like this setting sun is returned to the lonely ocean"

Themes of Life, Death, God and religion are constant on this record.

His new material is very political but this is also a very personal album, which documents a certain time in Oberst's life while also capturing as a backdrop the illegal war in Iraq.

In Landlocked Blues he sings: "We made love on the living room floor. With the noise in the background of a televised war. And in the deafening pleasure.

I thought I heard someone say, if we walk away, they'll walk away. But greed is a bottomless pit. And our freedom's a joke we're just taking a piss."

In the grand finale "Road to joy"

he talks about reading the body count in the papers and what history gave modern man "a telephone to talk to strangers, machine guns and a camera lens"

With its fantastic horns and searing guitars he ends a bit more positive. "So when you're asked to fight a war that's over nothing. It's best to join the side that's going to win. And no one's sure how all of this got started."

This record is one to be loved and played over and over again because once you let him into your life, his music will become a permanent fixture.

A plea for rationalism in a sea of moral panics, catastrophists and post-modernist 'mumbo jumbo'

Francis When: How Mumbo Jumbo Conquered the World reviewed by **Owen McCormack**

WHEN IS a well-known journalist with the Guardian and author of an excellent biography of Karl Marx.

His latest book, How Mumbo Jumbo Conquered the World, is a wonderful read which should be on every socialist and trade unionists reading list.

When takes an axe to the distortion of language and the psychobabble that surrounds much of our government's, bosses' and media talk.

It is an impassioned plea for rationalism and reason in a time of new age quackery and mystic mumbo jumbo. It is also frequently hilarious.

When's starting point is the rise of two different fundamentalists in 1979; the Ayatollah in Iran and Thatcher in Britain.

He charts the rise of Thatcher's voodoo economics, (today know as neo-liberalism) and the attempts to justify its

attacks on the welfare state by dressing it up in the language of a moral crusade.

He points out that it was around these early years of Thatcher/Regan that a glut of management guidebooks and self-help manuals appeared.

Books with titles like the "Seven habits of highly effective people" or "The one minute manager" sought to eulogise management and bosses and claimed that everyone could get rich with the same "attitude" It didn't matter how you got rich, it was your right to be rich.

It soon crossed over in to claiming a spiritual dimension to justify the rampant "greed is good" culture of the ruling classes.

Soon you could buy guides that told you "God wants you to be rich" or bizarrely "Ghandi; the Heart of a CEO!"

Inspirational speakers were soon in great demand to motivate not just CEOs and middle management but whole workforces.

Last year for example, Dublin Bus spent

over 5 million euros sending its workers through a course to motivate them into accepting change. Any worker who has been on these courses will recognise the bland platitudes offered as profound wisdom.

Supposedly, they can help you lead a more fulfilling life. The bottom line however is; accept change, change is good; it's an opportunity to prove your worth, even if it means the privatisation of your job!

When's book is at its best in dealing with the new age mysticism that spiritual guidebooks offered to vulnerable readers.

"Chicken soup for the Soul"...."Seven laws of spiritual success" followed on from the get rich quick manuals of the 80s by offering easy solutions to people who found it increasingly difficult to survive under capitalism.

The strength of the book is not that it takes on what are easy targets, but that it places these in a political context. They all have one thing in common, acceptance of the status quo in society. If there is a

problem, it is with the individual. Just change your attitude and all will be well.

Amidst all the platitudes, these gurus where selling free market ideas as well. Terms like "downsizing", "benchmarking", "demassing" and "proactive out placing" can be dated to this time as a attempt to gloss over what many employers where actually doing; screwing their workforce.

When demolishes all sorts of moral panics, catastrophists and post-modernist 'mumbo jumbo'. He correctly points out that the impenetrable gobble gook of much of post modernism comes from ex or current leftist who have given up all attempts at challenging capitalism but prefer to write about how nothing much matters any way!

However, I found the latter sections of the book disappointing. In it When attacks well know figures on the left for their attitude to 9/11 and Islamic fundamentalists.

Much of this I found strange and slightly dishonest.

I got the impression that he had taken a scattergun to the left in order to balance up the earlier attack on free market gurus of the right.

He attacks Chomsky and Michael Moore in quiet vitriolic tones. For a book that is a plea for rationalism it is strange that he attacks any one who seeks to explain the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in a rational way; i.e. as a response to western imperialism.

He quotes Michael Moore as almost justifying the 9/11 attacks. But the quote is taken out of context and its use is extremely disingenuous.

Moore was making the point that the people who died in those attacks where not responsible for US imperialism and had most likely voted against Bush and Co. Despite these misgivings, it remains a marvelous book.

EXHIBITION: What is to be done?

Reviewed by **Sinead Kennedy**
In 1902 Lenin published his famous pamphlet and handbook for activists, What is to be done?

The pamphlet's title was inspired by the Russian radical journalist and writer Nikolai Chernyshevsky's novel of 1863 in which among other things a group of textile workers organized themselves into a union to respond to their exploitation.

Lenin's pamphlet represented the important moment of evolution in his thought that saw him orientate his revolutionary thinking towards the idea of a vanguard party.

As part of the Communism exhibition running in Dublin, artist Susan Kelly poses the same question for today. 'What is to be done?'

It is a collaborative project and traveling archive that began at the Lenin Museum in Finland in 2002. Participations are asked to respond to Lenin's question.

Your contribution along with others will be documented and displayed in the exhibition and included in future exhibitions.

In the three years that the project has been running Kelly has documented more than 300 responses in 10 languages.

These include short texts from Michael Hardt, Alain Badiou, Jeremy Gilbert and Nell McCafferty.

'What is to be done?' functions as both a question and a vector. It indicates a movement from theory to practice and invites a conjunction of the two.

It is a perennial question that has haunted human beings especially at moments that demand imaginative and collective action to transform a given impasse.

The recent responses from Dublin reveal how many activists we are living at such an impasse. Many of the Irish contributors see tackling the question of war and imperialism to be at the heart of what needs to be done for the new millennium.

The one common feature among all participants in the exhibition is that a belief that a better world is possible.

In our world of cynicism and the constant barrage from media reminding us there is no alternative to capitalism and its imperial neo-liberal agenda, this is where the exhibition is at it most revealing.

You can add your response to the question by visiting the exhibition at the Project Gallery, East Essex St. Temple Bar. The exhibition runs until February 27, alternatively you can e-mail whatistobedone@excite.com.

International Socialism

Media coverage of the Iraqi election has

thickened the fog of lies and misinformation about the Iraqi resistance.

In the new International Socialism, Anne

Alexander and Simon Assaf counter the myths and provide the fullest

account of the resistance yet to appear.

They argue that it is a movement for national liberation that deserves the support of anti-imperialists everywhere.

The journal also interviews Iranian activist Elaheh Rostami Povey about workers and women in Iran. It also looks at how the 1905 Russian Revolution affected Marxist theory, and talks to the people behind the Marxists Internet Archive.

Available for 8 euro / £5 stg
To order write to SW Books PO Box 1684
Dublin 8, e-mail info@swp.ie or phone (01) 872-2682



FIRST PERSON

By Paddy Haughey, Plough Youth Club, Ballymun

The Ballymun Rip-Off

DUBLIN CITY Council formerly known as Dublin Corporation neglected Ballymun from the day the Builders Cubit Hayden and Sisk left. In 1997 they handed over the "Regeneration" of Ballymun to a limited company (Ballymun Regeneration Ltd, BRL) with Dublin Corporation staff as its Directors.

Some people are of the opinion that Dr. Anne Power who has featured widely in the media in recent days was retained by them from the start.

Will Hutton in the forward to the book "Cities for a small Country" by Dr. Power and Richard Rogers says that neighbourhoods have to be constituted and designed so that the range of income groups is necessarily living more on top of one another and that the physical environment doesn't matter one jot.

By the way he also mentions that the London City Council which is doing a Regeneration three times the size of Ballymun rejected these suspect ideas.

The Master Plan shown to the people of Ballymun at the beginning, was seen to be proposing building city type houses to replace the flats.

The drawbacks of this type of housing in a suburban area was not immediately obvious to people living in run down flats, in which drug users were allowed to operate in the public lifts and stair wells with impunity.

But BRL proceeded to make a bad situation worse by increasing the density by over 50%. People now living in new houses are suffering high density traffic on a street only 6 metres wide and along the side of which they have to park their cars.

They live in fear for the lives of their children. A large number claim to have applied to DCC for a transfer.

BRL were given the lands of Ballymun by DCC to use as they wish, so the Local Authority houses are squeezed into as small a space as possible and the private and co-operative houses and flats are given ample space in comparison. Are there not grounds for thinking that need was displaced by greed?

This suspicion is reinforced by BRL's Progress Report 2002-2003 which states that "the population of Ballymun results in skewed child to adult ratios, and thus not enough adult role models and supervisors for the large population of children. These findings statistically reinforce the objective to introduce tenure diversity, and a new population into Ballymun. Tenure diversity is one of the central objectives of the Ballymun Master plan."

Then BRL goes and gets an exemption from the National Rent Support Scheme, resulting in anyone who grew up in Ballymun - who is unable to pay the full rental - not being given a lease on one of the New Town flats, from which all the new Local Authority houses in Ballymun are carefully segregated.

They want to demolish our swimming pool and prevent community volunteers and experienced swimming teachers from working with the young people through swimming clubs.

BRL stated in the Master Plan that all existing groups in Ballymun would be accommodated and encouraged.

On the contrary there appears to be an attempt to centralise all youth work under the control of DCC and thereby discouraging all voluntary involvement in youth work.

Their stated concern for role models and supervisors now sounds very hollow but not surprising when a member of BRL staff at a meeting of community

leaders and artists, claimed that the more experienced community activists don't appear to be welcoming the BRL's plans for Ballymun and they expect that they will have to push these people aside and foster the support of the younger, less experienced people.

In ten years time BRL will walk away from Ballymun counting its gains and the people in the Local Authority houses, bought or rented, will be trying to walk away counting their losses.

Protest to Save Our Swimming Pool Tuesday Feb 15, 12.30pm Old Swimming Pool, Ballymun
Contact PloughYouthClub@eircom.net

EVENTS

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

Free Market Capitalism isn't working, Michael!
We don't need competition!
We need to try socialism!

Speech bubbles include:
 - "Capitalism is the only system that works!"
 - "Socialism is just a fancy word for socialism!"
 - "We need to try socialism!"
 - "Socialism is just a fancy word for socialism!"
 - "Capitalism is the only system that works!"
 - "Socialism is just a fancy word for socialism!"

Below the cartoon:
 "While Private Lives is running around making millions, how does he know if he's a socialist?"
 "Who needs a fancy word for socialism?"

IRAQ: After the elections

WHY US/UK TROOPS MUST GET OUT

HANI LAZIM
Iraqi Scholar, Activist & Journalist

Hani Lazim came to Britain in the '60s, having won a scholarship to study overseas from Iraq's oil ministry. His family were poor and had a background of involvement in radical politics. He returned to Iraq to visit them in 1968 and found himself in the middle of the Baathist coup.

Several members of his family were arrested but he eventually managed to get out and return to Britain. Since then he has been politically active with other exiles that organised against Saddam. They organised against the first Gulf war led by Bush's father. They also organised against sanctions, the recent war and now against the occupation.

- UCC (Cork)** - Wednesday February 9th at 1pm, Room S3, Connolly Building.
- Tralee** - Wednesday February 9th at 8pm, Abbey Gate Hotel.
- Galway** - Thursday February 10th at 8pm, Town Hall Theatre.
- Dublin** - Friday February 11th at 8pm, ATGWU Hall, Middle Abbey St.
- Derry** - Saturday February 12th at 4pm, Sandinos.

Organised by the Irish Anti War Movement
www.irishantiwar.org; info@irishantiwar.org; 01 8727912

★WALDEN BELLO - speaks in Dublin on Feb 28th
Walden Bello, Director of Focus and Global South and one of the founders of the World Social Forum will speak in on Monday Feb 28th in the ATGWU Hall, in Middle Abbey St, Dublin at 8pm.

★Against War, Occupation & Empire (Forum) with Ahmed Ben Bella, Haifa Zangana, Denis Halliday & more. March 4-6th, Central Dublin
It will begin on Friday March 4th with a screening of the famous film Battle for Algiers about the Algerian liberation struggle. The film will be introduced by Ahmed Ben Bella, the leader of that struggle, who went on to be the first president of Algeria when the French were driven out.
Speakers include:
Eamonn Mc Cann, John Gormley TD, Ali Halimeh (Palestine - Delegate General in Ireland), Vincent Browne Joe Higgins TD, Kieran Allen (Author & Sociologist) Fintan O' Toole, Catriona Ruane MLA (Bring them

Home Campaign), Mick Mc Gaughan (Irish Times Journalist & Author), Andy Storey (Afri),

★Eoin Dubsky Judicial Review
February 8th, 9th, 10th and 11th, in the High Courts. Irish neutrality and overflight permissions. (087) 6941060 by phone or slack@redbrick.dcu.ie

★Rights Make The Difference, The Disability Bill & The National Disability Strategy
Tuesday 8th February - 7.30pm, RDS Concert Hall

★Stop Mc'Dowell's Criminal Justice Bill
A Kill the Bill campaign meeting is being held next Wednesday February 9th at 8pm in the Teacher's Club Parnell Square.

★Anti-G8 Benefit Gig Voodoo Lounge. Friday Feb 18th 8pm, plus stalls. Get in touch if you want to do one. sita@care2.com

★Campaign against the EU constitution meeting. Sat 19th feb, Teachers club

ALL OUT AGAINST THE BIN TAX

10 to 100
Government Waste Management Policy

DEMONSTRATION
Saturday 26th February
2.00pm

Socialist Workers Party Branches

Ballymun Against War Peace Gathering
Music, Street Theatre and more...
Tuesday 15th February 4.00pm-6.00pm Ballymun Shopping Centre
Details 086-3074060

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
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Address.....
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SWP

Socialist Worker

€1.00/£0.70p

NO 236 | FEBRUARY 8-22, 2005

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WATER CAMPAIGN SHOWS NORTH WAY FORWARD

By GORETTI HORGAN

THIS MONTH'S demonstrations against water charges and privatisation could be among the most important political events in the North in 2005.

A big turn-out in Belfast and Derry on Saturday, 12th February will not only boost the water campaign but will also have a potential to advance the political situation generally.

The mainstream parties are unable or unwilling to find a way of working together and moving forward. The fundamental reason is that each of them is based on backing the interests of one community against the other. They want to maintain and manage the sectarian division, not overcome it and this is why they end up repeatedly in sectarian gridlock.

But the campaign against water privatisation and charges cannot be carried forward except on a cross-community basis.

It can not be won in one community and not in the other. Protestant and Catholic working-class people, who would bear the brunt of the changes, will advance together or will not advance at all.

This is one of the reasons no mainstream party has come out unequivocally in support of the water campaign - because it does not fit into the pattern of politics they are part of.

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The purpose of water charges is to provide a revenue stream for a privatised water industry. Defeating charges means defeating privatisation, and vice-versa. Therefore the interests of the unions and of Communities Against the Water Tax (CAWT) are inextricably linked.

Across the world, governments and private water corporations fear more than anything a mass non-payment campaign where people refuse to provide a 'revenue stream'.

In countries from Bolivia to the Irish Republic, Peru to South Africa, privatisation has failed for one reason only: Non-payment campaigns.

Some people are reluctant to refuse to pay the new tap tax.

They worry about civil disobedience. However, a mass non-payment campaign could put a stop to the very need for civil disobedience.

If enough sign up to non-payment, we can scare the government - whether Stormont or London - into stopping the move to separate water charges and privatisation.

This is not, however, a version of the 1970s rent and rates strike which was called, literally overnight, when internment was introduced on 9th August 1971. There was no organisation, no development of local groups, no legal support. Everyone was in it as an individual.

It was widely thought at the time that the entire Catholic population had joined the rent and rates strike. But it turned out relatively few actually did.

At the height of the rent and rates strike, only 26,000 households in the North were withholding payment - not exactly a mass campaign.

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Communities Against the Water Tax has made it clear that anything less than 100,000 households refusing to pay water charges will not work.

This time round, there is more than a year in which to get organised, to ensure that there are people on every estate, if possible on every street, to whom non-payers can come for support. The rent and rates strike was limited to Catholics living in public housing. The water charges campaign unites

Protestants and Catholics whether in public or private housing.

The Payment of Debt Act is gone since the late 1990s. As the law stands, there is no way we can be forced to pay the water charges without each individual householder being taken to court. People on benefits have to agree to any deductions from their benefit, although few realise this, and there is little choice when it comes to rent, since the

alternative includes eviction.

Similarly, for those in employment, New Labour recently announced it is bringing in legislation to take fines directly from salaries and wages. But that also means being taken to court.

It is not likely to ever get that far, but a well-organised mass campaign of non-payment will ensure that anyone taken to court is well protected.

As in Scotland during the Poll Tax campaign, legal assistance must be provided through the campaign. And every court appearance must be accompanied by big, noisy protests. CAWT groups in every community will have to provide reassurance when the bills, especially the red bills, arrive and a local link to legal assistance should that become necessary.

There is enough opposition to water "reform" to defeat the plan. That's if the opposition is organised and mobilised.

Some-time between April and Sept. next year, payment demands are scheduled to come through the letter boxes and the move towards privatisation is planned to begin. If, by that time, we have every area organised into CAWT,

New Labour will have huge difficulty putting their "pay twice for water" scheme into practice.

They will find it virtually impossible if, at the same time, the communities organised into CAWT are standing four-square by the unions in defending jobs and resisting privatisation.

A victory on this issue will be a significant factor in tilting the political axis away from community and towards class, to the benefit of us all and the enhancement of the prospect of a future no longer dominated by sectarian hostilities. There is a lot at stake. The marches and rallies in Belfast and Derry on 12th February are just the start.

