

BUDGET:

COWAN WANTS TO MAKE WORKING PEOPLE PAY FOR ECONOMIC SLOWDOWN

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAGH

COWAN'S BUDGET is trying to make working people pay for the downturn in the economy. FF are announcing Ireland has entered a new economic period.

The speculation boom is over and there may be a global recession brought on by the sub-prime crash in stock markets (see page 12 for more analysis).

The Irish stock exchange has collapsed 32% in the last quarter wiping €40 Billion of the index. The Irish exchange is particularly open to the sub-prime initiated crash with banks and construction companies making up 60% of the stock exchange listings.

For the last five years the Irish rich

have been making huge profits in property speculation. The collapse in the property market means tax returns are down €1.75 billion.

Stamp duties are now projected to yield revenues 18.6 per cent less than was expected at the time of the last Budget. Projections for other taxes - VAT and corporation tax (tax on profits) are also down. The only tax take that is set to increase is income tax - the tax paid by workers.

Instead of increasing regulation and making corporations pay their fair share, never mind making corporations pay the same taxes as workers, to cover the shortfall in tax revenues. Cowan's response is to further cut taxes for business under the

guise of cutting 'red tape'. This means more self assessment and self regulation of business and makes it easier for corporations to fiddle their returns. Some in IBEC, the bosses lobby group want a zero per cent tax on business.

The other side of the boom was revealed when in reply to a parliamentary question Cowan revealed 1.5 million people earn less each year in gross income (before taxes) than Ahern's €38,000 pay rise. Many of these are couples with a joint income who are treated as a single tax unit.

When you factor in house prices, rents and cost of living in Ireland it shows the reality for many of the 'Pope's children'. A new report just published shows that the share of national wealth going to work-

ers has been falling at a higher rate in Ireland than in the EU generally since the early 1990s. Sweden spends almost 50 per cent of its GDP on social expenditure, compared with just 15.9 per cent in Ireland. The boom of the last 10 years was really a boom for a small layer of Ireland's population.

That layer of people includes Tony O'Reilly, Denis O'Brien, Michael Smurfit and many developers. They have made extraordinary financial gains during the period Bertie Ahern was in office. One of those is Dermot Desmond who was the chair of NCB stockbrokers at the time NCB made a €5000 contribution to Bertie Ahern in the famous 'whip-around' in 1993. The sordid details of the role Ahern

played is finally coming out in the tribunals and is why FF is pushing hard to get them closed down.

Dermot Desmond is also one of the key players building new private hospitals and nursing homes. The same cabal who benefited from the boom and property speculation are now targeting our healthcare.

The budget marks FF and their coalition partners intention to put the boot into workers. We need to gather the anger over the health crisis and other scandals to bring this government down before they make us pay for the coming economic crisis. The first opportunity to do this will be the united demonstration on health being organised for January 2008.

Government fiddles while the planet burns

IRELAND AS it stands is the fifth most climate pollutant country per capita in the world and 2nd in the European Union trailing only to Luxembourg.

Ireland's commitment under Kyoto is to limit the growth of our greenhouse gas emissions to 13 percent above 1990 levels by 2012.

Under the current propped up Fianna Fail government Ireland is failing miserably to reach these targets.

Ten years ago the ESRI predicted that if we continued with "business-as-usual" our emissions would rise by 28 percent by 2010.

Not surprisingly then, when the Government published the National Climate Change Strategy in 2000 it said "business-as-usual is no longer an option for Ireland".

But business-as-usual is precisely what we got.

What has fuelled the government's incompetence on the issue of climate change has been its enthusiasm for neo liberal reforms; its constant capitulation to big business is set to wreak havoc on our environment.

The latest figures show that that climate pollution has risen by 25 percent, almost twice our Kyoto target, and exactly in line with the ESRI estimate of what would happen if we failed to take action.

The Government agreed to the



and motor taxation to how polluting the vehicle is.

None of these policies have been implemented so far.

Across the developing world as a whole the average per capita carbon emissions was 2.2 tonnes.

In the 49 poorest countries it was just 0.2.

It is no coincidence that the fastest growing source of Ireland's climate pollution is from carbon emissions from road transport, which have risen by 160 percent since 1990.

This is resulting from an over dependency on private transport due to lack of investment into regenerating our public transport system.

If our government continues its intransigence in its rise in the temperature of the global climate then we are soon faced with a situation of no return.

December 8th is the global day of action on climate change, across the planet people will be protesting and calling on their governments to take real action on global warming before its too late.

These co-ordinated demonstrations will coincide with UN climate talks in Bali.

So make your voice heard on the protest in Dublin on December 8th and gather at the amphitheatre at the Civic offices on Wood Quay at 1pm.

13 percent Kyoto target on foot of independent expert advice on how it could be achieved while sustaining our "economic development".

This 1998 international consultancy report recommended a carbon tax to put a price on pollution, switching Moneypoint from dirty coal to cleaner

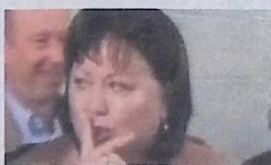
gas, phasing out peat-fired power stations, tightening the building regulations to make homes much less wasteful of energy and linking VRT

Earth's Ecology in Crisis



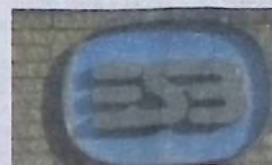
Special four page pull-out
Pages 7, 8, 9, 10

Harey must go! Scrap the HSE



By Dr Peadar O'Grady
Page 5

Privatisation and the ESB



By Brendan Ogle
Page 4

Dahr Jamail interviewed



Lies and Truth on Iraq
Page 11

Mass strikes in France...



Rising against neo-liberalism
Page 13

Ex Guantanamo prisoner speaks in Belfast

By MATT COLLINS

MOAZZAM BEGG, an ex-prisoner from Guantanamo Bay spoke out against the "war on terror" in Belfast recently.

The two meetings, organised by People Before Profit, were attended by 200 people and focused on how the "war on terror" had affected peoples civil liberties. Moazzam spoke of how the war on terror had resulted in the death of millions in the middle east. He had been abducted and taken to Guantanamo Bay and was unlawfully detained without trial for almost 3 years. There are up to 15,000 people detained in camps such as Abu Ghraib worldwide.

People Before Profit has now managed to establish itself groups in Queens University and in St Marys Training College in West Belfast.

Residents campaign for full time fire brigade

By VIOLET WILKEN



Funeral of Bray firefighter Mark O'Shaughnessy last October in Bray.

ON MONDAY 19th November there was a public meeting at the Royal Hotel Bray to build a campaign for a full time fire and emergency service.

People attending the meeting were angry that eight weeks have elapsed since the tragic deaths of two fire fighters, Brian Murray and Mark O'Shaughnessy in Bray and nothing has been done by local representatives.

Guest speaker Margaret Cahill spoke about her own personal tragedy in 2001 when she lost her sister and young nephew in a fire in their home in Oldcourt.

Although the fire station is in close proximity to Oldcourt and the fire occurred on Sunday morning when there was not much traffic on the road it still took the retained fire service 38 minutes, from the time of the 999 call, to get Teresa and Chris out of their house.

Emergency calls for Bray must now go through Tara Street Station rather than the fire station in Bray. One young woman said, "local taxis in Bray have difficulty finding my house, how is someone in Dublin supposed to get the fire brigade there?"

Protests will be held outside the council meetings held in the Old Town Hall in Bray on the 1st two Tuesdays of every month at 7pm. The next two will be on the 11th of December.

Fingal and Dublin councils increase bin charges



Previous protest by Bin Tax campaigners at Dublin City Hall

By CLLR JOAN COLLINS

THIS YEAR both Fingal and Dublin city Council have increased the bin tax charges.

A flat charge has been introduced in Fingal and a further 3.95% increase in DCC.

The increase in DCC is on top of 5% increases every year since 2001.

At the estimates meeting of DCC on the 26th of Nov over a 100 people from Drimnagh, Crumlin, Walkinstown, Ballier, Cabra, Edenmore etc protested outside city hall to scrap the bin tax and vote against the Estimates.

It was brilliant to have that support going into the Estimates meeting as since elected I have voted against the estimates be-

cause it contains the bin tax which is set by the Manager.

As usual, FG, the majority of LAB, FF the Green and PD voted for the estimates.

Their support comes after meet-

ings behind closed doors with the City Manager.

Sinn Fein who have publicly opposed the bin tax in Dublin has also had meetings with the City Manager and

this year two Sinn Fein Cllrs voted for the estimates. Killian Forde (Donaghmede) and Ray Corcoran (Ballymun).

Needless to say the rest of the Council were delighted with this break in the ranks/ or agreed voting arrangement in Sinn Fein.

To the people in Dublin who have being jailed, gone to court, waiting for the Supreme Court case, the 8,000 households not paying, this act is extremely repugnant.

If you receive any correspondence from Debt collectors/ or from DCC requesting where you dispose of your waste contact the campaign immediately. Keep up non payment.

The Anti Bin tax campaign will stand with you.

Galway cuts bin charge waiver

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

THE GALWAY City manager has decided to cut the waiver for the bins from 2008, keeping only the waiver for the fixed charge. This regressive step targets the poorest in Galway society.

This is just the first step towards the abolition of the

waiver system in its entirety.

Detle Mc Loughlin, Galway Bin Charges Campaign said, "It is important that our councillors know where people stand on the issue of waivers from the start of budget considerations, before any are duped by arguments for the city management's anti-social policy."

Irish schools to be run by food services multinational

By RORY HEARNE

ON THE 16 October this year Minister for Education and Science Mary Hanafin announced that Macquarie Partnerships for Ireland (MPFI) would provide four new public private partnership schools that will be designed, built, financed and operated for twenty-five years by MPFI. Construction is planned to commence in early 2008.

The four schools are:
 ■ St. Mary's CBS, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. A new school building to provide 850 student places.

■ Scoil Christ Ri, Portlaoise, Co. Laois. A new school building to provide 850 student places.

■ Gallen Community School, Ferbane Co. Offaly, a new school to provide 450 student places arising from the amalgamation of Ferbane Vocational School and St. Joseph's and St. Saran's Secondary School

■ Banagher College/Coláiste Na Sianna a new school to provide 550 student places arising from the amalgamation

of La Sainte Union Secondary School and St. Rynagh's Community College.

The Macquarie Group a multinational financial and investment service group, headquartered in Sydney, Australia is financing the project. Piers Group will design and build and Sodexo will provide facilities management. The Macquarie Group is also involved in PPPs in UCD gate way, metro north and decentralisation projects.

When the contract begins in mid 2008, Sodexo will

provide facilities management services at each site, ranging from caretaking, cleaning and waste management to grounds maintenance and energy management.

Sodexo is a French Multinational Corporation and one of the largest food services and facilities management companies in the world. It operates in schools, hospitals, United States military mess halls, and private prisons. The film Super Size Me criticized Sodexo's policies on child nutrition in their client schools,

featuring Madison Junior High School in Naperville, Illinois. In 2004, UK TV Channel 4 showed a documentary exposing the unhygienic preparation of food by Tillery Valley (a subsidiary of Sodexo).

There have been at least three boycotts of Sodexo in the US due to its partnerships with the US Military, dealings with prisons, low pay, and poor working conditions

Corporate Watch UK highlight why Sodexo, and maybe private companies in general, are not the best companies to handle the management of crucial and sensitive public services. Sodexo has a very poor record on sanitation, food safety and labour relations as well as running prisons and asylum seeker centres for profit and serving a highly unethical client list.

The International Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union run a website dedicated to Sodexo's anti-union activities called EyeonSodexo www.eyesodsodexo.org. Corporate watch also report on Sodexo's accounting irregularities (see www.corporatewatch.org.uk)

Call for ban on advertising in schools

By NIAL SMYTH

Over 100 people attended an 'Education Whose Business is it anyway?' conference on commercialism in Irish Education in Trinity College Dublin on Saturday November 17th. The keynote speaker was Professor Alex Molnar, Director of the Education Policy Studies Laboratory in the College of Education at Arizona State University and the leading US

expert on commercialism in public education.

Professor Molnar said the hope for an education system free from commercial lay not in government but "on the streets".

According to Maureen Mulvahill of the Irish Heart Foundation, who outlined the dangers of junk food advertising in schools, 80% of principals accepted sponsorship only because of under-funding.

Waterford Crystal cut 490 jobs, directors pocket €23 m

By WATERFORD GLASS WORKER

MANAGEMENT AT Waterford Crystal this week formally announced their intention to slash 490 jobs - half the local workforce - and outsource production to low cost producers in Germany and other locations in eastern Europe.

Over the last five years a small number of company directors pocketed almost 23 million euro while workers were asked to forego wage increases due under partnership agreements.

Much is being made of the amount of money put into the company by Tony O'Reilly and his brother-in-law, Peter Goulandrous. However, Waterford Crystal is currently the only part of the group making a profit.

After closing the Dungarvan plant two years ago with the loss of 500 jobs, nine directors awarded themselves 10 million euro for their handiwork.



Waterford Crystal announced plans to slash half the workforce

A resolution rejecting the company's plan for outsourcing production and job losses was passed overwhelmingly and demanded that no agreements be entered into with any other company to outsource production or jobs from Waterford and sought a credible and comprehensive plan to maintain and maximise the number of jobs locally.

Outright opposition to any compulsory redundancies was also unanimously agreed by the meeting.

Tom Hogan member of the negotiating committee told *Socialist Worker*, "Every job will be fought for and under no circumstances will compulsory redundancies be accepted."

Contact Socialist Worker
 PO Box 1648, Dublin 8
 (01) 872 2682
 info@swp.ie
 Visit our website:
www.swp.ie

No welcome for war profiteer in west Belfast

By SEAN MITCHELL

THE BELFAST Anti War Movement staged a picket outside a meeting in West Belfast on 8th November showing its opposition towards Oil bandit David Horgan.

The conference focused on bringing more private enterprise into west Belfast with David Horgan as a guest speaker.

It is absurd to think that the way in which Iraq's resources have been plundered through privatisation by companies like petrel resources should be accepted anywhere in the world, Baghdad or Belfast.

David Horgan's Petrel Company is one of the biggest oil companies in Iraq. He has amassed millions through the anti-Nationalisation laws passed immediately after the invasion of Iraq. Profits rose by 400% just weeks after the fall of Baghdad.

This robbery continues despite the fact that many places in Iraq receive no electricity, sanitation or effective health treatment.

Whilst most Iraqi's are being slaughtered and starved this man is allowed to pinch the wealth created by ordinary people.

Matt Collins spokesperson for the Belfast Antiwar movement said, "People were eager to demonstrate and oppose this sort of hypocrisy, whilst Iraqi people starve and are being murdered on a daily basis all in the drive for profit, it is unacceptable that business elites in west Belfast are hosting a man like David Horgan. Today it was made clear that war profiteers are not welcomed by the people of west Belfast."

'Hero of the year' peace campaigner returns to speak in Galway

By DETTE MCLOUGHLIN

WELL-KNOWN IRISH peace campaigner Caoimhe Butterly will speak at a public meeting in Galway Town Hall Studio Theatre on Friday December the 7th at 7.30pm as part of a nationwide tour that seeks to raise awareness of the critical situation in Lebanon and the Middle East.

In the talk, titled "Eye Witness from Lebanon", Caoimhe will speak on the current situation in Lebanon for Palestinian refugees and the people of South Lebanon where she is currently working.

The situation in Lebanon is precarious at the moment according to Caoimhe and she wishes to present a view from inside Lebanon that takes account of the human effects of conflict and displacement.

The event will highlight International Human Rights Day and is sponsored by the Galway One World Centre, The Galway Alliance Against War, Eco-Soc NUIG the Socialist Workers Party and Upstart.

This event will coincide with a week long exhibition by Galway multimedia artist and activist Niamb Moloughney. She will display her Palestinian Wall youth project Upstart in the Galway city museum that will send messages of solidarity to the young people in Palestine, Lebanon and Israel. This exhibition will run from the 4th 8th of Dec.

Save Our Community Childcare



Community childcare schemes are under threat

By KEVIN WINGFIELD

FROM NEXT year (2008), the basis on which the State supports community-based playgroups, nurseries and crèches, will change, placing many projects under threat.

Low income parents will be required to pay more for their children to attend playgroups and crèches and community crèches will face a funding shortfall that will put their continued existence under threat.

Grants to community childcare through the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme are to be replaced with means tested subventions per parent under the new Community Childcare Subvention Scheme. This will result in a serious cut in funding for many community based crèches, playgroups and nurseries.

A meeting in Donegal recently heard Siobhán McLaughlin who is manager of the Donegal Travellers Project, say, "To provide really high quality daycare on a full-day basis costs around €190 per week per child.

"So if a lone parent is in receipt of social

welfare and they get the full subvention, the government will pay €80 to the childcare provider and the parent is still going to be asked to pay €110, because the community childcare providers will not have the resources, in the absence of the staffing grant, to meet that gap."

In many parts of Ireland the situation will be even worse.

In one typical North County Dublin community-based playgroup operating 40 weeks a year catering for 35 children the real cost is €76 per child per week.

In the past, Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme direct grants have allowed them to charge €38 per week per child.

This represents about half the actual cost.

However from September 2008 the nursery will have increase charges to between €50 and €76

One of the childcare workers commented: "Will we be open? Is a service of over 25 years going to have to close?"

"Will we have qualified staff? How will we cope if staff opt to leave due to lack of job security?"

"What will we have to charge? How can we justify our ethos 'Affordable childcare to all children in our community?'"

"The bottom line is that with a subvention of only €12,896 OUR SERVICE WILL CLOSE, while if we were in receipt of the current staffing grant of €45,000 our service is sustainable, affordable to all who choose our service for what it is -- a QUALITY service".

Many other community childcare schemes which have provided a lifeline to lower income parents and children face closure.

Recently a Community Childcare Action Group was set up in Dublin by workers in the sector to demand the Minister for Children reinstates the staffing grants to the community sector.

It plans to link up with similar groups around the country and is working towards a national demonstration at the Dail in early February 2008

Argos workers strike for fair pay

By NORA BOYLE

ARGOS WORKERS from the Jervis St branch held a one day strike on Saturday 1st December.

The strikers picketed Jervis St. and Ilac Centre branches of Argos, demanding a rise of just 90c per hour.

Argos opened three stores in 1996, it now has 31 stores nationwide.

Argos sales in 2006 exceeded €8.1 billion and profits are up 50% in the first half of this year.

Meanwhile 66 percent of workers are on €9.07 euro an

hour (below the €10.25 an hour agreed by social partnership 2006). Argos workers deserve fairer pay as staff in Arnotts, Debenhams etc. are paid €10-12 per hour

As Annette the shop steward says "many of the long term workers are lone parents and ordinary people trying to bring up families and pay mortgages and that's why they are out on strike".

One striker had been working at Argos for eight years and is still on €9.07 an hour. One worker who started 20 years ago on £3.81 per hour is now on €12.81 -- an annual

rise of only 50c.

Management is only willing to negotiate with long term workers who represent 6 percent of the workforce. 94 percent of Argos staff are short term workers on minimum wage, many are students, so there is a 'revolving door' of staff.

The ILAC branch has no shop steward and most workers from the Ilac branch resigned from the union last week under pressure from management.

100 percent of Jervis St. branch workers are union members including temporary Christmas staff.

The management of Argos negotiated directly with workers up until two years ago when they decided to step outside negotiations with no prior warning.

On Friday night management and shop floor workers from Argos stores in England were brought into the Dublin branches to keep the stores open while workers were out on strike.

The ads for Argos tell us to have a more Christmas-like Christmas by shopping at Argos. Instead we should boycott Argos this Christmas in support of Fair Pay for Argos workers.

Greens push through incinerator

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

DESPITE THE verdict by An Bord Pleanála to grant permission to DCC to go ahead with the incinerator on the Poolbeg Peninsula the Combined Residents Against Incineration has vowed to continue the campaign to stop the incinerator.

The CRAI campaign has called on the Minister for the Environment John Gormley to refuse permission to Dublin City Council to sign the contract for the incinerator on the Poolbeg. He can do this through a Ministerial order. John Gormley has repeatedly stated he would not be part of a government that allowed the Poolbeg incinerator to go ahead.

CRAI has also called for an investigation into the US waste company, Covanta Energy who will be partners in the operation of the Poolbeg incinerator.

Covanta was bankrupt in 2004. It was also removed as the contractor of Tampa Bay Water's troubled desalination plant. Covanta has also been accused by environmentalists in the US of leaking poisonous dioxins from its incinerators.

The process to grant permission to the Poolbeg incinerator has broken EU directives on consultation and waste disposal. The technology to be used by the plant itself is flawed in many ways.

Frances Corr of CRAI said: "CRAI with the help of the communities in the area collected over 3,000 objections to the incinerator. We also stated our points of opposition at the oral hearing itself which was held in a location and at a time that excluded the possibility of adequate community participation. The decision to locate the incinerator on the Poolbeg was anti-democratic and Dublin City Council management took the democratic right to vote on the location of the incinerator away from Dublin City Councillors.

Rory Hearne, People Before Profit Alliance said: "A legal challenge to the ABP ruling is likely from CRAI. Ultimately it will require direct action such as large numbers of residents blockading trucks trying to enter the site to stop this incinerator."

GET YOUR COPY OF *Socialist Worker* EVERY FORTNIGHT

Six month subscription €15/£10stg

Name _____

Address _____

Tel _____

Email _____

I would like to receive _____ copies of Socialist Worker each issue
Return to PO Box 1648, Dublin 8, with a cheque/postal order or a bank lodgement receipt. Bank Details: Socialist Workers Movement, AIB, 37/38 Upper O Connell St, Dublin 1. Account No: 85173469. Sort code: 93-11-36

Time to short circuit the market madness

By BRENDAN OGLE

DO YOU remember 'Comical Ali'? What a man!

Saddam Hussein's propaganda guru was so full of dodgy dogma and meaningless mantra that even as the tanks rolled down Baghdad's streets to his hotel there he was on the roof briefing the press about how the infidel had been defeated, was on retreat and that his leader was vindicated and victorious.

I think of him a lot these days. With every turn of the Mahon Tribunal the lies and perjury of Bertie Ahern become ever more apparent, ever more transparent.

No matter. Fianna Fail is well equipped in the propaganda department and has a whole collection of 'Comical Alis' in cabinet spoofing and bluffing on behalf of their beloved, and now almost pathetically exposed, leader.

Whether its Willie O'Dea, Frank Fahy, Conor Lenihan or Mary Hanifin there is no shortage of party men willing to destroy their credibility in defence of a leader whose lack of ethics are appalling.

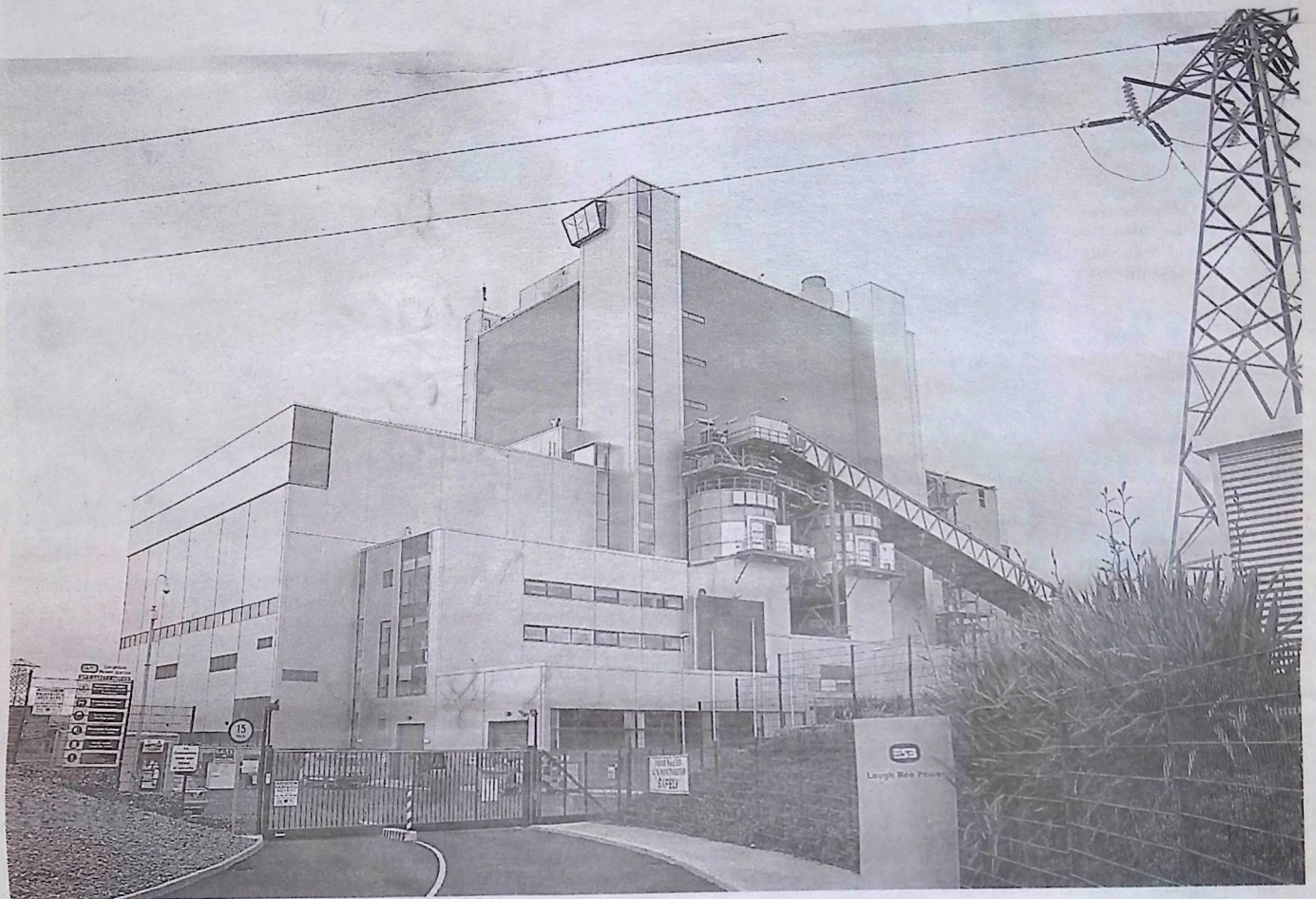
(Unfortunately there is no shortage of airtime for their pathetic and childish excuses either). But, I digress.

The message is simple. The party and the brand must be defended at all costs and in all circumstances regardless of the lies necessary, the lack of logic or the long term damage.

And so it is in policy areas too. The Progressive Democrat takeover of Fianna Fail in policy areas is now so endemic that attacking and breaking up state companies must be done regardless of the lack of logic and long term damage to the country.

I speak of the current Government proposal to break up ESB. With Eircom destroyed and Aer Lingus cast adrift, ESB is now to be broken up just for the sake of it and because the ideologues demand it.

ESB was encouraged by Government to rebuild its Transmission system and renew the grid to the highest standards in order to ensure security of supply



Lanesborough Power station

in the national interest.

The workers in ESB performed the task on time and under budget.

They walked the walk as ESB were forced to borrow heavily in order to fund this renewal while the Government refused NDP funding. ESB managed to do this while still returning record profits year on year (over €520 million this year) of which the Government take a third in an indirect tax on consumers. Another one!

So the Government leave ESB and its staff to rebuild a system alone and they take a third of the

return for doing nothing!

Of course ESB only did this on one basis. That basis is a tri-partite agreement between Government, ESB and the Unions that ESB would continue to own and operate the assets they have built in the national interest.

In March 2007, when the work was done, the Government published a White Paper sundering that agreement and taking the assets off ESB.

This proposal will leave ESB with a whole lot of debt and no assets to fund it.

It will destroy the finances of

a successful company run well in the national interest by the workers of that company. And it breaks our agreement. We will not allow it to happen.

The Comical Ali's are out in force though. They tell you this is necessary to drive down electricity prices and encourage competition.

This is a simple lie. In March 2007 the ATGWU published our document of electricity prices called 'Through The Looking Glass' (see it at www.generating-unity.com).

We showed how this

Government's policy has increased electricity prices by a full 30% more than is necessary to produce the electricity.

Why? Because in a market as small as us the only way to get competition is to falsely increase prices and prevent the incumbent company (ESB) from expanding freely in a supposedly free market.

In other words - the Government rips off customers to encourage competition which has little interest in such a small market while, ever the opportunists, the same Government takes 30% of the rip

off while blaming ESB for the ridiculous energy prices.

It's a genius stroke from the master stokers isn't it?

Thankfully we have an agreement that protects the company, the most successful state company we have, in the national interest.

We will ensure that the agreement is honoured and we look forward to someday having a government that is less inclined to propaganda and spin in the face of the indefensible and more inclined in honouring its agreements, its commitments in the interest of the citizens of this state.

Going underground: Privatisation and the Power lines in County Meath

By NIAL SMYTH

AS A row brews among unions over the proposed privatisation of ESB, local communities are beginning to see first hand some of the early effects of privatisation. Socialist Worker spoke to local residents.

A new state owned company, EirGrid plc, took over responsibility for the operation of the Irish national grid in July 2006.

EirGrid now finds itself at the centre of a much bigger row, one which sees them plan a project as part of cross-border sharing of electricity.

The project involves the running of a 400,000 Volt inter-connector, through Meath, Cavan and Tyrone. This will mean the imposition of massive

electricity pylons on small rural communities in Meath, Cavan and Monaghan.

Since the project was announced there has been an almost immediate response from communities across the North East. In Meath alone there are over 19 committees set up to oppose the project in its current form.

Each committee comes under the umbrella of the 'Meath Pylon Pressure' group.

There has been little public consultation on the matter apart from three meetings held during working hours on weekdays.

There is now a growing body of evidence that electric and magnetic fields (EMFs) such as those found near high voltage power lines pose a

significant risk to human health. A UK government funded study, the Draper Report, found that children who lived within 200 metres of high voltage power lines were nearly twice more likely to have childhood leukaemia than those who lived greater than 600 metres from the lines.

EirGrid will only allow their employees to have 15 minutes exposure in any hour and a maximum of four periods in any single day.

The pylons which stand at over 35m high, and 200m apart will have a major impact on the rural landscape of the Northeast. The project will involve 100 km of lines and 300 pylons, with some of the lines located 50m from houses. The campaign wants an

Underground Cable instead of Overhead Lines. EirGrid complain that this will cost more.

One resident of 40 years, Maire said, "For me the central issue in this dispute is greed. Our health and well-being appears irrelevant to these people."

"They are prepared to run roughshod over people for the sake of money."

"If the government is successful in privatising the ESB, then it will be like Eircom all over again."

"The people at the top will get the big bucks and it will be us who lose out, as we are in this case. It has been speculated that EirGrid will be offering shares to people but as I said it is only a few at the top who

benefit from this".

"It's like how they treated the people of Rosspoint. They will try to pick people off by buying them off and splitting the opposition. It is vitally important that people stand together."

One man in Kingscourt in Cavan was offered €10 million for a 30 acre of his land as a site of the new substation as part of the project.

The site is beside a recently extended primary school where there is a large school population."

There have been meetings of 200-300 people held in Athboy, Kells and many other parts of the North East. Just last week in Trim, up to 3,000 people packed into a hotel in the town to attend an information

meeting on the project.

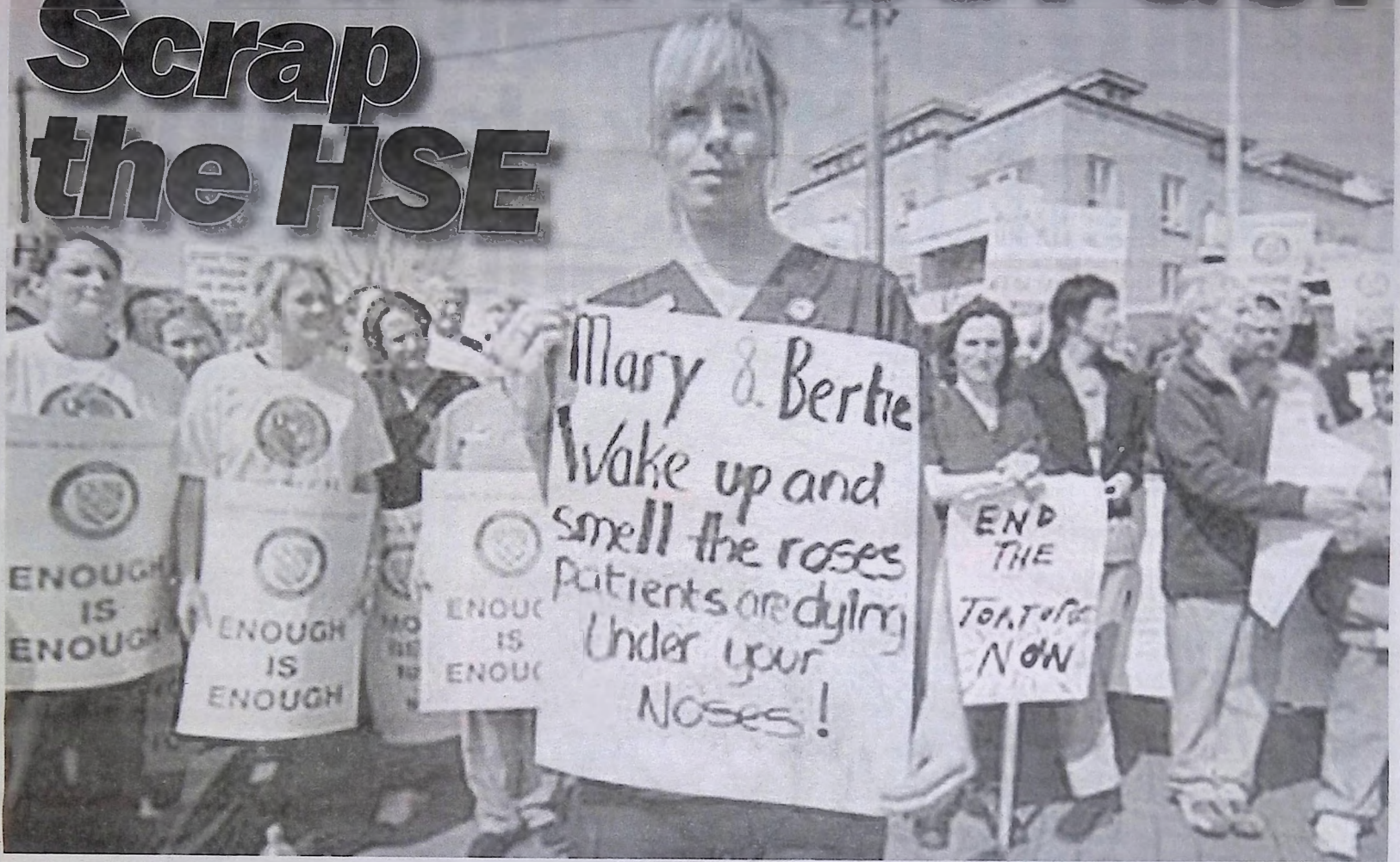
Professor Mike O'Carroll, who is chairman of REVOLT (Rural England Versus Overhead Line Transmission), a British group set up to oppose "unnecessary, excessive and intrusive powerline development" addressed the meeting.

Maire is optimistic that the campaign will be successful. "People power is the only way they will be stopped. There have been massive public meetings and everyone is behind the campaign."

For further details see: www.pylonpressure.ie www.rathmoreaction.com Send objections to The Project Manager, Meath-Cavan 400kV Power Line, EirGrid, 27 Lower Fitzwilliam Street, Dublin 2, use the information line 1890 2526 90, or e-mail: meathcavanpower@eirgrid.com

HARNEY MUST GO!

Scrap the HSE



By Dr PEADAR O'GRADY

PROTESTS BY communities including Sligo, Ennis, Monaghan and Cork show the way forward to defend our public health services against the drive by Mary Harney and the FF/Green coalition to introduce a 'for-profit' system in the Irish Health Service.

These protests have held back closures of much-needed acute services at a time when 3000 hospital beds and hundreds of community clinics are still sorely needed.

These facilities were promised in the 2001 'Health Strategy', which is still government policy.

Harney and Drumm insist that these beds are not needed but have not announced any viable alternative.

Instead, privatisation by stealth has seen new private 'for-profit'

hospitals, Nursing homes and GP clinics open up all round the country.

Multinationals like Triad (Beacon) or Capio are making profit from the running down of public services – all tax-funded by PAYE workers. The HSE board is stuffed with unaccountable business people whose own interests are served by running down public services.

Cancer crisis

The crisis in Cancer services is just part of Harney's privatisation by stealth.

The government commissioned report in 2000 by surgeon, Prof. Niall O'Higgins, recommended 12 Specialist centres for cancer treatment in Regional Hospitals. Harney reduced this to 8 specialist centres without any explanation, built none and demanded the closure of services in 13 local

hospitals without any arrangement for new services. The HSE admitted recently that radiotherapy services planned for 2011 are not likely to be in place by 2015!

In March 2005 Portlaoise surgeon Mr Peter Naughten wrote a letter to Mary Harney reporting to her that the cancer services in Portlaoise were 'a shambles' and that women were at risk because mammograms (breast X-rays) were being examined by radiologists without specialist training. Harney passed the complaint to the HSE, as she has done with all similar complaints in the Dail.

The shambles continued and the radiologist appointed since had no specialist training in reading mammograms.

Even after the tragedy of women wrongly given the all clear, Harney continued to insist she knew nothing of Naughten's

concerns even though he was conducting an urgent review of ultrasound scans for breast cancer patients at Portlaoise Hospital.

'Centres of Excellence'

Harney is using the excuse of wanting 'Centres of excellence' to close down local Hospitals. We need and we support improving Regional Hospitals with Specialist services including cancer services. There is no medical argument for closing down local hospitals because of this.

The only arguments are economic and ideological – that is, to save money and make more room for small 'for-profit' hospitals and the multinational corporations that take the profits.

We demand that all our centres, from GP clinics to Local hospitals to Regional Hospitals should be centres of excellence.

For-profit healthcare has been proven beyond doubt to provide more expensive and poorer quality public care when compared with public 'not-for-profit' centres. Harney's only reason for risking the costs in lives and money is to support the profits of big business.

The Sunday Business Post front page story on November 25th told the story of the fiasco in Portlaoise, but inside on page 16 the headline ran: 'Private care in good Health' with the story of how 'for-profit' corporations are thriving on the crisis in the health service.

This is why Harney's 'for-profit' reforms must be stopped and real reforms brought in. Real reform like getting rid of the 2-tier system of waiting lists and treatment. Real reform like 3000 new acute public hospital beds. Real reform like public community (GP)

clinics and nursing homes.

Demands for 'Universal Health Insurance' are far from an adequate response to this crisis. Health cover needs to be not only universal (for everyone) but also comprehensive (full cover). It also needs to be managed on a not-for-profit basis – not by 'for-profit' insurance companies like in the United States.

The fairest and most effective way of providing universal, comprehensive health care is through progressive taxation.

These reforms will require a massive injection of local democracy and participation in running our services and this means getting people on the streets – communities, patient support groups, staff, unions and activists all working together. Local and National protests to demand real reform of the health service is now the only way forward.

Hundreds protest for Sligo cancer services

By DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

OVER 300 people protested at the Dail on Thursday 22nd November over the proposed closure of oncology services at Sligo hospital.

Lilly McMorrow from the breast cancer campaign for the northwest spoke to Socialist Worker.

"We're demonstrating here today to keep our cancer services and to demand a ninth centre of excellence for the northwest".

"The breast check scares have put a sense of fear for women throughout Ireland". "They're talking about putting in a private hospital in Sligo. We don't want a

private hospital.

"Give us the money for a radiologist instead of giving it to private companies.

"For me private means having money to go private and what does that mean for the ordinary man or woman or people on welfare?"

"It's like the American service of health creeping in. "My ambition is not to have a two tier system.

"Mary Harney doesn't listen to the people, she has no idea of the trauma of cancer patients".

"This will be an ongoing protest, we won't let our vital services go.

"We want them on our doorstep in the northwest, not hundreds of miles away in Dublin".

Major protest planned to save St. Luke's hospital

By RORY HEARNE

A MAJOR demonstration is planned against the closure of St Lukes Cancer Hospital, Rathgar for Saturday 15th December. THE MARCH will begin at 12 noon at St Lukes and march to the Central Bank in Dublin City Centre.

The Save St Luke's campaign was formally launched at a public meeting on 25 October 2007 in Ranelagh. A committee has been set up including former patients, current patients and their families, and local people of all political persuasions and none. The campaign believes St Luke's should

be retained and expanded because:

■ St Luke's has consistently been rated one of Ireland's best hospitals and, with 179 public beds, is currently the national radiotherapy centre treating patients from across the country. Patients and their families testify to this.

■ St Luke's has the therapeutic surroundings so important to cancer patients, has patient accommodation, and its Dubdoc clinic provides out of hours service for local people.

St Luke's is a public facility and the current plan is to replace it with a public private partnership at St James' and at Beaumont, thus

threatening equality of access and quality of service.

An upgraded and expanded St Luke's would help deal with the currently unacceptable cancer waiting lists. The site has room to expand thus maximising what we have and making the best use of tax-payers' money. The Friends of St Luke's have raised €22 million towards equipment and upgrading of the hospital.

There has not been adequate consultation with staff and patients about the planned closure.

The campaign PRO officer said, "We believe people power, political support and pressure can save St Luke's".



SAVE ST LUKE'S

PUBLIC CANCER HOSPITAL
AN EXISTING CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE

PROTEST MARCH

**12PM SATURDAY
DECEMBER 15**

ST LUKE'S, RATHGAR
arriving Central Bank,
Dame St. 1.30pm

St Luke's patients, supporting activists, and cancer care groups invited to speak.

www.savestlukes.net

SAINT LUKE'S HOSPITAL

COMMENT

GAA managers try to rip-off players

by DEIRDRE CRONIN

The Gaelic Players Association (GPA) recently announced that its membership of 1,881 inter-county hurlers and footballers voted overwhelmingly to go on strike from January 1st 2008. The GPA has been negotiating the delivery of government grants to inter-county players for the last five years, but despite a promise that €5 million was available, no mechanism has been found to distribute the monies. The GAA has refused to play any part in the dispersal of the funds, claiming it would undermine the amateur ethos of the organisation and claiming it is fearful that the €5 million allocation will lead to a deduction from its overall capital funding.

To say that the GPA is unpopular in the higher echelons of the GAA would be an understatement. Founded in 1999, it demanded greater representation for players at all levels of the organisation and set about fighting on issues of player welfare. It has agitated on issues like adequate provision of playing gear, appropriate training facilities and improved insurance schemes for injured players. Along with this it also sought opportunities for players, individually and as a whole, to generate money through sponsorship deals.

The GPA has been portrayed as greedy and self-seeking elite players whose ultimate aim is "pay for play". Some in the GAA would like to present a De Valera type vision of athletic youths and comely maidens, the modern day reality of the GAA is somewhat different.

The GAA operates unashamedly as a commercial organisation and its amateurism has long been undermined. Since 1991 inter-county players have taken to the field in jerseys emblazoned with sponsorship logos. Since the mid 1990s, All-Ireland winning captains have had to thank the championship sponsors (Guinness in hurling, Bank of Ireland in football) in their acceptance speeches. The GAA is currently considering the most lucrative deal they can make on TV rights for the upcoming season. If this means ditching RTE, "the national broadcaster", then so be it. Corporate boxes occupy the prime locations in the state of the art, jewel in its crown, that is Croke Park.

But despite all the millions that are generated by the GAA, clubs still have to fundraise and seek sponsors to cover their running costs, while companies like Coca Cola are allowed step in to sponsor underage competitions.

This strike however is not about these commercial activities. It is about obtaining a government grant of what will amount to approx €2500 per player. The demands on inter-county players today are huge. Holding down full time jobs, they train nine months of the year with their county team for a minimum of three nights a week, while weekends are taken up with matches at either club or county level. Club training also has to be attended. The sacrifices in terms of time and loss of earnings are often massive.

The allegation that these players want to set themselves apart from the rest of the volunteers who make up the GAA is very disingenuous. Most will give a lifetime to the GAA, often ending up coaching underage teams and playing a key role in their clubs.

The rising militancy of GAA players is something to be welcomed and supported. Another strike currently looms in Cork. Following a successful strike in 2002 against the Cork county board, the Rebel hurlers won improved facilities and rights and rolled back the powers of some top administrators who ran the GAA in Cork like their own personal fiefdom.

Despite threats and intimidation particularly directed at younger players, they stood firm and won by spreading their strike to include Cork footballers. Five years on, the board is trying to roll back the gains. The hurlers and footballers have again united and given notice that they will take "whatever action is necessary" if the situation is not resolved.

As with all strikes, those taking the action will be condemned, painted as militants with other agendas and demonised. In this case there is a wider context about the commercialisation of the GAA but it is not the GPA who is responsible for this. Players should be fully supported in their current attempts to seek access to grants that will help make their commitment to their sport marginally easier. The government needs to deliver on Ahearn's promise of €5 million, guarantee it will be in addition to existing sports funding and find an appropriate mechanism to deliver the money.

SF use memory of hunger strikers to attack classroom assistants



The classroom assistants had marched to the Sinn Féin office on the Falls to demand decent treatment. Some of the placards compared Catriona Ruane (right) with Margaret Thatcher (left).

by EAMONN McCANN

"IF ANYBODY had said a couple of years ago that the DUP and Sinn Féin would be sitting happily together at Stormont, they'd have been looked on as lunatics." So runs the refrain of the conventional commentators.

But Chuckle Brothers Ian and Martin convulsed at one another's jokes isn't the most startling aspect of the Executive. No, it's the dramatic emergence of Red Mick McGimpsey.

The Ulster Unionist McGimpsey, Minister of Health in the new set-up, had previously been noted mainly for his sepulchral voice and appearance of charisma bypass.

Now he's being portrayed as a disruptive Left-winger for demanding more money for his Department.

Admittedly, the person most loudly denouncing him is Iris Robinson of the DUP, who probably believes that the Mongol Empire would have lasted a lot longer if Ghengis Khan hadn't been such a big softie. But still.

Why, Ms. Robinson asked, can Red Mick not get with the Programme? Why does he continue to carp and criticise proposals for saving money by privatising everything and keeping the workers in their place when all the other Executive parties are singing the same tune and it isn't the Internationale?

It's all down to McGimpsey's "natural left-leaning tendencies," she reckoned. "The Minister must disprove that he is ideologically incapable of

adapting to the change demanded.

"Otherwise, the health sector could find itself left behind in the new Northern Ireland.

"The province cannot afford a Health Minister constrained by outdated political dogma."

On the other hand, Iris Robinson and her DUP colleagues have been unstinting in their praise for Education Minister Catriona Ruane's handling of the classroom assistants' strike.

They were particularly gleeful at the Shinners using the legacy of the hunger-strike to try to discredit the union members.

The classroom assistants had marched to the Sinn Féin office on the Falls and then to DUP headquarters in east Belfast (DUP Finance Minister Peter Robinson is the other Minister involved) to demand decent treatment. Some of the placards compared Ruane with Margaret Thatcher.

Sinn Féin spin-masters immediately saw their chance.

They noted that there is a mural of Bobby Sands on the gable wall of the office where the strikers had gathered—and claimed that the strikers had therefore been insulting the hunger strikers.

"Margaret Thatcher will be forever synonymous with her role in permitting 10 Republican hunger-strikers to die...Comparing Thatcher with anyone within Sinn Féin is a highly offensive act and deeply provocative," said SF spokesman Paul Butler.

Butler knew well that the class-

room assistants were not referring to the hunger strike, but to the similarities between Ruane's attitude to the classroom assistants and Thatcher's to the 1984 miners' strike.

Ruane had repeatedly denounced the strike, demanded that the union hold a second ballot, and used the plight of children with special needs to exert emotional blackmail on Nipsa.

"Thatcherite" was a fair description. A party with even a glimmering of socialism would have booted Ruane out.

Instead, to defend her, Sinn Féin resorted to one of the shoddiest manoeuvres in the Nationalist repertoire: when selling out the working class, wrap the green flag round you.

If you sense that your supporters might be dismayed by your behaviour, tell them that the people you are sticking the boot into have insulted the patriot dead...

The legacy of the hunger strike was being cynically misused, right enough, but not by the classroom assistants.

Now that Nipsa has been browbeaten into calling a second ballot, Sinn Féiners are openly gloating that Ruane has gotten the better of them. Well, we shall see.

SF supporters who regard themselves as on the Left, should be asking how they have come to find themselves in this position—being cheered by the Paisleyites for taking a hard line against trade unionists—even as the Ulster Unionists are being denounced for pushing Left-wing ideas.

The collapse of third world agriculture

By **Mike Davis**, author of books including *City of Quartz*, *Ecology of Fear* and *Planet of Slums*

IF THE IPCC's Fourth Assessment offers 'unequivocal' evidence for epochal climate change, its regional impact analyses (contained in volume two) support a disturbing corollary: a radical global shift in water resources from poorer subtropical to richer temperate countries. Across a wide range of model parameters and emission scenarios, the supercomputers partnered with the IPCC keep grinding out the same robust finding: the wet latitudes will get wetter and the dry, drier and much hotter.

Thus Canada, the northwestern and northeastern United States, much of the British Isles, Scandinavia, and Russia as well as a few equatorial countries are predicted to see enhanced rainfall (albeit more of it delivered by extreme events like the recent English floods).

Meanwhile, the observational record of the last quarter century corroborates climate modeling that shows Mediterranean and other semi-arid climates (roughly 20 to 35 degrees latitude in both hemispheres) becoming more drought-stricken or desert-like in coming years. The great wildfires that incinerated Greece and Southern California this past year—as well as devastating droughts in Mexico, Central Asia, and Australia—may be terrifying portents of this shift.

As the IPCC emphasizes, this drying/expansion of the Semi-Tropics will have profound impacts upon the water balances that sustain irrigated agriculture and the livelihoods of hundreds of millions of people from Sonora to the Punjab. Although the IPCC itself does not venture detailed projections, William Cline, one of the pioneers of the quantitative analysis of climate change's societal impacts, offers a staggeringly pessimistic view of the future of Third World in his major new study, *Global Warming and Agriculture* (July 2007).

CLINE IS a senior staff economist at one of the world's most high-end and ultra-capitalist think-tanks, the Peterson Institute for International Economics on Massachusetts Avenue in Washington D.C. His book synthesizes data from a daunting array of state-of-the-art climate and crop models, as well as from existing regional climate-change studies. As he acknowledges, his methodology leaves heroic scope for agricultural adaptation, more efficient use of irrigation water, medium rather than high-range population growth, and enhanced productivity due to 'fertilization' by rising carbon dioxide.

Yet even these best-case scenarios yield a catastrophic revolution in world economic and geographical inequality. Although global warming's impact on Chinese farming is surprisingly neutral or enigmatic in Cline's study (ranging from a 7 percent increase to a 7 percent decline), South Asia suffers a complete collapse of food security by the 2080s: with output in India and Myanmar plummeting by as much as 38 percent, and Pakistan losing almost



Rural marketplace in Ghana

Even these best-case scenarios yield a catastrophic revolution in world economic and geographical inequality.

one-third of the harvest in the Indus Valley.

Cline likewise estimates huge future declines in farm production throughout North Africa (Egypt excepted), the Sudan and Ethiopia, parts of the Sahel, South Africa, the Middle East, the Caribbean (especially Cuba and Venezuela), Central America, and Mexico. In the bleaker of his major scenarios (that is, without a large CO2 boost to plant productivity), Nigeria, Indonesia and Brazil also lose about one-quarter of the current value (2003 dollars) of their crops, while five African countries suffer "complete shutdown" of their agriculture.

THE ONLY wealthy country to share significantly in this projected disaster is Australia, although the American Southwest and the northern Mediterranean will also become more furnace-like and inhospitable to both inhabitants and tourists. Otherwise, the large-scale agricultural systems of North America, the EU, and Russia should be net beneficiaries of increased warmth and rainfall. (Such serendipity, however, should be taken with a grain of salt, since his

calculations do not include the costs of more frequent weather disasters.)

Cline, of course, only provides a quantitative metric for dark futures already popularized in reports by Western blue-ribbon commissions and intelligence agencies. Thus a 2003 report on abrupt climate change commissioned by the Pentagon imagined impoverished hordes fleeing "drier, subtropical often over-populated and economically poor regions."

The new report by the German government's advisory council on global warming, subtitled "Climate Change as a Security Risk," is equally melodramatic when it prophesizes the "emergence of 'failing subregions' consisting of several simultaneously overstretched states, creating 'blackholes' in world politics that characterized by collapse of law and public order."

EVEN BRITAIN'S Stern Review—criticized on both the left and right for its Pollyannish estimates of the costs of stabilizing greenhouse emissions—is unremitting in its depiction of the destitution, disease, and conflict that will result from falling agriculture output

in subtropical and arid countries

Partisans of an 'Inconvenient Truth,' who have come to welcome any governmental acknowledgement of global warming as a step in the right direction, should be wary (to say the least) of official attempts to spin climate change as a 'security' issue or to evoke images of a starving rural humanity as a preemptive pretext for raising drawbridges and sealing borders.

If scenarios like Cline's are even remotely realistic (and he concedes that they are probably unduly optimistic), global warming will entail a nightmarish magnification of all existing regional inequalities and class divides. The coming dustbowls may give Rosa Luxemburg's famous warning—'Socialism or barbarism'—its ultimate meaning.

Mike Davis is professor of urban and environmental history at U.C. Irvine and a former MacArthur Fellow.

His books include *City of Quartz*, *Ecology of Fear*, *Magical Urbanism*, *Late Victorian Holocausts*, *Dead Cities*, and most recently, *Monster at Our Door: the global threat of avian flu* (New Press, 2005) and *Planet of Slums* (Verso, Feb. 2006).

His current projects include a history of race and disaster in New Orleans, and an edited volume on neo-liberal utopias (*Evil Paradises*, New Press 2006).

infocus

Can the market solve climate chaos?

By TOM WILLIAMS,
Biological scientist

FOR twenty years, environmentalists have been battling for governments to recognise the reality of climate change.

Now that George Bush and Gordon Brown have finally acknowledged that the problem exists, surely something will be done about it? However, behind all the talk there is very little substance to the market-friendly solutions being proposed by our world leaders.

Capitalists tell us that we can defeat climate change in two ways: individually, by adopting green lifestyles, and internationally, by carbon trading—a global market for pollution.

On the face of it, carbon trading seems like a very reasonable solution: if companies (or countries) cannot reduce their own carbon emissions, they can compensate by buying “carbon rations” from others which have more easily been able to cut back: the system makes it profitable to pollute less.

Think about it for more than a few seconds though, and massive problems emerge.

The greatest of these is simply the amount by which we must reduce our carbon emissions: on the best science, an emissions cut of 90% is required to avoid the worst effects of climate change.

While small reductions are achievable under a trading system, large cuts cannot work because all industries have to reduce their emissions.

For instance, George Monbiot has calculated that if emissions from road transport were only cut by 50%, rather than 90%, in the UK, then all other areas of the economy would have to make impossible cuts of 98.2%. There are just not enough rations to go around for carbon trading to work—unless we start trading with other planets!

In fact, the much-

publicized EU Emissions Trading Scheme stands little chance of achieving even small reductions.

At the outset, industries were given pollution permits proportional to their emissions. Rather than requiring cuts, this scheme was nothing more than a handout of polluting capacity—something which should be owned democratically by everyone—to the dirtiest industries.

The other side of the solution to climate change, we are told, is for individuals to make eco-friendly choices in their own lives. This is the idea behind government campaigns such as the “Power of One” in Ireland. Of course, energy efficiency at home is very important and should not be ignored by any environmentalist. But the domestic contribution to Ireland’s carbon emissions is 12%, dwarfed by emissions from power generation and transport.

When seen in this light, energy efficiency drives are a cynical diversion from the kinds of policies that would make a real difference in the fight against climate change, such as a radical development of our public transport and power infrastructures.

Efficiency is the buzzword behind a whole range of technologies which will, apparently, allow economic growth and consumption to continue while saving the planet: we can look forward to more fuel-efficient airplanes and cars, or perhaps even models which run on biofuels (despite the fact that we are running out of land on which to grow our food).

As long understood by economists, however, energy efficiency does not lead to a reduction in energy use under Capitalism.

This sounds odd, but it is easily understood. For instance, the fuel-efficiency of cars has been increasing substantially over the last century,

but carbon emissions from cars have increased dramatically.

The reason is that increasing fuel-efficiency allows car companies to lower their prices (increasing demand), or to add new energy-guzzling features to their products in order to better compete with other companies: the result is a net increase in emissions.

The core principle of Capitalism—the drive for profit—is not compatible with the emission cutbacks required to prevent climate change, irrespective of technological developments.

This basic contradiction between the demands of the market and the requirements of the planet is expressed clearly in the hypocritical attitude of today’s leaders to air travel.

While Bertie Ahern and Gordon Brown both claim to be committed to fighting climate change, they are both overseeing the expansion of their country’s largest airports: Dublin Airport and London Heathrow. Gordon Brown’s stated target is a 60% reduction in carbon emissions by 2050.

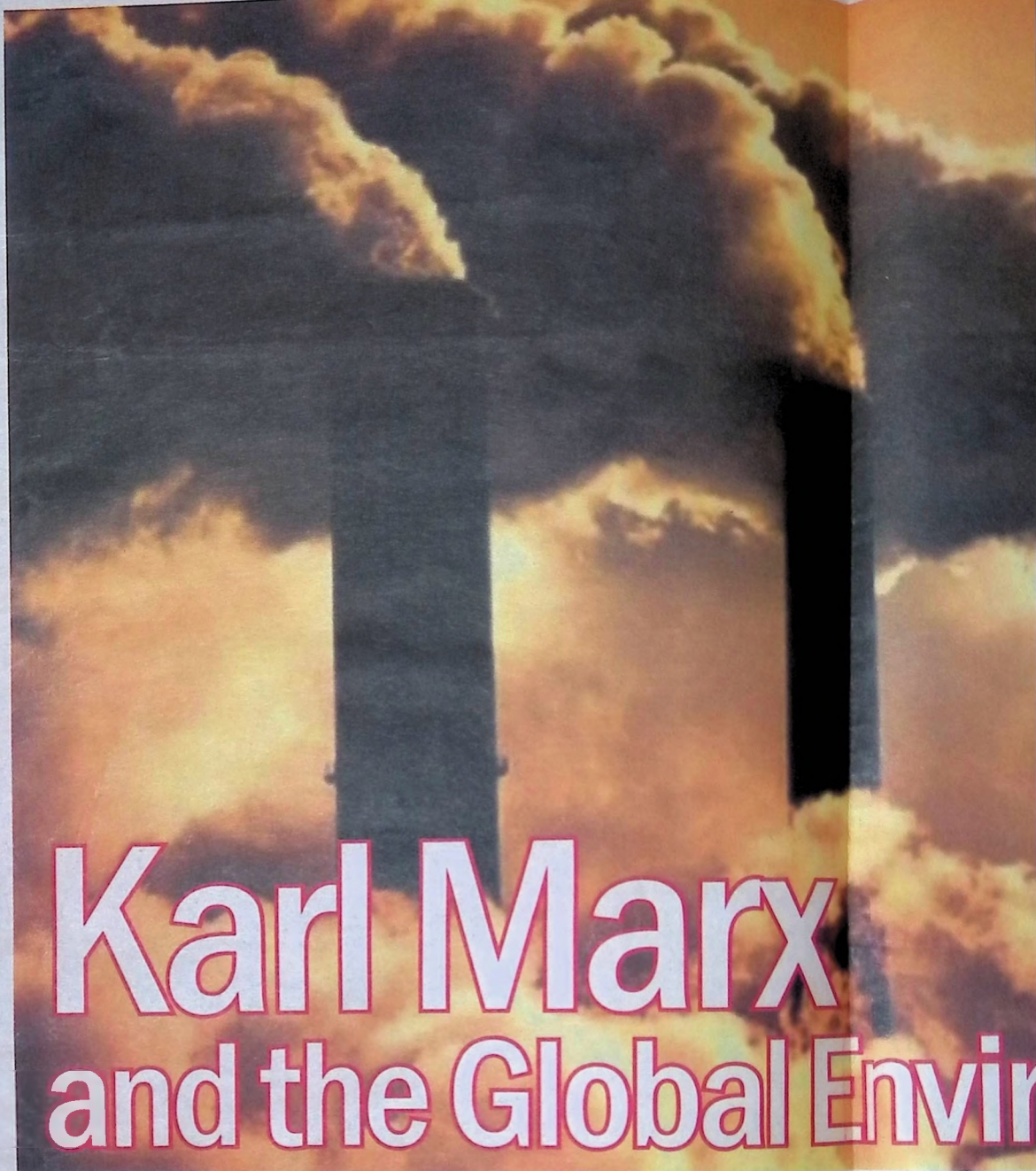
However, British emissions from air travel will amount to between 91 and 258% of this target in 2050, depending whose figures you believe.

Brown gets around this by excluding air travel from his carbon budget.

The solution to climate change is ultimately straightforward: we need to set a limit on our emissions, and divide this up fairly between the countries of the world.

But as the response to the problem so far has shown, this kind of restriction—and the kind of global co-operation required to implement it—is not possible under a market system.

This is no time for socialists to sit back and wait for the revolution, however—climate change makes it all the more urgent.



Karl Marx and the Global Environ

By JOHN BELLAMY FOSTER

ECOLOGY IS often seen as a recent invention. But the idea that capitalism degrades the environment in a way that disproportionately affects the poor and the colonized was already expressed in the nineteenth century in the work of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels.

Writing in *Capital* in 1867 on England’s ecological imperialism toward Ireland, Marx stated: “For a century and a half England has indirectly exported the soil of Ireland, without even allowing its cultivators the means for replacing the constituents of the exhausted soil.” Marx was drawing here on the work of the German chemist Justus von Liebig.

In the introduction to the seventh (1862) edition of his *Organic Chemistry in its Applications to Agriculture and Physiology* Liebig had argued that “Great Britain robs all countries of the conditions of their fertility” and singled out Britain’s systematic robbing of Ireland’s soil as a prime example.

For Liebig a system of production that took more from nature than it put back could be referred to as a “robbery system,” a term that he used to describe industrialized capitalist agriculture.¹

Following Liebig and other analysts of the nineteenth-century soil crisis, Marx argued that soil nutrients (nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium) were sent in the form of food and fiber sometimes hundreds and thousands of miles to the cities, where, instead of being recycled back to the land these nutrients ended up the polluting the urban centers, with disastrous results for human health.

Meanwhile, faced with an increasingly impoverished soil, Britain, as Liebig pointed out, imported bones from Napoleonic battlefields and from Roman catacombs together with guano from Peru in a desperate attempt to restore nutrients to the fields.

(Later on the invention of synthetic fertilizers was to help close the nutrient gap, but this was to lead to additional environmental problems, such as nitrogen runoff.)

In addressing these environmental issues Marx took over the concept of Stoffwechsel or metabolism from Liebig,² describing the ecological contradiction between nature and capitalist society as “an irreparable rift in the interdependent process of social metabolism.”

Indeed, “capitalist production,” Marx explained, “only develops the techniques and the degree of combination of the social process of production by simultaneously undermining the original sources of all wealth—the soil and the worker.”

This rift in the metabolic relation between humanity and nature could only be overcome, he argued, through the systematic “restoration” of the metabolism between humanity and nature “as a regulative law of social organization.”

But this required the rational regulation of the labor process (itself defined as the metabolic relation of human beings to nature) by the associated producers in line with the needs future generations.

“Even an entire society, a nation, or all simultaneously existing societies taken together,” Marx stated, “are not owners of the earth. They are simply its possessors, its beneficiaries, and have to bequeath it in an improved state to succeeding generations as *boni patres familias* [good heads

of the household].”³

Marx’s ecological discussions, coupled with those of Engels, therefore went well beyond the general understanding of his time.

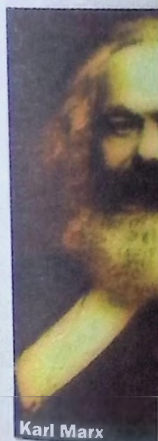
TODAY THE ecological issues that Marx and Engels addressed (albeit sometimes only in passing) read like a litany of many of our most pressing environmental problems: the division of town and country, the degradation of the soil, rural isolation and desolation, overcrowding in cities, urban wastes, industrial pollution, waste recycling in industry, the decline in nutrition and health, the crippling of workers, the squandering of natural resources (including fossil fuel in the form of coal), deforestation, floods, desertification, water shortages, regional climate change, conservation of energy, the dependence of species on changing environments, historically-conditioned overpopulation tendencies, and famine.

Marx saw the materialist conception of history as related to the materialist conception of nature, the science of history as related to the science of nature.

He filled his natural science notebooks with studies of geology, chemistry, agronomy, physics, biology, anthropology, and mathematics.

He attended the lectures at the Royal Institution in London of the Irish-born physicist John Tyndall.

Marx was fascinated by Tyndall’s experiments on radiant heat, including the differentiation of the sun’s rays.⁴ It is even possible that he was in the audience in the early 1860s when Tyndall presented results of his experiments demonstrating



Karl Marx

for the first time carbon dioxide v greenhouse effect heat within the pl

(No one at that time knew that the greenhouse carbon dioxide from fossil fuels might be a global climate change introduced until physicist Svante Arr

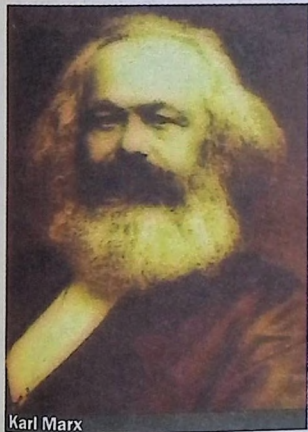
TODAY’S environmentalists are not the first to worry about global warming. In the early 1800s, physicist John Tyndall demonstrated that the greenhouse effect was a real phenomenon. Tyndall’s experiments on radiant heat, including the differentiation of the sun’s rays, showed that the earth’s atmosphere acts like a blanket, trapping heat. Tyndall’s work was a precursor to the modern understanding of global warming. Recent research

Marx Global Environmental Rift

household].²³ Marx's ecological discussions, contrary to those of Engels, therefore went beyond the general understanding time.

TODAY THE ecological issues that Marx and Engels addressed (albeit sometimes only in passing) read like a litany of many of our most pressing environmental problems: the division of town and country, the degradation of the soil, rural depopulation and desolation, overcrowding in cities, urban wastes, industrial pollution, the decline of recycling in industry, the crippling of nutrition and health, the squandering of natural resources (including fossil fuel in the form of deforestation, floods, desertification, drought, regional climate change, energy shortages, the dependence on fossil fuels), species on changing environments, agriculturally-conditioned overpopulation, diseases, and famine.

Marx saw the materialist conception of history as related to the materialist conception of nature, the science of history as related to the science of nature. He filled his natural science notebooks with studies of geology, chemistry, agriculture, physics, biology, anthropology, and mathematics. He attended the lectures at the Royal Institution in London of the Irish-born physicist John Tyndall. Marx was fascinated by Tyndall's experiments on radiant heat, including the differentiation of the sun's rays.²⁴ It is even possible that he was in the audience in the early 1860s when Tyndall presented the results of his experiments demonstrating



Karl Marx

for the first time that water vapor and carbon dioxide were associated with a greenhouse effect that helped to retain heat within the planet's atmosphere.

(No one at that time of course suspected that the greenhouse effect interacting with carbon dioxide from the human burning of fossil fuels might lead to human-generated global climate change—a hypothesis not introduced until 1896 by the Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius.)

TODAY THE dialectical understanding with regard to nature-society interactions that Marx and Engels embraced is increasingly forced on us all, as a result of an accelerating global ecological crisis, symbolized above all by global warming.

Recent research in environmental

sociology has applied Marx's theory of metabolic rift to contemporary ecological problems such as the fertilizer treadmill, the dying oceans, and climate change.

Writing on the social causes of the contemporary "carbon rift," stemming from the rapid burning up of fossil fuels, Brett Clark and Richard York have demonstrated that there is no magic cure for this problem outside of changes in fundamental social relations.

TECHNOLOGY IS unlikely substantially to alleviate the problem since gains in efficiency, according to what is known as the "Jevons Paradox" (named after William Stanley Jevons who wrote *The Coal Question* in 1865) lead invariably under capitalism to the expansion of production, the accompanying increases in the throughput of natural resources and energy, and more strains on the biosphere. "Technological development," Clark and York therefore conclude, "cannot assist in mending the carbon rift until it is freed from the dictates of capital relations."²⁵

The only genuine, i.e. sustainable, solution to the global environmental rift requires, in Marx's words, a society of "associated producers" who can "govern the human metabolism with nature in a rational way, bringing it under their collective control instead of being dominated by it as a blind power; accomplishing it with the least expenditure of energy and in conditions most worthy and appropriate for their human nature."²⁶

The goals of human freedom and ecological sustainability are thus inseparable and necessitate for their advancement the building of a socialism for the 21st

century.

Notes

1 Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1 (New York: Vintage, 1976), 860; John Bellamy Foster, *Marx's Ecology* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000), 164. See also Erlend Mårdal, "Everything Circulates: Agricultural Recycling Theories in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Environment and History*, vol. 8 (2002), 65-84.

2 As indicated in the editor's notes to the Penguin/Vintage edition of *Capital*, vol. 3: "Liebig is referred to several times in both this volume and Volume 1, and it seems that Marx took from Liebig the concept of metabolism (Stoffwechsel) that he applied there, suitably transformed, to the analysis of the labour process (Chapter 7)." In Karl Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3 (New York: Vintage, 1981), p. 878.

3 Foster, *Marx's Ecology*, 155-70. See also Paul Burkett, *Marx and Nature* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); Paul Burkett and John Bellamy Foster, "Metabolism, Energy, and Entropy in Marx's Critique of Political Economy," *Theory & Society*, vol. 35 (2006), 109-56.

4 Spencer R. Weart, *The Discovery of Global Warming* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 3-4; Y. M. Uranovsky, "Marxism and Natural Science," in Nikolai Bukharin, et al., *Marxism and Modern Thought* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co., 1935), p. 140. In 1865 Engels reported that a chemist that he had just met—probably Carl Schorlemmer, who was to become one Engels and Marx's closest friends, a Fellow of the Royal Society and the first individual in England to occupy a chair in organic chemistry—had explained to him Tyndall's "sunbeam experiment." See W. O. Henderson, *The Life of Friedrich Engels* (London: Frank Cass, 1976), vol. 1, p. 262.

5 Brett Clark and Richard York, "Carbon Metabolism: Global Capitalism, Climate Change, and the Biospheric Rift," *Theory & Society*, vol. 34 (2005), p. 419. For further work on the metabolic rift and global ecological crisis see Rebecca Clausen and Brett Clark, "The Metabolic Rift and Marine Ecology," *Organization & Environment*, vol. 18, no. 4 (2005), pp. 422-44; Philip Mancus, "Nitrogen Fertilizer Dependency and its Contradictions," *Rural Sociology*, vol. 72, no. 2 (June 2007).

6 Marx, *Capital*, vol. 3, p. 959.

Will it take a ban on flying to stop climate change?

Stopping global warming means cutting air travel. Jonathan Neale looks at how this could be done without targeting the poor

TACKLING CLIMATE change means cutting carbon emissions drastically. We have to start now – that's clear. But there's confusion over what to do about air travel.

Half of global carbon emissions come from seven sources – heating buildings, air conditioning, cars, trucks, petroleum refineries, cement plants and steel plants.

Air travel may seem less important right now. Planes are responsible for 3 percent of carbon emissions globally.

But air travel puts other, more powerful and rarer greenhouse gases directly into the stratosphere. It's the fastest growing carbon source.

It's true that planes now use 70 percent less fuel per mile than they did 40 years ago, and further design changes are possible. But that alone won't be enough.

One common answer starts by saying cheap flights are the problem – so tax them heavily, and fewer people will fly.

Sounds good. But then only the rich would fly. This is the problem with all green taxes.

There is always another solution that is fairer and cuts more emissions.

For instance, you can tax cars and roads heavily. Then only the rich will drive, and ordinary workers will hate environmentalists.

A better solution is to ban cars in cities and provide excellent public transport. Then you have beautiful cities where parks replace most roads.

Again, if you tax energy and make it expensive to heat houses, the poor and the elderly will freeze. And most people will hate environmentalists every time they open their bill.

But if the government gives grants to insulate every house, we can cut energy use from heating by more than half.



Arnold Schwarzenegger's California is building one million solar roofs. We could do the same in Ireland.

The way to stop global warming is almost always not to cut what we have, but to do things differently. So it is with air travel. Here are some social justice solutions that will work:

First, ban all flights in Europe. But don't make people give up their holidays. Instead have subsidised trains that prebook until they're full, like cheap flights.

We would need new train lines. Those trains will have to be publicly owned. Privately owned railways invest less, cut the number of trains and raise the ticket prices.

What about longer flights? One answer is to ban expensive flights, not cheap ones. Luxury transatlantic seats create four to five times as much carbon.

But much more important, much long haul travel is done by business people. There are not so many of them, but each makes many flights.

The solution is rationing. Let people have one long flight a year. But don't let them sell that ration – they use it or lose it. The business people can teleconference.

With new railways, that means more travel, more holidays, and less carbon emissions. And if we cover the world with wind farms and solar power, we can run the railways on almost carbon free electricity.

These kinds of massive public works that create jobs and

improve people's standard of living is what will stop climate change.

Otherwise, activists lay themselves open to the right. Look what Tony Blair said about air travel. He claimed his hands were tied because ordinary people wanted their holidays, and would never stand for airport cuts.

In reality right wing governments build new airports to please business travellers.

Blair posed as the working people's champion because he could smell the weakness in green taxes – they're unfair.

We have to build a global mass movement to stop climate change. Time is short, and nothing less will work.

We can't build that movement by asking ordinary people to sacrifice when the rich don't.

In almost every area where we have to act on climate change, there is a choice. The conservative answer is to keep the economy the same. Then we have to cut living standards.

The radical answer is to change the way the economy is organised, so we can have both growth and fairness.

None of this means we wait for the new railways before we shut down runways.

We have to fight for both, now.

Jonathan Neale's book *Stop Global Warming: Change the World* will be published by Bookmarks in next year.

The Campaign against Climate Change has called a national demonstration on Saturday 8 December, part of a global day of action involving more than 60 countries. For more go to www.campaigncc.org

We reprint extracts from **Michael Löwy's** essay from the 2007 *Socialist Register* dealing with the environment and socialist planning.

Michael Löwy is research director in sociology at the CNRS (National Center for Scientific Research) in Paris. In 2001, with Joel Kovel, he wrote the *Ecosocialist Manifesto*. Löwy is the author of many books, including *Fatherland or Mother Earth?*

Ecology, socialism and planning

THE AIM of socialism is a new society based on ecological rationality, democratic control, social equality, and the predominance of human need over profit making. This aim requires: a) collective ownership of the means of production,—“collective” here meaning public, cooperative or communitarian property; b) democratic planning that makes it possible for society to define the goals of investment and production, and c) a new technological structure of the productive forces. In other words: a revolutionary social and economic transformation.

For socialists, the problem with the politics of the Green Parties, is that they do not seem to take into account the intrinsic contradiction between the capitalist dynamics of unlimited expansion of capital and accumulation of profits, and the preservation of the environment. They don't go beyond an ecologically-reformed “market economy”. The result has been that many Green Parties have become the ecological alibi of neoliberal governments.

The logic of insatiable growth is built into the nature of the system, the requirements of capitalist production. Each corporation, acting rationally from the standpoint of the owners and employees seeking to maximize their own self-interest, makes individually rational capitalist decisions. But the result is that in the aggregate, these individual rational decisions are massively irrational, indeed ultimately catastrophic, and they are driving us down the road to collective suicide.

If capitalism can't be reformed to subordinate profit to human survival, what alternative is there but to move to some sort of nationally and globally planned economy? Problems like climate change require the “visible hand” of direct planning.

The whole productive system must be transformed, and this can be done only through a democratic planning of the economy which takes into account the preservation of the ecological equilibrium.

Planning means destructive industries would be stopped. For instance, nuclear plants, certain methods of mass/industrial fishing (responsible for the extermination of several species in the seas), the destructive logging of tropical forests, the arms industry, advertising etc.

Solar energy, which never got much interest in capitalist societies, not being “profitable” nor “competitive”, would become the object of intensive research and development, and play a key role in the building of an alternative energetic system.

It would also mean full employment, in equal conditions of work and wage. This condition is essential, not only because it is a requirement of social justice, but in order to assure the workers support for the process of structural transformation of the productive forces.

Planning and the reduction of labor time are the two decisive steps of humanity towards what Marx called “the kingdom of freedom”. A significant increase of free time is in fact a condition for the democratic participation of the working people in the democratic discussion and management of economy and of society.

The socialist conception of planning is nothing else but the radical democratization of economy, if political decisions are not to be left for a small elite of rulers, why should not the same principle apply to economic ones?

In a rationally organised production, the plan concerns the main economic options, not the administration of local

restaurants, groceries and bakeries, small shops, artisan enterprises or services.

It is important to emphasize that planning is not contradictory with workers self-management of their productive units. While the decision to transform an auto-plant into one producing buses and trams is taken by society as a whole, through the plan, the internal organization and functioning of the plant is to be democratically managed by its own workers.

There has been much discussion on the “centralised” or “decentralised” character of planning, but it could be argued that the real issue is democratic control of the plan, on all its levels: local, regional, national, continental and, hopefully, international. Ecological issues such as global warming are planetary and can be dealt with only on a global scale. One could call this proposition *global democratic planning*; it is quite the opposite of what is usually described as “central planning”, since the economic and social decisions are not taken by any “center”, but democratically decided by the concerned population.

Of course, there will inevitably be tensions and contradictions between self-managed establishments or local democratic administrations, and broader groups of “concerned people”. Mechanisms of negotiation can help to solve much of such conflicts, but ultimately those directly concerned, if they are the majority, have the right to impose their views.

Socialist planning is therefore grounded on a democratic and pluralist debate, on all the levels where decisions are to be taken. Different propositions are submitted to the concerned people, in the form of parties, platforms, or any other political movements, and delegates are accordingly elected.

However, representative democracy

must be completed—and corrected—by direct democracy, where people directly choose—at the local, national and, later, global level—between major options: should public transportation be free? Should the owners of private cars pay special taxes to subsidize public transportation? Should sun-produced energy be subsidized, in order to compete with fossil energy? Should the weekly work hours be reduced to 30, 25 or less, even if this means a reduction of production?

The democratic nature of planning is not contradictory with the existence of experts, but their role is not to *decide*, but to present their views—often different, if not contradictory—to the population, and let it choose the best solution.

Some ecologists believe that the only alternative to productivism is to *stop growth* altogether, or to replace it by negative growth and drastically reduce the excessively high level of consumption of the population by cutting by half the expenditure of energy, by renouncing to individual houses, to central heating, to washing machines, etc.

The issue is not “excessive consumption” in abstract, but the prevalent *type* of consumption, based as it is on conspicuous appropriation, massive waste, obsessive accumulation of goods, and the compulsive acquisition of pseudo-novelty imposed by “fashion”. A new society would orient production towards the satisfaction of authentic needs, beginning with those which could be described as basic—water, food, clothing, housing—but including also the basic services: health, education, transport, culture.

Socialism is based on a wager, which was already Marx's: the predominance, in a society without classes and liberated of capitalist alienation, of “being” over “having”, i.e. of *free time* for the

personal accomplishment by cultural, sportive, playful, scientific, erotic, artistic and *political* activities, rather than the desire for an infinite possession of products.

Obviously, the countries of the South, where these needs are very far from being satisfied, will need a much higher level of “development”. But there is no reason why this cannot be done in an environment-friendly way based on renewable energies. Agriculture based of family-units, cooperatives or collectivized farms, can be as efficient as the destructive and anti-social methods of industrialized agro-business, based on the intensive use of pesticides, chemicals and GMOs.

Instead of the present monstrous debt-system, and the imperialist exploitations of the resources of the South by the industrial/capitalist countries, there would be a flow of technical and economic help from the North to the South.

All this does not mean that one does not fight for concrete and urgent reforms. Without any illusions on a “clean capitalism”, one must try to win time, and to impose, on the powers that be, some elementary changes: the banning of the HCFCs that are destroying the ozone layer, a general moratorium on genetically modified organisms, a drastic reduction in the emission of the greenhouse gases, the development of public transportation, the taxation of polluting cars, the progressive replacement of trucks by trains, a severe regulation of the fishing industry, as well as of the use of pesticides and chemicals in the agro-industrial production. These, and similar issues, are at the heart of the agenda of the Global Justice movement.

But it is only a revolutionary transformation of current system that can save the planet.

DAHR JAMAIL INTERVIEW

Iraq occupation in the eye of the storm

One of the few independent journalists to report from inside Iraq, Dahr Jamail spoke to Socialist Worker about the reality behind US claims of success in its 'surge'



THE US military are claiming that the "surge" of 30,000 troops in Iraq has stabilised the occupation. Is this true?

The propaganda campaign which is being pushed by most of the establishment media in the US has now assumed is that the so-called surge is working.

The line goes something like, "People are returning to their homes in Baghdad, fewer people are dying", and so on.

It is true that there are fewer US soldiers are being killed – in May this year 131 US troops were killed, October this dropped to 40 – but we're not told why.

There are fewer military patrols being run, and the US has bought off much of the resistance in the mainly Sunni Muslim al-Anbar province in western Iraq and the capital Baghdad. Meanwhile rebel Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr has declared a ceasefire.

There has also been a huge escalation in the use of air strikes.

There is less violence in the capital because we're seeing the endgame of the US-backed sectarian death squads. With Baghdad we need to consider the fact that one million of the six million who lived there have fled.

As of 1 October 2007 Syria, the last country to allow Iraqis unrestricted entry, has imposed tough new visa restrictions.

People are also returning from both Syria and Jordan because their savings are running out.

There are now over one million who have been killed, three million wounded, over five million displaced, and four million in need of some emergency assistance.

That means that over half the population of the country are either



Top: Troops outside the Green Zone; above: Dahr Jamail

'There is less violence in the capital because we're seeing the endgame of the US-backed sectarian death squads.'

displaced, wounded, in need of emergency assistance, or dead.

Why are sections of the mainly Sunni resistance now co-operating with the US?

Several tribal sheikhs, mostly in the al-Anbar province, have agreed to take US cash to order their fighters to stand-down.

It is a classic example of divide and rule. The US is now arming and backing Sunni resistance groups, while supporting the predominantly Shia government in Baghdad. It is a ticking time bomb.

Why did Muqtada al-Sadr call a ceasefire?

His Mehdi militia had been heavily infiltrated by criminal gangs, and "foreign elements" which led to generating strife with rival groups.

He called a six month stand-down to rebuild his militia, to vet members, and weed out the undesirable elements.

How deep is the sectarian divide in Iraq, and how serious are moves to divide the country?

The sectarian divide is a result of the US policy to "divide and conquer".

We cannot underestimate the impact of the sectarian death squads – orchestrated by John Negroponte while he was US ambassador to Iraq and facilitated by colonel James Steele, the "Counsellor for Iraqi Security Affairs".

Negroponte and Steele launched their death squads in November 2004 and controlled them through the Iraqi ministry of interior.

They funded, armed and backed them in a similar way that they ran

death squads in Central America in the 1980s. This is the key element in the US plan to divide the country.

Then of course we have the overt attempts to stoke divisions. The White House has been praising Iraqi premier Nouri al-Maliki for his progress towards the "soft-partition" of the country.

What are your reports on life for ordinary people in Iraq?

There is no ordinary life. On all levels the basic infrastructure in Iraq is far worse than before the invasion.

Unemployment is between 60 to 70 percent, the average home has only up to five hours of electricity a day, there are ongoing gas shortages, and 70 percent of Iraqis do not have access to drinkable water.

Over half the medical workers have fled the country, and the situation in the hospitals is worse today than it was than during the punitive United Nations sanctions following the first Gulf War in 1991.

The occupation of Iraq is a complete catastrophe, and one could easily argue that is the result of a genocidal policy conducted by the current Bush administration, the former Clinton administrations, and the Bush senior administration before that.

This is a bipartisan war against Iraq by successive US administrations that has spanned decades and resulted in the destruction of the country.

Beyond the Green Zone: Dispatches from an Unembedded Journalist in Occupied Iraq, by Dahr Jamail is published by Haymarket Books.

For his dispatches from the Middle East go to www.dahrjamail.org

Should we take sides between Bush and Ahmedinajad?

By NAZ MOSSOUMI,
Iranian socialist

THE US is pushing for the UN security council to impose tougher sanctions on Iran in an attempt to lay the justification for an attack.

These sanctions are an attempt to isolate Iran internationally as part of a series of steps to pave the way for military action.

They come on the back of already existing US financial sanctions and Gordon Brown's call for tougher sanctions at his Mansion house speech to business men. This follows Condeleeza Rice's categorisation of Iran's revolutionary guards (the biggest wing of Iran's military) as a 'terrorist' organisation. The first time part of a sovereign state's military categorised as a terrorist organisation and widely seen as a legal cover for war. And more frighteningly, it appears as 2,500 US marines, nuclear powered aircraft carrier and a nuclear submarine stationed in the Persian gulf.

It's a bit rich suggesting Iran is a threat when it has not invaded another country for over 250 years and is a signatory of the Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is surrounded by nuclear states – India, Pakistan and Israel (none of them signatories of the NPT, but no calls for sanctions there) – and of course the US who occupies Iran's neighbours and is the only country to have ever used nuclear weapons. In fact, Vladimir Putin was accurate when he likened Bush, and not Ahmadinejad, to a 'madman with a razor blade.'

In fact, John Powell, Tony Blair's ex chief of staff went as far as saying recently that a nuclear-armed Iran would be tolerable were it not for its un-democratic regime. As opposed to Musharraf's undemocratic, nuclear-armed Pakistan maybe. So in the same trajectory as the Iraq war, the focus has now shifted as late from Iran's nuclear weapons programme to the issue of Iran's human rights record.

Unfortunately, this demonisation and scare-mongering is not limited to the mainstream media. Some who consider themselves on the left paint a similar view of Iran, calling for condemnation of the Iranian regime alongside our resistance to Bush's wars. This a badly mistaken position, if not a seriously dangerous one.

There is no doubt that there is repression and human rights abuses in Iran. Iran is far more complex than the distorted, monolithic image we are led to believe. And its not like Iranian leaders are getting the red carpet treatment bestowed by Gordon Brown upon pro-Western countries like Saudi royals where human and democratic rights are far more repressed. For example, Iranian women make up 65% of university students, 80%



Iranian leader Ahmedinajad

of teachers and 60% of civil servants. Saudi Arabia is a country where women aren't even permitted to drive and where recently a woman was sentenced to 200 lashes after being gang-raped.

Not that the US or Britain's human rights record is any better. No one asks about the human rights of the estimated 600,000 Iraqis who have perished, and possibly up to 1.2 million according to a recent report, as a result of the Iraq war.

In any case, Iranians are already in the process of fighting for change through a vibrant democracy movement (also known as the reform movement), led initially by women and students and now including organised workers, standing in a rich history of struggles from below.

But at every point these struggles have been reversed or suffocated by foreign intervention. Most notably in the 1952 British/CIA-led coup that replaced the democratically-elected Prime Minister Dr Mossadegh with the Shah's military dictatorship and in Western support for Saddam Hussain's invasion of Iran in 1980, in response to the Iranian revolution which democratically overthrew that dictatorship.

The movement has now suffered setbacks in the increasingly hostile climate of US threats of military strikes. In an atmosphere reminiscent of the suffocating conditions during Iran's devastating eight year war with Iraq, conservative elements have strengthened their hand, using threats of an impending war to quell dissent as pointed out by leading activists like the human rights lawyer and Nobel Peace winner Shirin Ebadi.

Calls for regime change (however coated in anti-war slogans) only re-enforce a pro-war argument – that Iranians are incapable of fighting for change themselves. Iran's democracy movement, and historic struggles, prove the opposite of this colonial mindset. The only assistance they need from us is to remove the threats that at best are suffocating their struggles now and at worse could subject it to the death and destruction of neighbouring Iraq.

Whatever your view of the Iranian government, we must come together on what we agree on – that a war would be catastrophic for its people and the region and only united can we prevent it.

EDITORIAL:

IRISH ECONOMY:

Rough times ahead?

By KEVIN WINGFIELD

THE IRISH stock market fell dramatically again in November—down by a third since the beginning of the year. This, and other indicators, suggest the economy is in for a lean time.

In reality, the Celtic Tiger economy ended five years ago. From 1990 to 2002 the volume of Irish exports quadrupled. Since then export growth has become largely stalled. What has been driving the economy along over recent years has been the housing bubble and finance.

Construction and banking are intimately tied to the housing market. Housing construction represents 15% of the Irish economy, three times that of most other countries.

And Irish banks and financial institutions are closely connected with mortgages and other housing loans, even before the unwinding of the US sub-prime crisis is taken into account.

It is investor fears of a serious downturn in these sectors and its knock-on effect for the economy as a whole which lies behind the November crash.

The housing bubble bursts

UCD economist Morgan Kelly published a report in April this year which studied previous housing boom-busts over the past 30 years in advanced economies*. Remember property prices rose by 251% in Ireland in the ten-year period from 1997 to 2007.

Morgan found, "Typically, real house prices give up 70 per cent of what they gained in a boom during the bust that follow." For Ireland, Morgan notes, "[This] would predict a fall in real house prices of around 40 to 60 per cent, over a period of 8 or 9 years.

"Assuming an inflation rate of 2 per cent, this would translate into an annual fall of average selling prices of 6 to 7 per cent."

This scenario has three major effects: First: The high prices of houses today make it less and less profitable for investors to buy new houses to let. At the moment, the rents that can be achieved scarcely cover mortgage interest, and without the prospect of continuing capital gains on property as prices fall, millionaire landlords will be less and less inclined to buy houses to let. This reduced demand will cause construction industry lay-offs and bankruptcies (The collapse of the major Irish firm, Midland Construction, looks like a harbinger of what is to come).

Secondly falling prices will make it less profitable to build houses so the construction industry will slow further, laying off more workers.

Thirdly, householders struggling to pay-off mortgages who get into difficulty, will find the price their house can attract on the market will not cover the outstanding mortgage. This exposes the bank to more and more unrecoverable debts and devalued assets. (This is an echo of the sub-prime crisis in the US and in Finland at the start of the 1980s, where bad housing loans caused a collapse in the banking system.)

Even where householders own their homes, their declining values cause people to borrow and spend less, causing the economy to further slow down. The remarkable feature of the past few years has been a mushrooming of consumer debt which is only now moderating.

Morgan prediction that this would take 8 or 9 years to work through implies a long-time dead weight on the Irish economy.

There are further indications that Irish capitalists are expecting a downturn in the economy including recent employment figures.

The overwhelming majority of new jobs are part-time—a clear indication that employers have no confidence to offer full-time permanent jobs, but rather employ people they can sack easily.

All this takes place in the context of a falling dollar. An already funny-money based US boom has increasingly turned to dust after the sub-prime crisis and the continuing credit crunch.

The US economy is running enormous trade deficits by historical standards (\$56.6 billion in September) and the Federal Reserve has been cutting interest rates in a desperate attempt to keep the economy afloat. As a result, the US dollar is in free fall, hitting record lows of €1.48 against the euro in November.

The effects for Ireland are serious

Describing the US economy as "in a mess", Irish businessman, chairman of BP and Goldman Sachs International, Peter Sutherland said recently on TV3: "The situation makes it more difficult for Ireland to sell in dollar-denominated markets while productivity becomes a major issue for multinational operations based here."

"Productivity" is boss-speak for more flexible workers, more work for below inflation pay rises, etc.

This was a theme Finance Minister Brian Cowen echoed in a speech to the American Chamber of Commerce on Thanksgiving Day where he said the Irish government is committed to a "modern flexible environment" to secure competitive conditions for business.

Nobody can predict with confidence the exact short term outlook for the economy. But it seems highly probable that we are facing a severe economic downturn, and, as they have already made clear, our rulers will be seeking to make working class people pay the cost. Our side needs to be ready to make sure they don't get away with it.

*On the Likely Extent of Falls in Irish House Prices" by Morgan Kelly, www.ucd.ie/economics/staff/mkelly/papers/housing.pdf

Hype, hysteria and a high society



Cocaine has developed a "cool" drug image

By BRENDAN O'DONOGHUE, community drugs worker in Dublin 8

THE RECENT epidemic of cocaine related articles in the Irish Times point to something happening in the top echelons of Irish society. Cocaine is now being recognised as a "problem" in Ireland.

The controversy over the "high society" documentary (and matching book to follow up, eager punters) has stuck coke onto the front pages of the most respectable papers.

The allegation that Justine Delaney had a minister on record admitting using cocaine and that shock horror other respectable members of society also had been sniffing the devil's dandruff has got the knickers of Geraldine Kennedy's organ in a right twist. The did he/didn't the saga rumbles on.

Taking into account that some of the side effects of overuse of cocaine are talking shite, displaying arrogance and not caring about the people around you, is it not plausible that most ministers in this FF/PD/Green government are out of their collective minds on cocaine?

The hospitalisation of a number of young people in Waterford after a party led to a similar frenzy in the tabloids with wild and untrue stories of adulterated cocaine being

responsible printed. The "concern" for these young peoples health was best demonstrated by the disgusting picture of a young man on life support machine being printed on a front page. Something I'm sure was done in the "public interest" and not merely profit driven.

Amid all this hype it is hard to actually find out any facts about cocaine and separate them from fiction.

For approximately 10 years cocaine in powder form has become widely available in Ireland. The price has dropped (as has quality). The increase has occurred for various reasons, the booming economy of the Celtic Tiger has provided a ready market and production has been on the increase in Latin America leading to a glut in supply.

Cocaine has an image (unlike heroin) of a cool, sexy, harmless drug. It's a stimulant that makes you more alert and sociable. For 95% of recreational cocaine users it will pose no serious threat other than threatening to turn you into an arrogant gobshite.

For the other 5% though, things can be different for a variety of reasons. If you are an intravenous drug user you risk doing serious damage to your veins. Cocaine can also exacerbate already (unknown) vascular defects bringing on strokes and heart attacks in otherwise healthy young people.

Overuse can lead to weight loss, insomnia, depression and psychosis. Most cocaine users will also use other drugs, mainly alcohol with cocaine and this produces further risks.

Adulteration also increases the danger. Dealers seeking to maximise profits and will mix cocaine with various agents to "bulk" up their product. Normally these additives will not be harmful but in a tight spot dealers will also use whatever is available.

It is ironic that the Waterford tragedy seemed to arise from the opposite case, the cocaine used was very damp, this would indicate that it had not been "cut" as would normally happen and therefore would be very potent. This coupled with the fact that a lot was taken and probably accompanied with alcohol may explain this tragedy.

For a user of cocaine who is concerned about their habit, help and advice is available if required. Class however will play a big role in the speed and quality of that care. For working class users there is the option of linking into their (underfunded) local community drugs project.

For the middle class user there are a raft of dubious private addiction clinics who will welcome their client's chequebooks with open arms. Facing into a recession it is likely that the former projects will be facing cutbacks whilst the

latter will receive tax breaks.

Cocaine will also affect neighbourhoods differently depending on their class. In working class areas cocaine can cause havoc. The lure of easy money for kids with few other options can prove fatal. Young men attracted by the allure of street cred and a gangster lifestyle are sucked into a machine that chews them up and spits them out.

These young dealers are pawns for both dealers and the Gardai and are expendable. The young men using coke and steroids have access to guns.

Paranoia that other dealers are informing on them is rife (and true). Larger dealers under pressure from the Gardai to get a result will tip the cops off about a stash. The result is the Gardai claim some kudos, the pressure drops off a big dealer and another working class kid graduates to Mountjoy.

The illegal status of certain drugs also cause problems. Legalisation of all drugs would not be a panacea to the problems that they can cause, but you would remove huge profits from parasites who feed on misery.

If all current illicit drugs were subjected to rigorous testing it would seriously curtail drug related deaths and drug use problems would be considered a health matter and not a law and order one as it is currently.

Facts about cocaine use:

107 tonnes seized in Europe 2005

The average age of user 15-34

4.5million Europeans using cocaine in 2006 (up a million since 2005)

"Cocaine is now after Cannabis the second most commonly used illicit drug in many EU member states and in Europe as a whole"

source: European Monitoring centre for drugs and drug addiction

COMMENT

The neo-colonialism of the EU's Economic Partnership Agreements

by **ANDY STOREY**,
lecturer UCD Development Studies Dept

THE EU is very keen on ensuring other countries open their doors to European service sector exporters, as evidenced by requests (tabled by the EU in 2002) under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) to 109 countries. Each such request involved asking the government of the country concerned to open certain, specified service sectors up to competition from EU firms.

The requests largely originated from the European Services Forum, a European business lobby group.

The EU was targeting some of the poorest countries in the world in its pursuit of services market access, and it was specifically targeting countries where non-market based delivery systems were working well, precisely because such not-for-profit systems limited the commercial opportunities available to European exporters.

This story says much about the EU's claim to be a 'development-friendly' power.

The EU is now seeking to sign Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with African, Caribbean and Pacific countries: these would involve abolition of trade barriers between Europe and the poorer countries concerned, as well as a variety of other provisions.

The ACP countries previously had enjoyed privileged, non-reciprocal access to EU markets.

Under EPAs, negotiated with regional groupings of ACP states, there is supposed to be a rapid transition towards reciprocal free trade.

These EPAs are likely to have a number of negative consequences for ACP countries, including:

- Loss of tariff revenue – as the ACP states dismantle trade barriers, their revenue bases will be eroded. For example, the Gambia might lose 20% of its total government revenue.

- Impediments to regional integration – by entering into regional deals with the EU, countries may be forced to choose between their neighbours in terms of economic ties.

For example, Tanzania will be part of a Southern Africa EPA, thus undermining the emerging East Africa Community of Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda (Kenya and Uganda are opting for an East African bloc).

- The 'locking in' of neoliberal economic policies.

For example the EU is insisting that ACP countries open up public procurement contracts to European companies and fully expose their service sectors to potentially ruinous European competition.

And they are demanding that this liberalisation be introduced with minimum delay despite the misgivings

of the ACP governments and many other observers.

The EU Commission is now proposing that if complete EPAs cannot be signed by the end of this year (the original deadline), then poor countries will be asked to sign up to 'first stage' deals involving commitment to free up trade in goods.

Particularly contentious issues – including service sector, procurement and investment liberalization – would be deferred for negotiation until 2008. At one level this is to be welcomed as the EU should never have been trying to impose economic liberalization on other countries.

But there are at least three significant problems with the current Commission stance.

First, the Commission is proposing that any 'first stage' deal would include so-called 'rendezvous' clauses committing the signatories to moves towards the Commission's position on the liberalization of public procurement, service sector activity and foreign investment.

Thus, the apparent gain of having taken these matters off the table would be subverted by getting poor countries to bind themselves to long-term Commission objectives.

Second, countries that do not sign up the 'first stage' deals may find themselves facing higher tariffs for their products on EU markets from 1st January 2008.

The Commission is using this possibility to strong-arm countries into signing deals, but the EU has options available to it to ensure that no country suffer increased tariffs on its products – it is just cynically choosing not to deploy them.

As spokespersons for Christian Aid and Traidcraft have stated, "the spurious insistence on a December deadline [is] staggeringly disingenuous".

Third, the Commission is claiming that if a region does not sign up to a deal, then it should be open to an individual country to do so.

This is another disingenuous negotiating tactic designed to have as many deals as possible in place by the end of the year.

The effect of such 'divide and rule' stratagems could be to undermine regional cooperation in Africa and elsewhere and set poor countries at each others' throats.

A huge range of activists and concerned commentators (see www.stopepa.org) is rejecting the Commission's approach and demanding that there are no 'rendezvous' clauses in any 'first stage' EPAs signed; that no producer suffer higher tariffs on EU markets from 1st January next regardless of whether deals are signed or not; and that regional cooperation amongst poor countries is not undermined by 'divide and rule' stratagems.

INTERNATIONAL NEWS

France rises up against neo-liberalism



The student movement in France has made links with workers fighting neoliberalism

Pictures: Phototheque Rouge/JMB

By **DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH**

A MAJOR battle is underway in France. Sarkozy and his right wing government have launched a wave of attacks on workers and students.

He has managed to unite the right and his presidency is based on a promise to break the power of the unions.

Sarkozy's agenda sums up the vision for Europe contained in the new EU Treaty. European employers want to degrade living and working conditions under the slogans of increased 'flexibility' and 'competitiveness'.

They want to make people work longer hours and for more years

before they retire.

They also want to dismantle the welfare state and pension rights.

The riots in Paris are also a response to neo-liberalism. Dumped on the edge of the city and then abused with police violence and racism, young people have responded with riots.

Workers have also fought back magnificently – railway workers struck for two weeks, teachers, nurses, solicitors, magistrates, post workers, gas and electricity workers, fishermen and civil servants have also taken action, along with ballet dancers, actors and stagehands at both Paris opera houses and the Comédie-Française theatre.

On Tuesday 20 November 700,000 people marched in the national demonstration in Paris.

This movement was joined by action by school and university students against the LRU law to introduce privatisation into higher education.

Students closed more than half of France's universities.

The lazy coverage of November's strikes in the Irish media has made much of France's "bloated public sector".

No journalist mentions that France gave 15 billion euros in tax breaks to the rich, three times what it paid out this year on the special pension schemes.

The strikers have also had to

wage their fight in the teeth of opposition from the leaderships of both the Socialist Party – France's equivalent of the Labour Party – and the trade unions.

Sarkozy admitted last week that he is looking to co-opt union leaders to push through attacks on public sector workers.

"The special pension schemes are the aperitif," his spokesperson said. "For the other reforms we will need responsible trade unions."

Sarkozy is opposed by significant forces that can turn anger into effective action.

But to win, the movement will also have to develop the political means to challenge its own leadership.

LCR: 'We need to build a political alternative to the neoliberal parties'

By **FRANÇOIS DUVAL**, Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire

THE CURRENT wave of industrial disputes in France takes place less than six months after the election of the right wing Nicolas Sarkozy as president. It shows that the French working class is still up for a fight, despite its recent election defeat.

Sarkozy's slogan "work more to earn more" has turned out to be a false promise – people are working harder, but they certainly aren't earning any more.

The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) has been deeply involved with the movement, as both a network of grassroots activists and as a political party.

We have tried to broaden out the strikes and demos, linking the railway workers' struggle to that of all workers against pensions "reforms". During this struggle we

have had to confront not just the government, right wing parties and the bosses, but also the "left wing" that have accepted neoliberal ideas.

The parliamentary left has been unable to give any leadership to the movement because it shares the right's analysis and proposes the same "solutions" as them.

That's why so many people think it's time for a genuine left political answer.

The LCR is committed to the project of building a new broad anti-capitalist party in France, one that is involved in and supports the social resistance against the neoliberal offensive.

This party would regroup

all those who want a radical change in society – political currents, activist groups and individuals who no longer trust the Socialist Party or its allies, such as the Communists and the Greens.

Olivier Besancenot, postal worker and the LCR's presidential candidate earlier this year, has launched an appeal to create this new political party.

Meetings will take place in towns and workplaces all across France to debate this idea. The LCR's national congress will meet at the end of January to decide.

This battle for a new anti-capitalist party is not just a French concern. In every country, the left has to find its own way to reorganise and build alternatives to the neoliberal parties.

Because now more and more people agree with our slogan – "Our lives are more valuable than their profits!"



The LCR's Olivier Besancenot addressing a rally last month

Selling Shyness: The Pill For Happiness

Kieran Allen reviews *Shyness: How Normal Behaviour Became a Sickness* by Christopher Lane, Yale University Press

MOST PEOPLE can probably recall times of extreme shyness. I certainly remember bouts of tremendous anxiety about going

to school.

My tummy muscles tightened and I experienced a fear of being 'left out' or mocked or slagged. In those dreary days when priests with swishing soutans ruled our town, I suppose I was regarded as a 'shy boy'.

Those experiences are not altogether unusual. Apparently, shyness is now so common that 42 percent of American children exhibit it. Instead of fading away with age, it is, according to one academic study, increasing. By the time, US teenagers reach college 51 percent of men and 43 percent of women describe themselves as shy or introverted.

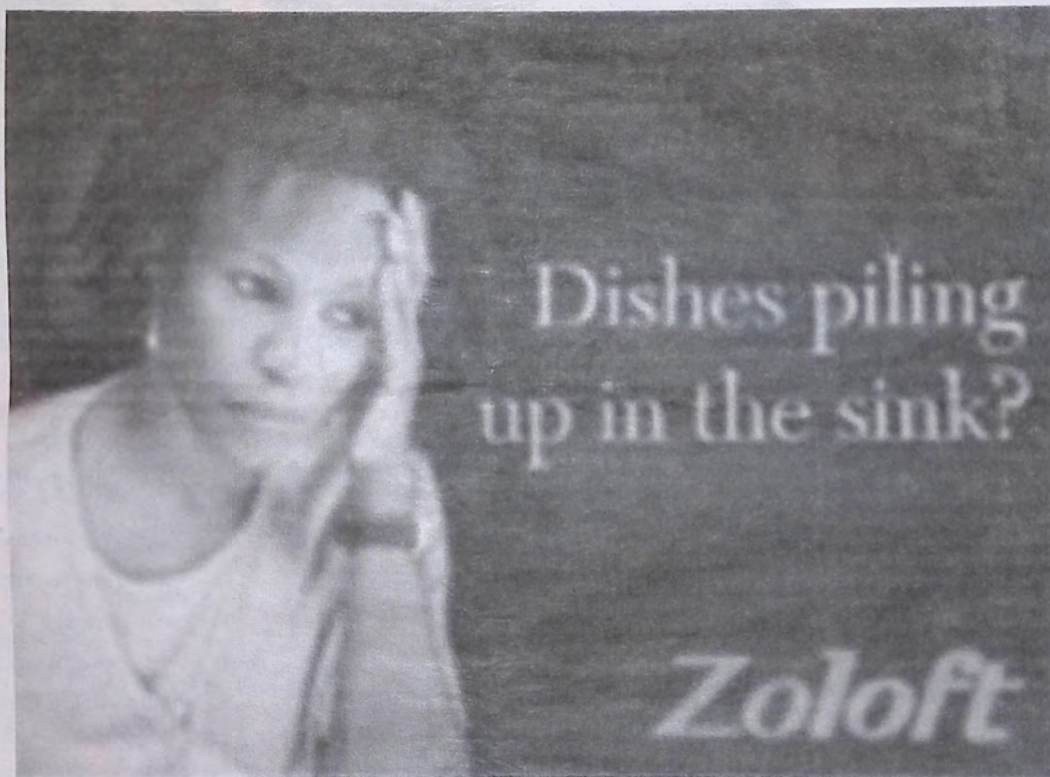
The relationship between the individual personality and our society is highly complex. A recognition that we live in the eyes of others and that their consciousness forms part of our lives creates an important dialectic in the development of the personality. It would be churlish to suggest that how we handle the 'I and How Others see my I' can be read off from the nature of modern capitalism. There is after all, as many artists insist, a 'human condition'.

But the twisted inhumane logic of capitalism intrudes into areas where you would least expect it to appear. Christopher Lane's description of how a normal human condition called shyness has been turned into a sickness shows exactly why. It is a horrifying story of how the mundane workings of the pharmaceutical industry and a new reductionist form of psychiatry is creating drug dependency on a vast scale.

The key textbook for the modern psychiatrist is the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM). This will be found in virtually every surgery in the world and its list of user-friendly symptoms will be consulted to define psychiatric disorders.

The DSM has gone through four editions from 1952 to 1994. Although the psychic life of humanity may have changed somewhat, the number of reported disorders has risen dramatically from 121 in the second edition in 1968 to over 350 in the 1994 edition. Interestingly, the first and second edition of the DSM also defined homosexuality as a disorder – but that was later revised.

In 1980, the third edition of



A serious problem with modern psychiatry is a reductionist thinking that sees a 'disorder' as a definite thing which can then be located in a certain part of the brain.

the DSM suggested that a person could receive a diagnosis of 'social phobia' and the symptoms included being afraid of eating alone in restaurants, avoiding public toilets and concern about hand trembling when writing cheques. A further revised third edition expanded the symptoms to include an anticipated concern about saying the wrong thing.

With these rather low thresholds for slotting into a mental disorder category, shyness was well on the way to becoming a medical condition.

Enter the modern academy which has been re-organised around schools and units that resemble small businesses who compete for grant funding. When the new 'disorder' was discovered, scores of career academics raced in to 'corner the field'.

Before long, the most bizarre pronouncements were being made. Two of the world's 'experts' Lynne Henderson and Philip Zimbardo of the absurdly named Shyness Institute of Palo Alto declared that shyness was 'a public health danger that appears to be heading towards epidemic proportions'.

A more serious problem with modern psychiatry is a reductionist thinking that sees a 'disorder' as a definite thing which can then be located in a certain part of the brain.

In the past, the right wing psychologist Eysenck categorised the people according to whether they were 'introvert' or 'extrovert' by counting how people responded to one of his attitude scales. He then claimed that these personality traits were the result of a different brain physiology.

The notion that someone, however, could be both introvert and extrovert depending on their social situation simply escaped him.

Since Eysenck's time, this tendency has gotten worse. Depression and shyness is located in a definite malfunction of serotonin levels and is therefore deemed as amenable to cure through the use of 'selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors' (SSRIs) such as Prozac, Paxil or Zoloft.

It would be foolish to deny that biology does not impact on the human condition. A short but intense bout of exercise may, in certain circumstances, make you feel better because of the simple fact that your endorphins have

been jangling around.

But equally to reduce our understanding of human beings to set of user-friendly symptoms which are read off from the DSM to indicate a specific disorder which is then reified and located in distinct parts of the brain is to see humans as walking, talking machines.

This approach is best exemplified by a comment made by Tipper Gore when she was discussing clinical depression. 'What I learned about it is your brain needs a certain amount of serotonin and when you run out, it's like running out of gas'.

This simplistic mechanistic understanding of human beings, however, suits the pharmaceutical industry because they can develop a pill for every occasion. So when shyness is re-labelled as a medical disorder such as a 'social phobia' or 'social anxiety disorder' they are ready at hand to provide the cure.

One of the first was GlaxoSmithKline, the maker of Paxil, who declared that its anti-depressant could also treat social anxiety. They ran a public awareness campaign in the US

called 'Imagine Being Allergic to People' that cost more than \$92 million in one year – which happened to be just \$3 million more than Pfizer spent on Prozac.

Soon social anxiety – or what some used to call shyness – became the third most diagnosed mental illness in the US, behind only depression and alcoholism. A vast market opened to Big Pharma when academic studies put the total number of people affected at 17.5% of the population.

The industry, of course, does not wait for shy or depressed people to present for treatment but engages in the most disgusting of tactics to persuade doctors to prescribe them pills.

Daniel Carlat, from Tufts University Medical School recently penned an article in the *New York Times* where he revealed how he earned \$30,000 from the drug company Wyeth for giving talks to GPs to promote the drug Effexor XR.

After he developed some reservations about the drug he was visited by the district manager of the company who told him that 'My reps told me that you weren't as enthusiastic about our product in your last talk. I told them that even Dr Carlat didn't hit home run every time. Have you been sick?'

A staggering 200,000 US doctor receive such payments and before giving their talks they often receive faxes from the companies asking them to emphasise certain points.

These in turn are often developed in response to the findings that emerges from 'prescription data mining'.

This refers to a practice whereby specialized companies such as IMS Health and Verispan buy prescription data from local pharmacies about the purchases of patients from particular doctors. These in turn are sold back to the pharmaceutical companies who devise talks to change or re-enforce certain prescription practices.

In recent years concerns have grown about the side effects of some SSRI drugs but that hardly bothers corporations who try to manipulate scientific research to further their profits.

Instead of looking for a pill for every disorder, we might be better seeking a cure for the manipulative practices of the pharmaceutical industry. Sacking their boards of directors and taking them into responsible public ownership might help.

REVIEWS

Frederick Douglass and Riversmeet: Connecting 19th century struggles

Author Richard Bradbury spoke to Ken Olende about his novel on Frederick Douglass's 1845 speaking tour of Ireland, Scotland and England.

IN 1845 Frederick Douglass arrived in Ireland and began a speaking tour that would take him across Scotland and England.

Douglass had illegally learned to read and write as a slave in the American South. At the age of 20 he escaped and met up with Northern abolitionists including William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of the Liberator. Douglass became known for his writing and speaking against slavery.

Richard Bradbury's new novel Riversmeet combines a narrative of Douglass's tour with the story of fictional Irish radical Eamonn MacDonagh.

"Douglass is one of the towering figures of the 19th century," Richard told Socialist Worker. "His move from slave to politician, editor and writer is extraordinary. What makes it even more impressive is that he never forgot the importance of struggle."

"He was one of the finest writers and orators of his time and yet he is still scandalously neglected in comparison to much less important figures. I think that's connected to his race and to his insistence on struggle as the motor of change."

Throughout the novel Douglass interacts with a range of historical figures including Garrison, who suggested the trip, and the Chartist leaders William Cuffay and Feargus O'Connor.

"While there are a lot of real incidents in the book, there's also no evidence that Douglass and Cuffay ever met," says Richard.

Different directions

"But I wanted to think about what these two great figures, coming from very different directions and traditions but sharing black



A mural of Frederick Douglass on the Falls Road in Belfast. Richard Bradbury's new novel interweaves Douglass's story with the struggles of the Irish

skin, would have discussed. So I invented a series of meetings."

Douglass's story is told through letters he sends to the US.

At first things seem straightforward and he sends letters to his wife which can be passed on to other supporters. He reveals his

joy at speaking to large rallies and at the lack of colour prejudice in Dublin.

As he becomes more aware of local political conditions he asks that letters expressing doubts about some collaborators are not forwarded to Garrison, who might

publish them.

The letters here are all fictional. This enables Richard to dramatise Douglass's uncertainty over keeping secret a trip to meet Fenians in Belfast, and his emotional response to the poverty in the London factories

of the liberal industrialists who back his cause.

While Douglass's journey continues, MacDonagh experiences the horror of famine – his village starves and people are evicted from their farms for being unable to pay their rent.

In an ironic but poignant move he goes on hunger strike during the famine.

MacDonagh meets Douglass early in the novel and again towards the end, by which time the Irishman's early idealism has shifted in another direction.

Richard says, "It seemed to me very striking that Douglass arrived at a point where both the Chartists were reviving and also the famine was hitting Ireland."

"There seemed to be some parallels to the present day – famine, terrorism, single issue campaigns, class struggle, economic migration, arguments about the tactics and strategy for change – that I wanted to talk about while writing his story."

Douglass remained a radical through his life, Richard notes. "In one of his speeches he said, 'If there is no struggle, there is no progress.'"

Those who profess to favour freedom, and deprecate agitation, are men who want crops without ploughing up the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning."

Women's suffrage

"Douglass also connected the struggles together – he was the only black man to sign the Seneca Falls declaration, the 1848 statement of women's rights, and he died of a heart attack after speaking at a women's suffrage rally in 1895."

The beautifully written novel moves to a climax in the West Country as the different struggles butt up against each other at a great Chartist rally. There is a real sense of history, place and continuing struggle throughout the book.

Cultural Highlights for 2008

By PAUL O'BRIEN

THEATRE

THE ABBEY Theatre's new season kicks off in February with Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*.

Following the huge success of *True West* and *Kicking a Dead Horse*, the Abbey continues its relationship with the American playwright Sam Shepard with *Fool for Love*.

Early in his career Shepard shocked and surprised audiences with groundbreaking avant-garde work on next to nothing budgets.

Fool for Love is set in the 1980s during the Reagan presidency, it is an intensely physical play with all the gruff romance of the fading wild west; a typical background for Shepard's work, it cries with the longing, humour and violence of love gone wrong.

In April the Abbey welcomes back *The Burial at Thebes*, a new version of Sophocles' *Antigone* by Seamus Heaney.

First produced in 442 B.C. this play has constantly been translated and adapted. Nobel prize-winning writer Seamus Heaney follows that tradition with this vivid version.

The startling modernity and emotional force of this ancient tale comes to life against the background of the Iraq War.

BOOKS

FRANCIS STUART: Artist and Outcast. (Liffey Press) €22.95. Kevin Kiely's new book on the life and politics of the writer Francis Stuart is bound to be controversial.

Stewart was a wonderful stylist whose career was blighted by his support for the Nazis during the 1930s.

At the outbreak of the war he went to Berlin and broadcast for the Nazis.

The award by Aosdana of its highest honour in 1997 reopened the controversy.

Unfortunately Kiely's book does not sufficiently challenge Stuart's anti-semitism or his account of his support Nazi Germany.

DVD

TWO OUTSTANDING historical documentaries are now available on DVD. *Mise Eire* was directed by George Morrison in 1959 with a soundtrack by the composer, Sean Ó Riada.

The film uses contemporary newsreel to tell of the growing challenge to British rule in the build up to the Easter Rising, the events during the rising and the aftermath as the Republican cause gathers support.

It uses imagery in the style of Sergei Eisenstein's *October* and importantly emphasises the role of the working class in these events.

Saoirse was made in 1961. It tells the story from the December 1918 election, which Sinn Fein won and the creation of the first Dáil.

The film finishes with the civil war between the new Irish Free State and the IRA.

Both DVDs were commissioned by the Irish language organisation, Gael Linn, and are available with English subtitles from www.copperplate.ie/order. Copperplate is also an excellent site to order and download the best of Irish traditional music.

PICASSO

IF YOU hurry there is still a little time left to catch the stunning Picasso exhibition of Picasso's graphic work at Instituto Cervantes (close to Pease St Station).

The exhibition, Picasso:



The Multiplicity of the Vertex, offers a rare opportunity to for Irish audiences to explore the graphic works of Picasso and his illustrations for books such as "Le Cocu magnifique", with texts from Camilo José Cela and "El entierro del Conde de Orgaz".

Picasso had no formal training in printmaking but picked up new techniques throughout his life, changing and adapting them as he went along.

In an age where photography had taken over the role of realistic representation, he invented the technique of Cubism where reality is rearranged.

He often used collage to incorporate aspects of the real, in the form of a newspaper or packaging, into his art.

This exhibition consists of 40 pieces of Picasso's graphic work produced between 1930 and 1970 and offers a wonderful sense of the thematic scope and range

of Picasso's work including everything from his relationship with women, to his interest in myth, politics and classical painting.

The Dublin exhibition is organized on the occasion of the 125th anniversary of Picasso's birth by the Spanish Instituto Cervantes in Dublin. It should not be missed.

Picasso: The Multiplicity of the Vertex continues until 18 December at the Instituto Cervantes, (close to Pease St. DART station) Lincoln House Lincoln Place, Dublin 2

Executive jobs training scandal

By EAMONN MCCANN

THE PRIVATISATION agenda of the Northern Executive has blighted the job hopes of young people and given rise to another scandal.

The scandal came to light when the boss of a Derry motor firm wrote to an Assembly committee denying that it had ever agreed to train motor mechanics on behalf of a British company.

The Committee for the Department of Employment and Learning was told by two senior civil servants on September 19th that Carter and Carter, based in Nottingham, would fulfil a contract to train motor mechanics across the North through the Blackwater House training facility at Mallusk and at Donnelly and Taggart in Eglinton, outside Derry.

Trade unionists had been questioning the transfer of training from Colleges of Further and Higher Education to private-sector firms, and had specifically challenged the ability of Carter and Carter to deliver the courses it had promised.

However, the Direct Rulers pressed ahead, and the new Executive has accepted the deal.

It took a few weeks for Donnelly and Taggart to realise that their name was being misused.

On October 12th, managing director TA Donnelly wrote to committee chairwoman Sue Ramsey of Sinn Féin saying: "At no time has Donnelly and Taggart entered into an agreement for provision of (training) facilities nor, in fact, discussed the possibility of such an arrangement."



Carter and Carter's website advertisement

On October 25th, Ms. Ramsey replied: "I write to you to assure that we are taking this issue very seriously..."

"I have forwarded your correspondence

on to the relevant Departmental officials for an urgent explanation and answer on this issue."

On August 30th, three months after the

contract had been awarded, three weeks before it was to be discussed at the committee, Carter and Carter announced its acquisition of Blackwater House for

£980,000.

Dooley Harte of Nipsa commented: "The criteria laid down included that any bidder had to be financially sound and have a track record and a demonstrable ability to deliver.

"It also had to be able to show that its tutors and trainers were suitably qualified and experienced.

"But this company only acquired training capacity at one location some months after winning the contract! How can this have happened?"

"The publication of the letter from Mr. Donnelly now shows that the second location which the civil servants assured the committee had been arranged had in fact not been arranged at all."

Sue Ramsey's committee is now examining how two senior officials came to give members of the Assembly inaccurate information which served to justify handing an important contract affecting the education of young people to a private company which turns out to have fallen very far short of the criteria laid down.

It is estimated that the North needs 270 apprenticeships in motor mechanics this year.

About 150 young people are currently training at Mallusk. But there is currently not a single training place in the north west.

Meanwhile, tutors in the colleges are being paid off.

This is the price of the privatisation agenda which all the Executive parties have endorsed.

Funding scandal shows New Labour is up for sale

by DONAL MAC FHEARRAIGH

GORDON BROWN'S government is a government which touts for cash from big business – and a government which acts on behalf of big business.

The Labour Party was founded to represent working people. Funding came from trade unionists and subscriptions collected from its members.

The New Labour project, in

contrast, centres on breaking the party's connections to unions and the working class.

First Tony Blair and now Gordon Brown want to move towards being a pro-business party, like the Democrats in the US.

That requires reducing the party's dependence on trade union funding – and is one reason why both Blair and Brown have courted big business.

In doing so they have come

to face a harsh reality – the rich are not that generous. As New Labour became more desperate for corporate cash, it started to cut corners.

Some £600,000 in donations came from property developer David Abraham, but was granted in the name of his associates in order to shield his name. That in itself was illegal.

On the day news broke of the illegal funding, Brown was addressing the CBI bosses' organisation.

He promised that the privatisation of public services "will continue to grow" and boasted of holding down public sector wages and reducing pension payments.

New Labour's business backers are getting good value for their money. But ordinary trade unionists are not. It's no surprise that they are asking why their leaders still insist on giving a blank cheque to Brown's New Labour. Its time the unions stopped funding



Gordon Brown: Thumbs up—if you've got the cash

New Labour and start funding real left parties that defend workers and public services. Working people desperately

need a party to represent their interests. That is what the People Before Profit Alliance is creating.

Earth's Ecology in Crisis



Special four page pull-out
Pages 7, 8, 9, 10

Ahmedinajad and Bush



Should we take sides?
Page 11

SF spin on class assistants



By Eamonn McCann
Page 4

Dahr Jamail interviewed



Lies and Truth on Iraq
Page 11

Mass strikes in France...



Rising against neo-liberalism
Page 13