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# Socialist Worker

Get rid of this government

# ONE DAY NATIONAL STOPPAGE

FRENCH WORKERS can do it. The people of Iceland did it and got rid of a government of speculators and fraudsters. Why can't it happen here?

Everyone knows that the government is protecting its rich friends.

Despite Lenihan's denial, senior officials were aware of the scams at Anglo-Irish Bank.

Yet they rushed through legislation to guarantee its holdings and embarked on a costly form of nationalisation to protect its bad debts.

According to UCD economist, Morgan Kelly, this will cost each household €20,000.

In the coming months, we will see the same story unfold at Bank of Ireland and AIB.

The government should have created one state bank from the ashes of bankrupt firms and used its credit facilities to launch a massive public works programme.

Instead of doing this, the government has embarked on a war against workers. Pay cuts of €43 a week have been imposed on public sector workers who receive an average salary of €35,000 a year. Those on middle income will lose a staggering €60 plus a week.

The employers' organisation, IBEC, were the main instigators of these pay cuts. Over



Picture: Paula Geraghty

the past few months, they used the corporate media to demonise public sector workers and prepare the ground for the attack.

But their wider aim is to reduce the wages of ALL workers by about 20%. This is what lies behind their mantra about 'restoring competitiveness'

No sooner was the pension levy imposed, than politicians began calling for reducing the minimum wage.

These attacks on workers must be met by strong, effective action that drives the government out of office.

Cowen and Gormley have no democratic

mandate to carry out their policies.

We need a one-day national stoppage as the start of a massive campaign to bring real change.

The leaders of the ICTU, however, are doing to everything to stop a momentum building up.

Despite benefiting from working class anger in the polls, Labour leader Eamonn Gilmore is singing the same tune.

The union leaders called a huge Saturday demonstration – but they have not yet called a national stoppage.

They also offered to re-enter the 'social partnership' talks, even though the pension levy has not been withdrawn and IBEC is imposing wage cuts.

Socialist Worker urges all its readers to

- Call emergency union meetings in your job. If your union official will not call it, do it yourself.
- Build the momentum for a one day stoppage. If the ICTU does not act, grassroots trade unionists should build it from below
- Start by giving full support to the stoppage organised by the CPSU on February 26th.
- Set as your goal an Iceland style demonstration that drives this government from office.

Support the CPSU day of action Feb 26

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 COUNTRYWIDE

# North and South: Cutting services to bail out bankers

## Teachers unions ballot for strike

## SF & SDLP back Derry City cuts



Teachers and parents protest at cuts

Picture: Paula Geraghty

ALL THREE teachers unions, the ASTI, INTO and TUI, are balloting for strike action over the 'pension levy'. The pay cut will mean many teachers cannot afford to pay their mortgages.

Niall Smyth, branch secretary of the INTO, Dublin City North Branch, said "On Wednesday 11th February, a packed emergency meet-

ing of 500 members of our branch unanimously passed a resolution calling for a strong campaign of united industrial action across the public service".

"Teachers expressed anger and outrage at the manner in which the public service have been targeted in an attempt by government to scapegoat workers for the financial crisis

which they did not create".

Many teachers spoke of the concerted attempt to place a divide between public and private sector workers and expressed their solidarity with workers in the private sector.

Anger was also expressed at the further cuts in special needs provision announced.

A motion, passed unanimously by the packed meeting, demanded a strong and determined campaign to include:

- Protests at the clinics and offices of government TDs and councilors,
- A one-day work stoppage across the public sector as a first step in building a broad unified campaign

By EAMONN MCCANN

DERRY CITY Council has cut the opening hours of Brook Park and St. Columb's Park leisure centres and ordered the closure of two recycling centres as part of a cost-cutting exercise.

The centres serve working class areas where a lack of amenities results in constant complaints of "anti-social" behaviour by young people.

Now local SDLP and Sinn Fein representatives have backed a move which will make things worse.

The chair of the Policy and Resources Committee, Elisha McLaughlin of Sinn Fein, thanked the council officials who devised the cuts and praised them as "reflect(ing) the strategic approach which we have been endeavouring to use

in recent years".

Councillor McLaughlin defended the measures as keeping rates down and meeting financial targets set by Stormont--which in turn operates within limits set by the British Treasury. Neither Nationalist party seemed embarrassed to be implementing cuts ordered from London which target the interests of local people.

The idea of a fight-back doesn't occur to them. Meanwhile, all the council parties back subsidising City of Derry airport, which effectively exists to facilitate Ryanair.

The SDLP and Sinn Fein have shown themselves as willing as the Unionists or Fianna Fail to solve a financial problem by trampling on ordinary people while bowing the knee to big business.

## NI health cuts

HEALTH MINISTER, Michael McGimpsey, has imposed massive cuts on the health service, including axing over 700 nursing jobs. Sinn Fein, the DUP and the SDLP

all complain loudly about this, but they agreed the budget that has resulted in the NHS being slashed. They should make McGimpsey cut NHS Fat Cat executives' jobs and keep nurses.

## Bus workers vote to strike over cuts

WORKERS IN Dublin Bus have voted overwhelmingly for strike action to stop job cuts and management's attempt to tear up all previous agreements about working conditions like travel time.

It will also mean up to 120 buses will be cut from bus routes.

Busworkers have

held protests against Noel Dempsey at the Department of Transport. They also protested at the Green Party head office. Owen McCormack, a busworker in Harristown garage, said "The Greens made action on climate change a central reason to enter government, but here they are cutting 300

buses while telling us they want people to stop using cars."

"We're protesting against the laying off of hundreds of drivers and hundreds more of ancillary workers."

Alli from Phibsboro garage "I lived in a few different countries and whenever governments

try to pull out of public services it's the beginning of something really bad. It's a joke, they are giving so much money to bankers but cutting public services. We are going to support the ICTU protests against the government cuts. I think all workers should stand together against the cuts."

## Parents of schoolchildren join the protests over cuts

THE NATIONAL Parents Council has launched a campaign to reverse the government's education cuts.

Thousands of postcards will be sent to parents across the country asking them to protest against the cuts.

The government's cutbacks in education will have a drastic effect on Primary schools.

For example in Tralee,

Scoil Eoin, which will have over 600 students next year, three quarters of its students are studying in prefabs. The school will lose one teacher as a direct result of the increase in class sizes and will face cutbacks in language support staff.

The cuts will reduce teacher numbers by at least a thousand. They will increase primary school class sizes

from twenty seven children per class to twenty eight.

They will abolish substitute cover for teachers, the provision of English Language support teachers. Special Needs and Traveller education funding will also be cut.

School Transport charges are set to increase and the Free Book Scheme is to be axed.

Scoil Eoin's Principal,

Kieran O'Toole, said "for decades a new school has been promised, and nothing has happened".

Sean Moraghan, People Before Profit candidate in Tralee said, "There is a massive number of out of work construction workers in Tralee at the moment who could be usefully employed in such school building programme."

## Change Wilson can't believe in

By GORETTI HORGAN

SAMMY WILSON, NI Environment Minister, is the first Stormont Minister to lose a no-confidence vote.

The Environment Committee voted no confidence in him on the 12th February for banning a government climate change advert.

Although 99% of scientists say the evidence is clear that greenhouse gas emissions from industry and transport are causing the earth to warm to dangerously high levels, Sammy doesn't believe them.

Up to recently, his views have been a bit of a joke, but then he used his position as Environment Minister to ban an advertising campaign by the Dept of Energy and

Climate Change in London. The campaign was to highlight energy efficiency in the home by, for example, switching off standby settings.

But the controversy surrounding Sammy Wilson's irrational views tells us less about climate change and more about the ridiculous set-up in Stormont and the way in which the DUP are able to do whatever they want and get away with it. Because the Agreement has set up institutions where Ministers are not accountable to the Assembly, but each of the two larger Parties (Sinn Fein and the DUP) has a veto over every decision.

This means that it is impossible to get rid of a Minister, which is why Wilson has not been forced to resign.

## Taxi drivers strike over free market madness

THOUSANDS OF taxi drivers marched for a third time to the Dail and the Department of Transport. Chants of "Dempsey, Dempsey, Out, Out, Out" filled the streets around Dail Eireann.

The protests are organised by Taxi drivers for change, a rank and file group of taxi drivers.

The policy of deregulation has been a disaster for taxi drivers. There are over 14,000 taxis in Dublin and the regulator says there are another 5000 new licenses pending, more than in New York City. The situation is so bad that many drivers are now working 14 to 16 hour

days to break even.

There are only 560 taxi spaces in Dublin for all these taxis. The situation is so bad that the Gardai are asking taxi drivers to leave city centre areas because there aren't enough spaces for all the taxis.

The multicultural crowd reflected the new Irish working class. The protest included drivers from Britain, Nigeria and Poland. There was also a delegation of drivers from Galway city at the previous week's march.

Jim Weldon, one of the organisers said, "Don't let them divide us. We're all taxi drivers here, it doesn't

matter if you're from Ireland or from somewhere else in the world, we all have to stand together, everyone has a right to work and earn a decent wage."

The only people benefiting from the current set up are the radio and taxi companies and the car hire companies. The drivers are being forced to carry the cost of deregulation.

This is all the result of a capitalist approach to public transport. Instead of a planned and regulated transport sector the government, including the Greens, are pushing a free market approach to public transport.



Taxi drivers protest in Dublin

Picture: Paula Geraghty

# Rank and file trade union conference calls for action

## 'Now we need a one day national public sector strike'

A MAJOR national conference of trade unionists from both the public and private sector has initiated a call for a co-ordinated national one day strike of the public service to stop the government cutbacks and attacks on workers wages.

The conference was happening as most public sector unions were balloting for industrial action over the government imposed pay cut under the guise of a 'pension levy'.

Over 100 trade unionists attended, including many union executive members. Members of all the public sector unions were present. The three teachers unions were also represented as well as postal workers, busworkers and nurses.

Delegations travelled from as far away as Tralee, Cork, Waterford and Donegal to take part in the conference.

Paddy Healy, TUI colleges branch chair, opened the conference saying "This is not a pension levy, non-pensionable earnings are included in how it is calculated. Also workers excluded from the pension schemes will have to pay the levy. This is a new punitive tax on public sector workers. We need a sustained campaign of strikes to get this levy withdrawn."

John Kidd convenor of SIPTU Dublin Fire Brigade branch said, "Ordinary workers are paying for the mistakes of the developers, the bankers and the super-rich."

Melisa Halpin, an IMPACT member who works in Dublin City Council, said "The grass-roots anger over the levy forced the union beaureaucrats to ballot for strike. They tried to control and dissipate the anger with token lobbies of TDs but a revolt of the members has forced the issue of a ballot for strike."

The IMPACT equality officer said, "The anger over the pay cut is creating a new generation of trade unionists. We have to expose the lies they are being told by trade union officials that strikes can't win. If we stand together we can win."

Terry Kelleher of the CPSU executive said, "The CPSU organises the lowest paid public service workers. We called a strike on the 26<sup>th</sup> February and we're asking all other unions to support it. Going on strike after the levy has been imposed makes no sense."

This is a long term crisis, they want to come back for more next year unless we fight now."

"The situation has changed in the unions."



Waterford Crystal workers occupy De Loitte accountants in Dublin

Picture: Paula Geraghty

"Activists are no longer isolated. We need to use the mood of anger to rebuild the unions and rank and file movements inside our unions."

Kieran Allen, president of the SIPTU education branch said, "I've had calls from a local authority worker who is married to a nurse who are facing a loss of €400 a month."

In this situation you would expect union leaders to call emergency general meetings and put down motion for industrial action. Instead their response has been to call a march on a Saturday."

"Our branch wants to turn that march into a call for a national strike. We had mass meetings of hundreds of people in the Dublin universities voted over 99% for strike."

"We have also withdrawn from any partnership committees and productivity deals that now won't be paid."

"All union branches should call emergency general meeting to vote on strike action."

"The stakes are high, the economic model of tax cuts and lite regulatuion has brought disaster. We need to challenge that economic model. We need to tax capital and the rich at least at the same rate as workers."

"This government has no mandate, it won the last election saying the economy was fine. We need people power to drive this government from office just like they did in Iceland."

### Public and private sector stand together

WORKERS FROM the private sector were also present and said it was important to expose the false divide between public and private sector workers.

If the government defeats the unions in the public sector all workers will lose out. Already there is talk of cutting the minimum wage. Community workers told of how the cuts in government spending were causing a return of drugs and deep poverty in communities.

Tom Hogan, a retired Waterford Crystal worker

and UNITE union member, said "Workers in the private sector rely on public services like health, education and transport. The idea that there is a divide between public and private sector workers is a farce. We're all workers."

"The national one day strike can't come soon enough for the workers in Waterford Crystal. The wage cut in the public sector is being dressed up as a pension levy, while workers in the private sector are facing a future with possibly no pension."

Demanding the state guarantee the pensions of workers in the private sector is a way to link the demands of workers in the public and the private sector.

Des Derwin, president of the Dublin Council of Trades Unions and president of the engineering branch of SIPTU said, "Workers in the public sector must also raise the wider cuts in public services. We need to see this movement as a movement for public and private sector workers together."

### Delegates warn: Don't trust ICTU leadership

Christy McGinn from the ASTI executive said "The ICTU leadership are in favour of the levy but just disagree with how it was implemented. Continued involvement in Social Partnership is a disservice to working people."

"The ICTU want to stage manage the industrial action in order to get back into talks to cobble together another disasterous deal. This is the same ICTU that have failed to stand up to the scape-goating of the public sector in the last 6 months."

Eddie Conlon of the TUI said "We have to be clear that social

partnership is dead. The ICTU leadership are desperate to get back into talks so they can stitch up another deal. When someone sticks their hand in your pocket and robs you, its not partnership."

Joe Duffy from the INTO executive said "Just balloting is not enough, we need to carry through with the industrial action. It can't just be one day we need an escalating campaign of action."

Paddy Healy summed up the conference "We're calling on all unions who haven't done so already to call emergency meet-

ings and ballot their members. There can be no talk of deferral to renegotiate a deal, as a absolute minimum we want this levy withdrawn."

It was agreed to set up an inter union committee to co-ordinate work and keep pressure on union leaders to call a strike. If the union leaders refuse to act then union branches should be prepared to initiate action.

A motion was passed to get trade union branches to build the ICTU demonstration and to bring placards calling for a national strike against the pension levy.

## Occupation saves jobs and pensions

THE WATERFORD Crystal workers are deciding on the future of their workplace after their two week occupation forced the receiver to come up with a plan to save 250 jobs and give more compensation to workers who were laid off.

Tom Hogan, a retired Waterford Crystal worker and UNITE union member, said, "The company wanted to walk away and give us a kick in the teeth and send workers down to sign on at the labour exchange. Workers said, 'we're not accepting this, we're going to fight for as many jobs as we can, for compensation and for our pensions.'"

"Workers decided to occupy the plant to save jobs and secure compensation for over 200 workers who were let go from last July and who were due to get nothing from the company despite having agreements and to secure our pensions."

"The receiver has thrown €10 million into the pot as a payment for workers on top of their statutory redundancy package."

The union is now working out what the deal will mean for individual workers. Faced with what could be modest individual compensation nationalisation should still be kept on the table as an option.

The occupation also exposed the Irish government's stance with regard to pension security. They tried to block an EU directive that would guarantee workers pensions. Because of the occupation a deal has been struck to guarantee workers incomes from pensions. This deal may be the basis to secure all pensions in the private sector.

Government ministers have admitted that up to 90% of pension schemes may be insolvent. That means over 50% of workers could get nothing from their pensions if firms go bust.

Tom concluded, "The occupation shows what fighting back can achieve. A fortnight ago workers were told the place is shutting down and workers were getting nothing out of the company."

The occupation forced the receiver to come up with a better deal for workers. If the deal falls through we'll be asking the government to be intervening and nationalise to save the jobs."

### WHAT THE SOCIALIST WORKERS PARTY STANDS FOR

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

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

#### REVOLUTION

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

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

greater political and economic democracy.

#### AGAINST IMPERIALISM AND WAR

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

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

#### END RACISM AND OPPRESSION

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

working class.

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

We oppose immigration controls which are always racist.

#### FOR WORKERS' UNITY IN THE NORTH

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

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

We want to see an Irish workers republic where all

workers gain.

Our flag is neither green nor orange but red!

#### FOR A REVOLUTIONARY PARTY

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

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

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

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

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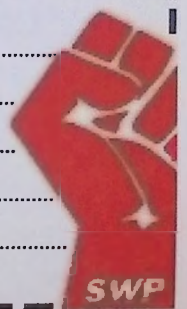
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# Chavez, Venezuela and democracy

By MIKE GONZALEZ,  
in Venezuela

Hugo Chavez has won the referendum allowing him to run for president of Venezuela for more than two terms. Here Mike Gonzalez looks at the election campaign and the implications of the outcome.

FOR NEARLY two months political life in Venezuela has focused on the issue of the campaign for a change in the law that will allow Chavez and every other public official to be re-elected in 2012.

In January alone Hugo Chavez made 48 national TV and radio broadcasts from different parts of the country. Most ministries have virtually stopped working as civil servants are mobilised to run the campaign.

And the right wing opposition, encouraged by its victories in the elections for governors and mayors in November 2008, have devoted all their energy and most of their media time to denouncing Chavez as a dictator.

For the right, the issue is one of democracy – a concern that rings false when you remember what it is they want the country to return to. Before Chavez's election in 1998, Venezuelan oil – while theoretically nationalised – in fact served to make several multinational oil companies and their local agents very rich while the mass of the population, around 80%, lived in conditions of real poverty.

It was that majority that voted Chavez in – with well over 50% of the vote.

And when the same right wing sections attempted to remove him in a coup in 2002, it was the masses who took to the streets and defeated the coup-makers in forty eight hours.

The Bolivarian revolution that Chavez proclaimed promised not just to use Venezuela's oil wealth to guarantee the living standards of the masses (a significant objective after ten years of savage neo-liberalism) but also a vision of a society in which power was passed into the hands of those masses – 'people's power' was what he called it. And in 2005 he defined this new kind of society as 21st century socialism.

Venezuela in 2009, however, still has a long way to go before 'people's power' moves from rhetoric to reality.

In the state, a new layer of powerful bureaucrats has emerged who have used many of those social resources to make themselves rich. Corruption is a reality – but it is more than just a sum of criminal activities.

Decisions made are ignored, public resources are channelled into private pockets. Real power is in fewer and fewer hands.

What the right wing in Venezuela, and the opposition to Chavez outside the country, fails to understand is that Chavez represents and symbolizes something deeper than the charisma of a leader.

True, some of the campaign literature falls into the 'support our great



Hugo Chavez

leader' category. But for the mass of working people, he speaks with the voice of a popular movement that has fought one government after another, and will do so again when the occasion arises.

These same people know what the Venezuelan bourgeoisie wants. They have lived through it before, and they see signs of that old way of life returning.

In recent weeks prices of most goods have risen almost daily.

Drug-based crime, particularly in the poor barrios, is claiming growing numbers of victims while the security forces are sluggish at best, complicit at worst. The opposition will do nothing to change that, given their frequent involvement with these same forces.

They have consciously set out to present an image of clean youthfulness – most of their election candidates were clean-cut and under 40 – and this campaign has been presented as essentially led by students and young people, carefully media-managed to look pretty and innocent.

But their mission is still to destroy a process designed to benefit the majority.

Rising prices benefit big Venezuelan capital, the manufacturers, distributors or importers of food (something like 85% of Venezuela's food is still imported).

While Chavez and his ministers insist that Venezuela will not be affected by the world recession because of its oil revenues, the reality is that the effects are already being felt.

The budget for most social programmes has been cut, in some cases savagely, including education, health and funds for cooperatives, and rising numbers are facing redundancy.

The oil price over the last twelve months has fallen from a high of \$140 a barrel to less than \$40 today.

These are the realities the Venezuelan people will have to face in the immediate future.

A victory for the Yes means a continuing hope in the Bolivarian revolution.

But it will not solve the problems faced by ordinary Venezuelans, who have little faith in the people running the state.

There are already signs that after the vote is over the mass movement will move into action again, in the first place to address the immediate problems they face – insecurity, corruption, uncontrolled inflation.

It is their success in doing that that will shape the future of the Bolivarian revolution, long before the elections of 2012.

# This government

THE REVELATIONS around Anglo Irish bank expose the extent of corruption and fraud that exists at the top of Irish society.

It is now clear that the Revenue knew about and went along with the fraud and insider dealing by Sean Quinn and others inside Anglo Irish Bank.

The super-rich and their bankers have brought us to the precipice of economic catastrophe.

The Irish economy has seen the biggest collapse of any European economy. Cowen and Lenihan are intent on safeguarding the wealth and assets of this elite at the expense of everyone else.

They have spent the last six months whipping up a media frenzy through IBEC and the media calling for cuts to public services and a pay cut for public sector workers.

The entire political establishment have been demanding that 'everyone take some pain' to deal with the economic crisis.

There was no social solidarity during the Celtic tiger years, no sharing of the gains. But now there is lots of talk about sharing the pain.

But have the rich taken any pain?

The top 1% of Irish society is worth €87 billion.

These people include the likes of Sean Quinn who could afford to gamble €1 billion on Anglo Irish Bank and lose. If he can afford to gamble such sums then they can afford to pay a lot more tax.

There are over 4000 people registered as tax exiles in Ireland, meaning they pay no tax.

At least 20 of these have a net worth of over €50 million.

The government has not made any moves to force them to pay taxes here like everyone else.

The top 1% increased their wealth by €41 billion in the last four years of the boom.

We now know where that money came from – dodgy bank dealings and property speculation.

Why is there no talk of a 'wealth levy' on them or of raising capital gains tax to help pay for the crisis.

By simply scrapping the property relief landlords get we could save the state €1.4 billion a year.

There is no talk of punitive taxes on the nearly 20,000 people who earn over €200,000 a year.

These measures alone would pay the public finances.

When it came to the talks with the unions they weren't even prepared to entertain the idea of tax increases on the rich. Instead they collapsed the talks and demanded a 20% reduction in living standards for Irish workers.

The 'social solidarity pact' touted by Labour and the ICTU leadership went along with all the extra taxes and cut-back for workers despite the fact that workers didn't cause this crisis.

Far from 'taking some pain' the agenda of the bosses, IBEC and the government has been to protect the rich from the crisis by passing the burden on to workers through extra taxes and cutbacks.



Low paid workers like council workers or nurses are being asked to pay an extra €6000 to €7000 a year in tax while bank chief executives like AIB's Eugene Sheehy still get €940,000 a year or Irish Life and Permanent CEO gets €750,000.

Two government Ministers, Mary Harney and Billy Kelleher have suggested that the minimum wage of €8.65 an hour is too high and should be lowered. In other words someone who earns just under €18,000 is over paid.

They claim that Irish minimum wage is well above the European average. Perhaps they would be better off looking a little closer to home.

The average salary for an Irish government Minister, even taking account of their recent pay cut, is approximately €200,000. This, for example, is 25 percent above what a Minister in the German government gets.

Why is  
the Irish  
elite  
turning to  
Thatcherism?

# it has got to go



**THE STRATEGY** of the Irish ruling class is different to that of Obama or Gordon Brown. Here there is no talk of a 'stimulus package', only of cutbacks and 'competitiveness' (code for low wages).

But Cowen, who gets paid more than the US President, is refusing to cut his own salary down to size.

The Irish elite made their money during the boom by becoming the most extreme neo-liberals. Property and financial speculation were the sources of the wealth of the super-rich.

They bet everything on the neo-liberal model with Ireland becoming a financial services economy.

When the crash happened the money rushed back to the US

causing an even worse crash here.

All the tax cuts for business meant Ireland had less resources to deal with the crisis than other states.

Lenihan's Thatcherite economic policies – demanding a balanced budget, refusing to borrow or raise taxes on business, are making the crisis worse.

These are the same policies that the US government tried after the 1929 crash and led to the great depression.

All the talk of a 'smart' or 'knowledge' economy is pure hype.

There is no investment in school buildings and more teachers nevermind in science equipment and computers.

The only solution bosses can

offer is to smash wages and attempt to relaunch the atlantic tax haven so multinational corporations can avoid even more tax through R&D subsidies. But the game is over for this strategy.

Capitalism is facing its greatest economic crisis in a century. It may be worse than the great depression.

Cutting workers wages and living standards won't solve the crisis as fewer people will buy things and will deepen the recession.

The only solution to salvage our future for the majority is to change the economic model.

That starts with kicking out this unpopular right-wing government.

## Fianna Fail poll support collapses as Labour rises

THE RECENT Irish Times/MRBI poll on the state of political parties provides the clearest evidence to date that the economic crisis is likely to bring about dramatic changes in the political landscape.

The big story is the collapse in support for Fianna Fail. It has only the support of 24% of the electorate - its lowest level ever.

Fianna Fail has traditionally been the main party of the Irish rich even while maintaining a large working class vote.

That base grew because the party was able to translate the language of Irish republicanism into an economic nationalism that promised to overcome the legacy of neo-colonialism in the 26 counties.

As long as the Irish economy showed spurts of growth, Fianna Fail was able to build up its working class base through a judicious use of the social welfare system and forms of patronage disseminated by its politicians.

It was ably assisted in this project by the connivance of Labour and union leaders.

In the 1920s, Fianna Fail could present itself as more left wing than Labour.

In later decades Labour leaders sung from the same hymn sheet of economic nationalism as Fianna Fail.

In more recent times, the ideology of social partnership has greatly assisted FF to maintain the 'we are all in the same boat' ideology.

But now an earthquake is occurring.

The poll puts Labour ahead of FF for the first time ever.

The collapse in Fianna Fail support in Dublin is even more dramatic, down to 13% suggesting that Labour is now massively ahead of Fianna Fail in the capital.

It is not surprising that the Labour Party is the major beneficiary of the Fianna Fail collapse.

Labour leader, Eamon Gilmore has given voice to much of the public anger, pointing to the unjust nature of cuts aimed at the least-well-off while the bankers, developers and super-wealthy are treated with kid gloves.

Gilmore, more than his predecessor Pat Rabbitte, has positioned himself to the left of Fine Gael. Like Dick

**The collapse in Fianna Fail support in Dublin is even more dramatic, down to 13% suggesting that Labour is now massively ahead of Fianna Fail in the capital.**



Eamon Gilmore

Spring in 1992, his attacks on the modern 'golden circle' is leading to a new popularity for Labour.

This pattern runs directly counter to the conventional wisdom, which suggests that parties who move to the centre ground do better in the polls.

Despite the left rhetoric, however, Eamonn Gilmore has no intention of breaking with the political establishment.

There are three key indicators, which show this.

First, the Labour leader came out strongly against a one-day public sector strike when he addressed IMPACT trade unionists in Mayo.

Spreading the same defeatist message as the ICTU leaders, he suggested that the public would turn against strikes.

A few days after this speech, however, an opinion poll shows that a majority of the population opposed the pension levy.

Gilmore is careful never to call for the withdrawal of the levy but, like the union leaders who are mainly members of the Labour Party, claims there must be a 'sharing of the pain'. This position fails to acknowledge that there was no 'sharing of the wealth' during the Celtic Tiger years and so the wealthy should bear the cost.

Second, after the Lisbon referendum Gilmore promised to oppose a second referendum. But no sooner had the anger died down, then Labour shifted its position. When the second referendum is called, Labour will once again do its duty for the political establishment and vote YES.

Third, despite the left rhetoric, Gilmore's principle goal is to join a coalition government with Enda Kenny.

The current independent stance of Labour is designed to re-build its electoral base so that its parliamentary party gets greater leverage with Fine Gael.

But the mere fact that Gilmore does not rule out coalition with a party that has swung even further to the right tells everything about the shallowness of his left rhetoric.

Socialists welcome a shift from FF to Labour and see it as a further sign of the emergence of class politics.

But while doing so, we should constantly argue the need for a more radical working class alternative that will not compromise with the political establishment.

# Marx and the Alternative to Capitalism

**I**n 1867, Karl Marx published his famous book, *Capital*. He began research a decade earlier after a banking crisis collapse in New York triggered a major economic depression. The book revealed the real workings of capitalism in a way that no conventional economist has ever done since. When read against the background of the current economic depression, it sounds almost prophetic.

But what was his alternative?

At first sight, it might appear that Marx only offered a critique. During his early years of political activism, he engaged in debates with the 'utopian socialists.' These were figures such as Robert Owen and Charles Fourier who devised great plans for a future socialist society, without asking: who would bring it about?

To his credit, Owen set up large communes – including one in Rahaline in Limerick – to show how co-operation was superior to competition. But these communes were dependent on his large inheritance which he generously shared. Fourier, by contrast, had to advertise for a benefactor to meet him in a Paris café to fund his plans. Of course, none turned up.

Marx's was disdainful of intellectuals who thought 'they had the solution to all riddles lying in their writing desks'.

He was against any dogmatism which claimed a knowledge of the one True Path. While fellow students in the Young Hegelian movement called themselves 'The Free' and launched searing attacks on religion, Marx took up the struggles of weavers in Silesia and peasants in Moselle who wanted to gather firewood from forests owned by landlords.

He summed up his approach as follows:

'We do not confront the world in a doctrinaire way with a new principle: Here is the truth, kneel down before it! We develop new principles out of the world's own principles.

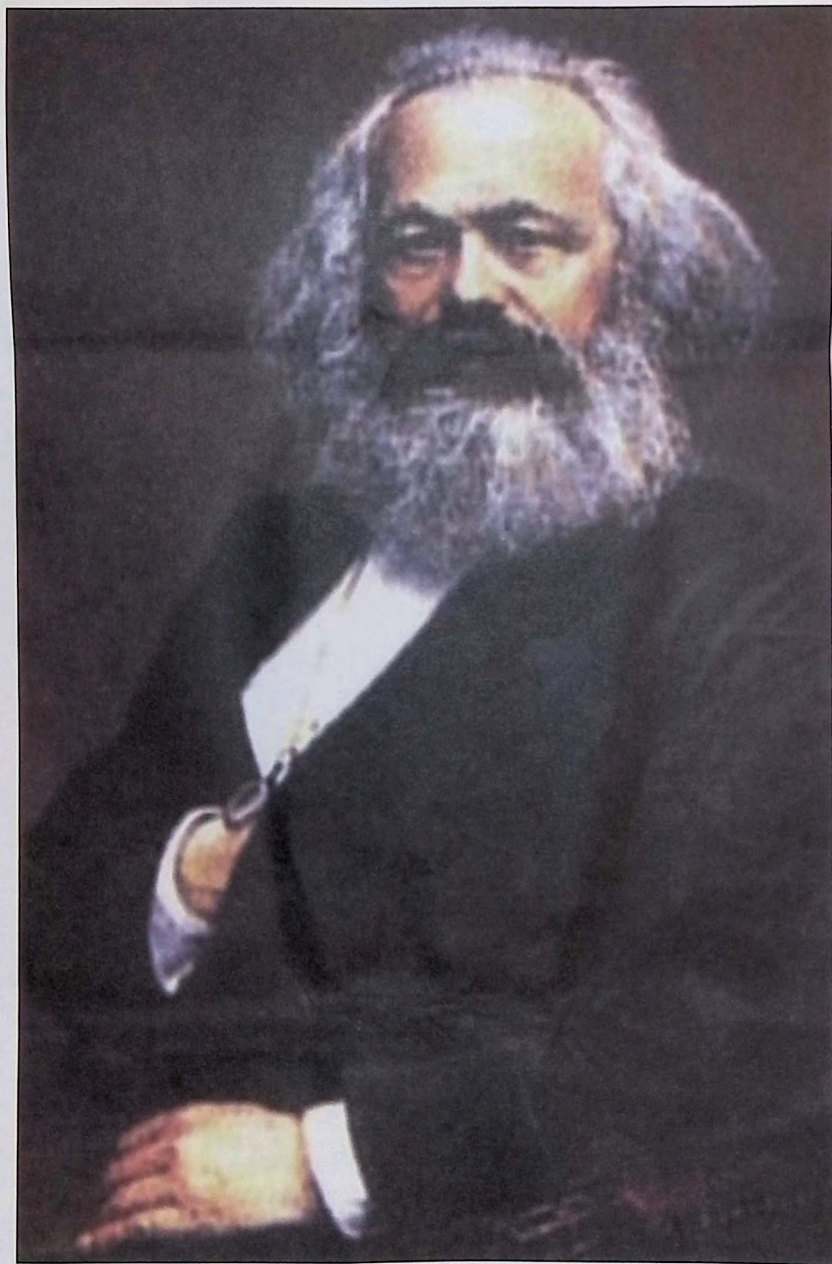
'We do not say to the world see your struggles: Cease your struggle, they are foolish – we will give you the true slogan of struggle.

'We merely show the world what it is really fighting for, and consciousness it something it has to acquire, even if it does not want to'.

This method differed from two other approaches that were popular then – and now – on how to bring change.

The first assumed that the mass of people were too indoctrinated by the old regime to be capable of bringing about change. They had to be led by an enlightened minority who worked behind the scenes to foment revolution and install themselves as a 'revolutionary dictatorship'. In Marx's time, these ideas were represented by Bounarroti, a supporter of a secret society known as the 'Conspiracy of Equals'. Elements of this conspiratorial method can be found in the Irish republican tradition.

The second approach advocated early French communists was 'education of the masses' through a continual stream of propaganda. But, for Marx this begged a further question: Who teaches the teachers? How did they come by the knowledge to be able to 'educate the



masses'?

Marx's argued that the working class had to emancipate itself through struggle that came up against the limits of capitalism. Workers might join these struggles without knowing how the system worked or what traps it set if they wanted change. But it was only in the course of such struggles that the working class could become aware of itself as a distinct class whose interests were opposed to their rulers. In other words that 'consciousness is something it has to acquire, even if it does not want to'.

Let's apply this method to contemporary Ireland.

Vast numbers of people are raging with the government and are joining in struggle. But to win, they will need to develop an awareness that it is not just Brian Cowen or even the bankers who are causing their problems but the capitalist system itself.

If they are not to be 'sold out', they will have to learn how union leaders or the Labour Party can talk radical – but only to head off the struggle. That consciousness arises more quickly when

socialists promote revolutionary ideas and while they also learn from the movement.

Marx also believed that the seeds of a future socialist society are laid from the way in which working people must organise themselves to impose their will on society.

Think again about contemporary Ireland. According to every official spokesperson, we have to undergo four more years of ferocious cuts that will be twice as bad as those we are witnessing today. To stop these attacks, workers need a general stoppage – most probably built from below. But that can only occur, if there is a profound democratic spirit in the workers movement.

Those who want to turn the current wave of anger into a sad, passive cynicism will try to avoid mass meetings and will suggest leaving matters to union leaders. If mass meetings occur, they will try to mystify people with formalities. They will use people's inexperience to preach trust in TDs' who will set up very important meetings in Dail Eireann.

Socialists, by contrast, promote a real grassroots democracy so that an open contest can be conducted between workers' fears and their enthusiasm for action. They want to elect leaders who are made accountable so that they cannot be co-opted behind closed doors. They want to send delegates to other workplaces to co-ordinate action from below.

Through such activities grassroots organs are built within the shell of the old capitalist society – but these same organs can lay the basis for a profound extension of democracy in a new society.

Significantly Marx's writings on the political structures of a socialist society only appeared in *The Civil War in France*, a short pamphlet rushed out in support of Paris workers who took control of their city in 1871 after they were faced with an invasion of the Prussian army.

That experience showed that the working class 'cannot simply lay hold of the ready made state machinery, and wield it for its own purpose'. Instead, it had to rule society through the new organs it had created during its struggles.

This form of workers' democracy differed fundamentally from the limited form of parliamentary democracy which fitted with capitalism.

Representatives were elected for short terms and could be re-called by their electorate. 'Cheap government' was made a reality because they were only paid average working wage.

The 'sham independence' of judges or higher civil servants, which was used to protect privilege, was unmasked and they were made subject to popular control.

Instead of a parliamentary talk shop which debated ideas and then transferred power to unelected state official to implement them, the legislative and executive functions were be integrated through mass popular democracy.

Marx's vision of socialism a deeper form of democracy, whose very seeds grew in the struggles of working people today.

*In part 2 we will look at his economic alternative.*

# North-South co-operation on racism

By EAMON MCCANN

NIGERIAN STUDENT Jamiu Omikunle has been awarded £20,000 by the High Court in Belfast for having been unlawfully detained at Aldergrove airport and then held in a detention centre in Scotland for nine days under threat of deportation.

Jamiu had arrived at Aldergrove from London on June 2nd last to act as godfather to the infant daughter of friends living in Belfast. An immigration officer wouldn't believe he had come for a christening. He was photographed and fingerprinted and taken in handcuffs to a police cell in Antrim. Next morning, he was put on the ferry to Scotland with a group of other black people, all handcuffed. "There were lots of couples and families with children and all of them were looking at these black people in handcuffs...I have never felt as humiliated as I did on that journey," recalls Jamiu.

On of the reasons for this treatment of black people is to stop them entering the Republic via the six counties. Irish immigration officials work alongside their British counterparts at ports and airports in the North.

The group which included Jamie was taken to Dungavel Detention Centre in Lanarkshire. Says Jamiu: "Detainees are locked up, their belongings taken from them. The centre is enclosed by barbed wire...It is massively overcrowded...There have been a number of suicides..."

The Scotsman newspaper has compared Dungavel with Guantanamo and called for its closure.

Jamiu says he was lucky. He was an English-speaking university graduate with friends in Belfast who were immediately on the case, arranging for representation by Barbara Muldoon, of immigration specialists P. Drinan, solicitors.

She quickly established that the reason given for Jamiu's arrest had no basis in law.

He was in the UK on a student visa. But he wasn't attending the post-graduate course at Coventry University for which the visa had originally been issued. Having arrived a day late at Coventry, he had switched courses to Greenwich College



in London. The immigration officials said this invalidated the visa.

However, in a scathing judgement in the High Court last July, Mr. Justice Weatherup pointed out that there was nothing whatever unlawful about what Jamiu had done. "It was not a condition of his student visa that he should become or remain a student at Coventry University."

Anti-racism campaigners find it hard to believe that an immigration official could genuinely have been ignorant of such a basic aspect of visa regulations.

They are concerned that there may have

been many other unreported cases of black people being arrested, treated like criminals and deported even though they had fully complied with all the regulations.

Jamiu's case came to light only because he had friends to look out for him and a representative to fight for him.

Who were the other black people taken in chains from Belfast to Dungavel at the same time, and what became of them?

Says Barbara Muldoon: "I have received judgements in three almost identical cases in the last couple of months."

"The Home Office were alleging that people were illegal entrants and were ar-

ranging their expulsion.

"In all three cases, those involved were found not to be illegal entrants and were released..."

All three people involved were black.

The participation of Dublin officials in arrest operations in the North has caused no controversy at Stormont.

Some Unionists might claim to be opposed on principle to Dublin involvement, but are even more opposed to allowing black people in.

Some Nationalists might say they are against racist immigration policy, but won't denounce the all-Ireland aspect

of the way the policy is implemented.

Says Jamiu: "I am an honest person. I have never been in any trouble of any kind in my life."

"I have always shown respect for authority. I have never knowingly harmed anyone...I did not deserve this to happen to me."

Of course, none of it would have happened if he'd been white.

Socialists, North and South, should be campaigning for an end to this cross-border racism and for the Dublin officials involved in it to be kicked out of the North.

## Love Music Hate Racism launched in Galway

By LIAM O'GRADY

OVER 40 people attended the Love Music Hate Racism (LMHR) launch night in Fagan's Bar in Galway, run as a benefit night for the Galway Palestine Children's Fund.

Ticket sales and donations raised about €300 for Gaza on the night and a further €600 was raised for the fund in a street collection on January 31st.

As well as combatting racism based on skin colour, Galway LMHR wants to highlight Islamophobia and anti-Traveller racism.

The event highlighted the racist attitudes of Israeli society towards Palestinians.

LMHR has a gig planned every 2 months in 2009.

## Civil rights for asylum seekers

By JOE MOORE

OVER 80 people attended the launch meeting of the asylum seekers civil rights charter in Cork at the start of February.

Ronit Lentin, a TCD lecturer, detailed the racist nature of the Irish state and the difficulties facing those opposed to state racism. The majority of asylum seekers are forced to live in direct provision centres. These centres are often located in isolated areas where it is difficult for the residents to get to know their neighbours.

Pamela Izevbechai described what life is like "it is like being in prison, except that the food in prison is better". Pamela should know as she was imprisoned for 15 days in Mountjoy. Her crime, attempting to save her daughters Naomi and Jemima from being forced to undergo female genital mutilation. In 1994, Pamela's first

born daughter, Elizabeth bled to death after the brutal ritual.

Asylum seekers are denied the right to work and are denied access to 3rd level education. In the direct provision system they are paid €19.10 per week.

After years of enduring these conditions, many face internment without trial before being forcibly deported.

The campaign has four demands,

1. The right to work.
2. The right to 3rd level education.
3. The closure of all direct provision centres.
4. An end to all deportations.

The campaign plans rallies around the country, culminating in Dublin, and is exploring the possibility of running asylum seeker candidates in the local elections.

Contact the Cork Anti Racism Network at 087-2994796.

## Victims payment controversy:

# Amnesia no cure for sectarianism

By EAMONN MCCANN

THE PROPOSAL to pay the families of victims of the Troubles £12,000 each has sparked angry controversy.

Most Unionists have denounced the idea because it doesn't differentiate between the "innocent" and the "guilty".

Many Nationalists have welcomed the move for the same reason---that it doesn't create a "hierarchy" of victims.

But the division isn't along neat lines. Some Unionists support the proposal in the interests of putting the past behind us.

Some of the Bloody Sunday families have responded. Stuff your £12,000, because they fear acceptance might be taken as settling their complaints.

The confused and contradictory

response reflects the fact that the issues underlying the Troubles have not been faced up to.

The contrast with, for example, South Africa, is stark. There, the settlement was based on acceptance that the problem was white majority rule, the solution black majority rule.

So, however imperfectly it worked out, there was consensus as to what "truth" and "reconciliation" were about. Not so in the North.

The Belfast ("Good Friday") Agreement doesn't allocate blame. Its implication is that the violence arose from an irrational unwillingness or inability of "the two communities" to get along.

The British State figures not as a participant but as a clumsy referee between the two sides.

So, the logic runs, everybody should now just accept their differences, stop fighting and live peacefully as separate, equal communities. This was the framework for the group chaired by Dennis Bradley and Archbishop Eames which recommended the £12,000 recognition payment to all bereaved families.

If Bradley and Eames were going to recommend payments in recognition of loss, it's hard to see how they could have done any different. They had no basis on which to make a distinction between those who died planting bombs and the people they blew up.

The controversy exposes the contradictions which ensure that the institutions under the Agreement will remain unstable and riven by sectarianism. It under-

lines the inability of the Nationalist and Unionist parties to deliver a settlement which transcends sectarianism.

Socialists recognise both the malign history of British colonialism in Ireland and the anti-Catholic discrimination of the Northern State under Unionism, while recognising also the inevitably sectarian and futile nature of the IRA campaign.

Sectarianism because it could be based on support from one community only, futile because a united Ireland was never achievable on that basis. Meanwhile, the British State was left off the hook.

Every move towards a future based on class rather than communal identity will make it easier for those who have borne the brunt of the Troubles to find comfort and fight on for a better future.

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# BOYCOTT APARTHEID ISRAEL

By COLM BRYCE

SUPPORT FOR the campaign to boycott Israel, along the lines of the boycott campaign against apartheid South Africa in the 1980s, has been given a massive boost by the launching of a report by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU) last week in Belfast.

The report, based on a visit to Palestine in 2007 by a delegation of senior Irish trade unionists, calls for a campaign of boycott, disinvestment and sanctions against Israel for its violations of international law in its treatment of the Palestinian people.

The ICTU will hold a major conference this year, along with the Ireland Palestine Solidarity Campaign, to discuss how the boycott campaign can be promoted.

The call for the boycott, which was initiated by over 200 Palestinian grass-roots organisations in 2006, has received fresh impetus as a result of the international outrage at Israel's military assault on Gaza in December and January which led to over 1300 civilians being killed and thousands more wounded.

The ICTU report insists that the oppression of Palestinians by the Israeli state is all pervasive, from outright discrimination within Israel to the horror of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza where Israel brutalises the Palestinian people on a daily basis.

The delegation reported on issues such as the continued expansion of settlements on Palestinian land and the building of the 'Separation Wall' which adds available land to settlements and imprisons the Palestinian people.

Launching the report, Patricia McKeown from UNISON, who was part of the delegation in 2007, said they were deeply shocked by the conditions they saw in the Palestinian areas they visited. "I didn't expect the denial of human rights and the discrimination to be so evident and



Protestors outside the Israeli embassy in Dublin in January

Picture: Michael Gallagher

to be an obvious part of daily life.

"To see unemployment on the West Bank rising to 80 percent, to see people having to get up at three in the morning, and virtually sleep outside the army controlled crossings in order to get into work - that's something

we didn't expect to see."

This is a major boost for local activists, across Ireland, who have been building support for the boycott campaign by picketing supermarkets and other actions.

ICTU backing for the January dem-

onstration in Belfast in support of Gaza led to a huge turnout of 6,000 people. It should encourage trade union members to push for boycott of Israel at work.

For example, the notion of an academic boycott of Israeli universities

has been debated widely in recent years in lecturers unions. The report should encourage lecturers to push for the boycott again.

The international isolation of Israel is growing. In early February, South African dock workers refused to offload a ship from Israel. This follows similar action by Greek dockers in January.

The report proposes a 'two-state' solution despite giving quite a deal of anecdotal evidence of the difficulties for Palestinians living inside the occupied territories and the destruction of the Palestinian economy by actions of the Israeli state. Also missing is any discussion of the refugees expelled from Palestine since 1948 and forced to live in crowded refugee camps in Gaza, Jordan and Lebanon.

The support for the Hamas government in Palestine flows from the refusal by Palestinians to accept the humiliating conditions imposed by Israel as part of the Oslo Peace accords, signed by Yasser Arafat.

The so-called 'two-state solution' amounts to giving Palestinians the right to raise a flag over their refugee camps, encircled by walls and checkpoints and held under siege by Israel.

The barbaric military assault on Gaza demonstrates why the 'two-state solution' is based on the continued dispossession of the Palestinian people and has entrenched injustice.

No matter who emerges from the recent Israeli elections as the governing party, those policies will be continued by Israel.

We should do everything we can to raise medical aid for Palestine and promote the boycott of Israel.

And alongside that socialists should also be arguing that the only solution to the Palestinian question is the construction of a democratic secular state, with a vote being offered to all Palestinians (including those expelled over the last 60 years) to decide the future of that state. This is the only solution which could bring lasting peace to the Middle East.

## Protest at G20 and NATO celebrations

**THIS APRIL** the leaders of the world's most powerful nations, the G20, will meet in London.

The meeting will be Barack Obama's first visit to London and many will

want to urge him to withdraw from Afghanistan as well as Iraq and to take action on Palestine. There will be an anti-war event on 1 April when Barack Obama visits the houses of

parliament.

There will be a second protest at the G20 itself on 2nd April. These protests have been called by the Stop the War Coalition, the Palestine Solidarity

Campaign, the British Muslim Initiative and CND.

Many groups are also travelling on to the anti-Nato protests in Strasbourg, France, leading up to a mass demonstration and

counter conference on 4 and 5 April. This year marks the 60th anniversary of NATO. The protests will be saying: 60 years of NATO is enough, 60 years of Israel is more than enough.